

IFLA, Columbus, OH, 17 August 2016

Good Morning and Greetings from Washington, DC. Welcome to those who have come from distant lands and a special welcome to those of you who are visiting the United States for the first time. Enjoy your time with us. And a special thanks to you all for choosing Columbus over Rio!

As a relatively new member of the IFLA family, I am pleased to have this opportunity to talk with you this morning on a topic I think nicely matches the theme of this year's conference: Connections, Collaboration, Community. My topic also resonates well with the agenda carved out by IFLA's Action For Development Through Libraries Programme. I will be speaking about Open Government from the local, national, and international perspectives and especially the power that institutions like ours can play in making this a better world.

Let me start with a little context (or as Jane Dysart Tweeted Maura Marx's comment yesterday..."I'm a librarian, let me tell you what I'm working on) by describing the National Archives and Records Administration and the role we play in supporting democracy here in the United States. Established during the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration with a mission to collect and protect the most important records of the country, the real focus, from the beginning, has been to make these records available to the American public so that they could hold their government accountable for its actions and to learn from our past.

In dedicating his own library, President Roosevelt captured it in his remarks:

"To bring together the records of the past and house them in buildings where they will be preserved for the use of men and women in the future, a nation must believe in three things. It must believe in the past. It must believe in the future. It must, above all, believe in the capacity of its own people so to learn from the past that they can gain in judgment in creating their own future."

Two monumental statues guard the Pennsylvania Avenue doors of the National Archives. One represents the Past and the Future, Past inscribed with "Study the Past" and Future with "What is Past is Prologue." Words that are as important today as they were when we opened our doors in 1935.

The National Archives is responsible for the records of the more than 250 agencies and departments comprising the Executive Branch of our government and courtesy storage for the records of Congress and the Supreme Court—all three branches of our government. It is a collection of more than 13b pages, 42m photographs, miles and miles of film and video, and terabytes of electronic records—all stored in 43 facilities across the country, including 13 Presidential Libraries where educational programs and exhibitions complement the research services provided to our constituents to enlighten, educate, and entertain. We are, therefore, archives, libraries, and museums.

So, in broad strokes, that is who we are and what we do.

In 2009 I was wooed away from the New York Public Library by the President's belief that the National Archives could and should play an important role in his new Administration's Open Government Agenda. And we, as an Agency, have been working very hard since to fulfill that vision and justify that belief with concrete action.

On his first day in office, President Obama laid the groundwork for Open Government in his first meeting with his senior staff. He said:

"Let me say it as simply as I can: Transparency and the rule of law will be the touchstones of this Presidency. Our commitment to openness means more than simply informing the American people about how decisions are made. It means recognizing that Government does not have all the answers, and that public officials need to draw on what citizens know. And that's why, as of today, I'm directing members of my administration to find new ways of tapping the knowledge and experience of ordinary Americans—scientists and civil leaders, educators and entrepreneurs—because the way to solve the problems of our time as one nation...is by involving the American people in shaping the policies that affect their lives." This philosophical stake in the ground was translated into the Administration's Open Government Directive issued at the end of 2009 which reinforced the President's message:

"The three principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration form the cornerstone of an open government. Transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about what the Government is doing. Participation allows members of the public to contribute ideas and expertise so that their government can make policies with the benefit of information that is widely dispersed in society. Collaboration improves the effectiveness of Government by encouraging partnership and cooperation within the Federal Government, across levels of government, and between Government and private institutions."

The Directive also articulated the Open Government Groundrules: We would publish government information online, we would improve the quality of government information, we would create and institutionalize a culture of open government, and we would create an enabling policy framework for open government. Most importantly, each Agency was required to create and submit an Open Government Plan which would serve as the public roadmap to how we were incorporating the President's principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration.

For the newest appointee in the Administration, the timing was perfect. I arrived in Washington just in time to launch this initiative with my new colleagues at the National Archives. We met the requirements of that first Open Government Directive in 2010 and are now in the review stage of our Fourth Open Government Plan. I can honestly say that the process we have created over the intervening years has enabled us to take advantage of new technologies to engage our staff and stakeholders in the discussion of our plan—suggesting initiatives, commenting on proposed activities, and providing valuable feedback and support.

In our three previous Open Government Plans we have proposed and implemented more than 140 commitments to Open Government—including efforts in records management, declassification, Freedom of Information Act guidance, and in innovative ways to engage users and improve access to our records.

This year, in developing our Fourth (and this Administration's last) Open Government Plan we have held more than 20 internal brainstorming sessions and briefings, including our hosting our first Open Government Town Hall which was webcast to staff members across the country. This was an important event so that staff at all levels knew that their voice mattered, that we were asking them for their ideas on how we could do our work better, and that they had a role in improving our corner of service to the American public.

In March of this year we held our first Open Government Webinar for the public and external stakeholders where we provided an overview of our Open Government efforts and solicited their reactions and comments. We received more than 180 ideas, comments, and suggestions for inclusion into the plan.

The draft plan has been published on Github—so that we can transparently address comments and make changes over time.

The plan contains more than 50 specific commitments to strengthen Open Government at the National Archives and across government from 2016 through 2018, through a Presidential Administration transition and beyond.

Some highlights:

- Our public engagement efforts will include launching a social media campaign to collect stories about people's own artifacts and documents from the Vietnam War to enrich the experience of visiting our new exhibit on the War
- Our Office of Research Services will explore how to best incorporate digital tools like social media and our pilot History Hub to make it easier for the public to find the records that interest them and will provide more customer service training for staff members so that they can better serve the public.
- Our efforts to improve employee engagement and to foster collaboration continue to be a robust part of our Open Government efforts, including launching six Employee Affinity Groups focused on LGBTQ, Veterans, Hispanic and Latino employees, individuals with disabilities, African American employees, and women
- Ten initiatives to increase access to our records through innovation, including expansion of our History Hub and Citizen Archivist programs and developing user-generated finding aids that dynamically update as information changes.
- A number of activities to strengthen the record keeping and access to records responsibilities of Executive Branch government agencies
- And, the recent passage of the FOIA Improvement Act provides us opportunities to strengthen our Office of Government Information Services role as the FOIA Ombudsman.

As important as these Agency Open Government Plans are, even more important is the work that goes on to meld these plans into a cohesive National Action Plan which becomes my country's submission to the International Open Government Partnership. Many of you in the room come from one of the countries who have signed the Open Government Declaration committing to promote transparency, citizen empowerment, to fight corruption, and to harness new technologies to strengthen governance. Launched in September of 2011 with eight founding governments, the group now includes 70 countries, who have made more than 2200 commitments to make their governments more open and accountable.

And this is where I take particular pride in the work that the National Archives has done to play a leadership role in this process. Not only are we at the table, the table is in my house! More importantly, we are front and center in the product which is created by the Open Government representatives of the various Federal agencies and departments.

The most recent Open Government National Action Plan for the United States was released at the end of October 2015. In putting together this third National Action Plan, the United States engaged in unprecedented consultation inside and outside of government, including a broad range of U.S. departments and agencies and subnational governments as well as the general public, civil society groups, foundations, academia, and the private sector. Consultation began with a collaborative workshop with government agencies and civil society organizations and included small and large-scale meetings to discuss and refine the commitments in the draft plan. The Administration also sought input via the White House's Open Government blog and other interactive online platforms. The Plan's "Access to Information" section contains 11 commitments, five of which are owned by the National Archives, providing us an opportunity to lead the effort to improve the quality of access afforded the American public.

It just warms the cockles of my heart to see my agency's talents so prominently highlighted in a document of international significance. So...let me walk you through those five commitments which will, at the same time I think, expand upon my brief overview of the work of the National Archives.

First, the United States commits to Improving the Management of Government Records. The backbone of a transparent and accountable government is strong records management. To quote President Obama: "When records are well managed, agencies can use them to assess the impact of programs, to reduce redundant efforts, to save money, and to share knowledge within and across their organizations. In these ways, proper records management is the backbone of open government." Modernization of records management improves performance and promotes openness and accountability by better documenting the actions and decisions of the Federal government. The Managing Government Records Directive of 2012 requires agencies to manage all of their email in electronic form by the end of 2016. Actions include releasing a public dataset of positions of government whose email will come to the National Archives for permanent preservation under our new Capstone approach and improvements to the existing records control schedule repository based upon civil society input.

Second, the United States commits to modernizing the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act. As I mentioned earlier, our Office of Government Information Services acts as the FOIA Ombudsmen—acting as the intermediary for the American public in their negotiations

with the various Executive Branch agencies and their FOIA requests, provides training for agency FOIA Officers, and recommends changes to the FOIA Law to both the White House and Congress. The Freedom of Information Act celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and the Administration promises to build on its commitment to improve implementation of FOIA to increase efficiency and effectiveness for Federal government employees charged with carrying out the law and for customers who sue the law to access information about government activities. Actions include exploiting technology to expand FOIA.gov to include online tracking of request status, simplified reporting methods for agencies, and tools that will enhance the public's ability to locate already posted information; improving agency pro-active disclosures by posting FOIA-released records online; improving agency FOIA websites; and the development of tools to teach students about FOIA to increase understanding about the important role FOIA can play in the life of every citizen.

Third, the United States commits to streamlining the declassification process. To many of you that may seem like a strange area for the National Archives to be claiming ownership. In the United States, two offices play an important role in both classification and declassification. Our National Declassification Center was created by Executive Order at the end of 2009 and is charged with working with the original agency classifiers to review 25 year and older classified material for release. This has entailed the development of effective, transparent, and standard declassification work processes, training and quality assurance methods. The second National Archives unit involved is our Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) which is responsible to the President for policy and oversight of Government-wide security classification activities. While national security interests require that certain information be protected as classified, democratic principles require government to be transparent, whenever possible, about its activities. Declassification is a time-consuming and costly process that often involves manual review of records. Actions include developing technological tools to help automate declassification review; declassification of historical intelligence records in the public interest; and the creation of an interagency topic-based declassification guide.

Fourth, the United States commits to implementing a Controlled Unclassified Information Program. The National Archives, through our Information Security Oversight Office, will implement an open and unified program for managing unclassified information that requires safeguarding or dissemination controls that are consistent with law, regulations, and government-wide policies. This information is known as Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI). We will issued guidance, establish phased implementation schedules, and publish an enhanced CUI registry that designates what information fall under the program. In addition, we will propose a Federal Regulation to apply the requirements of the CUI program to contractors, grantees, and licensees.

The fifth Access to Information commitment falls to our Office of the Federal Register. This office is responsible for providing access to the official text of Federal laws, Presidential documents, Administrative Regulations and Notices, and Descriptions of Federal Organizations, Programs, and Activities. In addition, this office daily publishes the Federal Register, sometimes called the Federal Government's Newspaper, which publishes proposed legislation and regulations with opportunities for public comment. The commitment in the National Open Government Plan is the development of a machine readable government organizational chart.

Many of you are probably familiar with the United States Government Manual which we publish and has provided access to agency organizational information and charts since the 1940s. To facilitate access to government agencies, the Government Services Administration will be working with our Office of the Federal Register to capture agencies' organizational directories as machine-readable raw data in a consistent format across the U.S. Federal government. Documentation for this format will be made available so that other government bodies, including local governments, can also publish their office names, organizational structure, and contact information as standardized open data. Making this data public and consistently available across the Federal government will help the public to find the offices and officials that serve them in a simple and straightforward manner.

Those are the five commitments for which the National Archives claims ownership. There are, in addition, a number of other commitments throughout the plan which speak to us! Like expanding Civil Society participation in Open Government Efforts or Raising the Voice of Citizens Through Improved Public Participation in Government or Increasing the Impact of Open Innovation Activities or Engaging the Public on our Nation's Greatest Challenges, for example.

So, I hope that has given you a sense how we have responded to an Administrative mandate to embrace transparency, participation, and collaboration at the local, national, and international levels. The process has engaged my staff across the country, demonstrated the value of the National Archives to the American public in new ways, and raised the agency's profile within the Federal government.

Let me close with a few words of advice:

- For those of you in the audience who represent countries which are participating in the Open Government Partnership, I encourage you to share your experiences with your colleagues here at IFLA.
- For those who are members, yet have not had an opportunity to participate in your country's national action plan, I encourage you to read our National Action Plan. I think you will find it easy to adapt and adopt many of the commitments spelled out in that document.
- For those of you who are not at the moment participating, I urge you to learn about the Open Government Partnership and think about ways your country would benefit from participation. Learn from your IFLA colleague who are participating--how they got involved and think about how that might work in your country. Pay attention to and get involved in the work of IFLA ALP—it can serve as a support group for your efforts.
- Finally, don't give up. We share a common mission—connecting people with the information they need to improve their lives.

Let's work together to make that happen and make this a better world. Or, to paraphrase a current meme in the American press..."Let's Make The World Great Again!"