

“Knowledge Will Forever Govern”

A VISION STATEMENT FOR FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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PREPARED BY THE DEPOSITORY LIBRARY COUNCIL AND OTHERS



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I. The Mission

The mission of the Federal Depository Library Program is to ensure that the American public has access to, and can use, its government's information. Since 1813, depository libraries have safeguarded the public's right to know by collecting, organizing, maintaining, preserving, and assisting users with information from the federal government.¹ Stated another way the mission of the FDLP is “to provide... for nationwide community facilities for the perpetual, free and ready public access to the printed and electronic documents, and other government information products, of the Federal government.”²

II. Situation

In 1993 the passage of the Government Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act (P.L. 103-40) was a landmark in the transformation of government information dissemination from print to electronic media. It also spawned the first discussions of the future among government information professionals at the Dupont Circle and Chicago meetings, and by the Depository Library Council (DLC).³

Within a few years, the Web, Google, the Internet Archive, Yahoo, and other tools and services began challenging the Government Printing Office (GPO), government information librarians, and, indeed, all libraries and librarians to redefine their roles in information provision. Three years ago, 300 depository librarians from all types of libraries joined newly appointed Public Printer Bruce James in Reno, Nevada, to envision the future of federal government information and their role in it. From the one and a half days of discussion the DLC distilled goals shared by the library community and GPO, including changes necessary to move forward. Goals identified in Reno included:

- GPO, in partnership with federal depository libraries (FDLs), meets the needs of the public for no-fee access to official government information.
- GPO and FDLs should retain the best aspects of the existing system while incorporating new technologies and services to provide a higher degree of dispersion of government information to the public.
- A more flexible Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) must be developed.
- GPO should become an aggregator for federal information
- Partner libraries should become facilitators in the federal information dissemination process rather than repositories of printed government publications.
- The traditional library role of facilitator to no-fee public access to federal information remains key.⁴

The GPO over the past two years has outlined and begun implementing its proactive, forward-looking vision for operating in the changed environment of the 21st century.⁵ With the cooperation and support of Judy Russell, Superintendent of Documents, the Fall 2005 Depository Library Council meeting was devoted to visioning and brainstorming about the future of government information and the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP)⁶ These and other discussions identified the following opportunities and challenges posed by this rich information environment:

- Customer focus
- Managing collections and delivering content
- Deploying expertise
- Education
- Increasing flexibility
- Adding Value
- Promotion (Marketing)
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Advocacy⁷

Any future Federal Depository Library Program will not be born in a vacuum. Current law (Title 44 of the *United States Code*) and the current tiered, collaborative structure of the FDLP will certainly affect, and to some extent, dictate what a future FDLP will look like. However, the vision reflected in this document assumes the flexibility to restructure the FDLP if necessary. It also assumes any future structure will remain flexible to allow libraries best able to meet users' needs to do so. Ideally, changes and improvements in providing government information via libraries can be accomplished within the current legal environment, however, should changes to Title 44 be necessary to improve future distribution of and access to government information, they should be recommended and advocated for by the library community.

III. Vision

In the 21st century, as in the past, the public needs to access government information in an open, free and easily accessible form that is guaranteed accurate, unmodified, official and authentic. The information must be maintained and held in trust in a public arena where history can be preserved in an unvarnished form. To be trusted by the public, government information must not be tampered with for any purpose. In the past, this meant tangible "book" form was distributed to commonly accessible libraries throughout the world as trusted custodians of this government information. The same level of trust in electronic government information is a major goal of the future FDLP.

In effect, the FDLP constituted a bargain wherein GPO printed and distributed federal publications at no charge to depository libraries who agreed to provide no fee public access to these materials. Through its bargain with libraries GPO had geographically distributed outlets for its product, libraries acquired valuable information resources useful to their clients, and the public got local access to federal publications and information services provided through FDLs. Council believes that in the electronic world the need for the bargain remains, but that the nature of the bargain will differ owing to the different opportunities and possibilities the digital and print environments pose.

Currently there is no organizational framework or technological consistency, such as the FDLP provided for print distribution and access, to help the public find, use, and understand the myriad of networks, databases, web sites, and data sets proliferating throughout the government. Council, GPO, and the library community are concerned about this lack of infrastructure and standardized methods to handle electronic information. This electronic infrastructure requires capital investment for the necessary transition to the information age to support the following needs of depository libraries and users of government information:

- Development of standards for document and metadata information interchange and, delivery between government agencies and the public. Currently, individual institutions (government and public) are inventing many different systems that do not communicate or interchange this information efficiently creating many "islands" of information.
- A centralized coordinating agency (such as GPO) to aggregate information from various agencies to avoid the inefficiencies of navigating different web sites, databases, and data sets to "fish around" for government information.
- Development of public tools to access the information in a common form. This includes electronic interfaces to exchange metadata and document content as well as a common, easy to use technology for the public to access the information. Full text searching would be required.
- Electronic Deposit of information at institutions (libraries and other public entities) housing government documents and metadata. It is important that custodians protect the public trust by providing an independent means to make sure information is not altered and is redundant to avoid catastrophic events.
- Version control of government documents and information to provide historical preservation of how the documents evolved and create a transparent view of government to the people. Any revisions to a document are maintained, tracked and archived to provide a public record.
- Guaranteeing, with reasonable assurance, that electronic documents are both authentic and official. This requires development of technologies to ensure the physical content has not been tampered with or altered.
- Legislation/Regulations that support an electronic environment. This includes authorizing courts and other agencies to use electronic documents from an authenticated and official source as official documents in their proceedings. This is dependent upon a technological framework that is both secure and redundant to protect the information against vandalism, tampering and "hacking."
- Educating the public through programs on accessing information in new electronic systems.
- Educating library directors and public institutions on the transition from tangible formats to electronic, and its affect their budgets, processes` and personnel.
- Providing a free and open place for the public, including the physically challenged and economically marginalized, to obtain government information.
- Maintaining the tangible collections to provide historic preservation of documents while adapting and investing in new electronic technologies.

GPO, with its proposed Future Digital System⁸ (FDSys), *National Bibliography*, legacy digitization initiative, proposal for redeveloping the current GPO headquarters and thereby generating income for future capital requirements, and other innovative plans, is beginning to move forward in many of these areas.

Council proposes the following goals for the library community and government information providers, such as GPO, to effectively transition to the electronic world. These goals are put forth by Council to provide a starting point for the evolution from the tangible to the electronic world. Moving to the electronic dissemination of government information is a sea change that has "ripple effects" throughout the public and private sector. This will be an evolutionary process as technology changes and tangible publications for *new* distribution migrate to digital distribution. This will require a combination of capital investments in technology, budget and staffing reallocations from tangible to electronic, as well as human capital investment to retrain staff and move both public and government institutions to the infrastructure necessary for the 21st century.

To remain competitive and avoid inefficiencies in the public and private sectors caused by ineffective and disjointed delivery, it is essential that the United States update its distribution of government information.

IV. Goals

1. Respond to or anticipate U.S. citizens' need for government information when and where it is needed by providing multiple access points to a network of experts.

Rationale: Discovering where and how the American public needs government information will enable both GPO and depository libraries to better anticipate and respond to user needs and expectations. Government information librarians recognize the growing importance of providing information content and services to the wider networked community as well as to traditional walk-in populations.

An underlying presumption of Council is that much access to federal information resources is 24/7 on the Internet. Hence, to be where information users are when they're online the FDLP must devise means for providing a combination of machine and human intermediated 24/7 assistance on the Web. As systems like FDSys are developed and Internet based reference services considered, Council encourages planners to keep end-user access to both content and services in the forefront of their considerations.

In its ongoing effort to forge better relationships with agencies, GPO can facilitate partnerships among agency experts, depository library experts and GPO staff. These partnerships will serve several purposes: share reference expertise between agencies and FDLs; increase agency awareness of public information needs; educate GPO staff, librarians, and agency staff about one another's missions and abilities.

Council recommends that Web services leveraging the knowledge and expertise of FDLP staff and other government information specialists be established to field reference and referral inquiries where the preponderance of users are – the Web. This service might

incorporate live chat, forms for submitting questions, FAQs derived from a knowledge base, or email reference.

Council also recommends that the FDLP establish a network of experts in specialized areas of reference and collections to which FDLP staff might turn for assistance with answering reference questions beyond their expertise.

To assist people with using government information it's important to understand how they find it, how they want to use it, and what their expectations are. To make more informed assumptions about public use of federal information, we believe that careful monitoring of the PEW/Illinois⁹ and similar studies of how the public gets government information from libraries and the internet is critical. Whether this monitoring is done by the FDLP or by professional organizations, it should be widely shared and discussed among all groups – the government, depository and non-depository librarians, professional organizations, library administrators, and citizens groups.

Additionally, we encourage GPO and the library community to collect data on information use behavior specific to the FDLP. To maintain the public trust data should only be collected in aggregate form, and individual privacy must be protected. Entertaining a broader perspective, this data collection could be coordinated with other federal information programs to glean insights into access to federal government information in aggregate form.

2. Provide access to information in appropriate formats.

Rationale: Government information must be available in formats that support a variety of information needs. This applies not only to our legacy collections, but also to born-digital and digitized materials, where continued access to print and other tangible formats may be necessary for particular types of uses and user populations, such as scholars needing to consult the item as an artifact as well as for content, or those needing a facsimile to consult on an ongoing basis. Conversely, until such time as the entire legacy collection is available in digital form, the FDLP must also provide for digitization-on-demand for those occasions where the digital is the preferred format.

Despite the migration of government information to the Internet, it is vital that certain materials continue to be available in tangible form. Council applauds GPO for its dark archive proposal¹⁰. Preserving at least two printed copies of each federal document in a dark archive is crucial to preserving the information legacy of the U.S. government.

Council also applauds GPO's light archive proposal, but believes that a more feasible option in the near term is the establishment of a distributed network of full FDL circulating collections. These full FDL collections might be housed within single depository libraries along the lines of the traditional Regional library collection, or within a partnership of several FDLs. Assuming these were approximately 10 to 15 in number, the network of full FDL collections would provide adequate redundancy of materials and would assure the availability of original documents via interlibrary loan for those requiring use of an original or facsimile.

Establishing full FDL circulating collections would presumably reduce the volume of tangible distribution and would free many Regional libraries from the necessity of managing comprehensive collections. With more limited collection management responsibilities Regionals would have more resources to focus on their consultative and advisory roles with the selective FDLs in their region.

Council also recommends continuation of the essential titles program¹¹, where select publications remain available for distribution in tangible form. To supplement this program, Council further recommends the establishment of a customizable, flexible, and affordable Print on Demand (POD) service, ensuring access to tangible formats not included in the essential titles program. Together with dark archives, a network of full FDLs, and the essential titles program, POD would provide for redundant, permanent, and ready access to material in tangible form.

Finally, Council recommends that GPO, in concert with the FDLs, establish a service that will provide users with digital copies of materials that have not yet been digitized, on demand and at minimal cost. Digitization and metadata standards should be established for these on-demand use copies.

3. Ensure continuing access to digitally available government information

Rationale: Information federal agencies publish in digital formats constitutes a growing collection of government documentation that must be preserved within the FDLP to assure ongoing free public access. Given that there are no best practices for preserving electronic information and that many agencies add and delete publications without public notice, strategies must be established for identifying, collecting, describing, and preserving these digital materials so that they continue to be freely available to the public.

Council believes that the FDSys must, as its builders intend, support capturing, authenticating, verifying, storing, migrating, refreshing, and printing of government publications on an open, freely available platform. Additionally, the FDSys, as the FDLP's primary digital delivery system, should support profiled, automated, free push and selective pull of digital files to depository libraries. These files should include all associated metadata. The FDSys will serve as a key node on the Internet for public access to the FDLP collection and anyone using the FDSys should be able to identify which libraries locally store what files.

To ensure continuing open and non-proprietary access to federal information it will be important not to attach digital rights restrictions to government information in the FDLP, while also guaranteeing its authenticity. The balance between offering open access and protecting the official and authentic nature of the information is a delicate one which will depend on and evolve with the technology.

As groups like the AALL Government Documents Special Interest Section's Fugitive Documents subcommittee identify and report "lost documents" to GPO they should be harvested immediately for the FDSys. Such efforts, together with GPO's automated

harvesting of federal web sites, will facilitate the capture of much “born digital” federal information for description and preservation in the FDSys and distribution to FDLs. GPO and the depository community should cooperate with the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the National Digital Information Infrastructure and similar organizations to develop, share, and implement standards for document and metadata information interchange and delivery between government agencies and the public.

4. Deepen and expand knowledge of government information resources via excellent training.

Rationale: As government information migrates to the web and future technologies, it is vital that both current and future government information professionals are educated in ways that will enable them to assist users with this information. In the digital information environment government information specialists will require the same broad knowledge of the federal government’s history, organization, publishing patterns, politics, and personalities that they have traditionally needed to assist users locate specific information resources relevant to their particular information needs.

In addition to its traditional focus on providing in-person educational opportunities, Council recommends that the FDLP take advantage of technology as a tool for training. For example, GPO and the library community should incorporate Webcasting and similar technologies where feasible to reach the broadest possible audience. Similarly, user guides, tutorials, and other forms of Help documentation should be made widely available on the Web and topical access to these aids should be highly coordinated. In addition to taking advantage of technology, the FDLP should take advantage of the expertise of current government information professionals to teach, possibly via a series of webinars, courses on finding, using, and understanding government information. These might be taught by librarians currently teaching government information courses in library schools.

5. Provide high quality descriptive tools for access to all FDLP publications, portals, and information products.

Rationale: Providing high quality metadata or descriptive access through allied software applications will ensure that information is easily accessible for librarians and the general public.

As GPO builds the FDSys, it should explore and exploit metadata and “smart” search and retrieval software technologies that empower the searcher and produce accurate, relevant results. XML, FRBR (functional requirements for bibliographic records), full text indexing techniques such as those demonstrated in the FEMA demonstration hosted on an OSTI server (<http://fema.deepwebtech.com>), federated search capabilities, cross walks among metadata schemes, Open URLs, and other options should all be investigated as potential tools for maximizing the effectiveness of user searches.

Given that for the foreseeable future libraries will continue to maintain catalogs of their collections (actual and virtual, in-house and remote), GPO's integrated library system (ILS) and FDSys should provide push and pull options for libraries that wish to house FDLP metadata in their local systems.

GPO should cooperate with the library community and other organizations to add metadata records for the pre-1976 legacy collection to the *National Bibliography*. As with current metadata records, these records should be available for push or pull to local library systems. Strategies by which libraries can select records by publishing agency (such as SuDoc or Item numbers) should be considered in this project. Similarly, strategies should be considered for automatic registration in the ILS of FDLs that select individual records to facilitate identification through the *Catalog of Government Publications* of libraries holding the items.

6. Enhance collaboration or coordination of effort among federal depository libraries, non-depository libraries, GPO, agencies, and cultural memory organizations that deal with internet resources.¹²

Rationale: The ubiquity and speed of electronic communication allows for unprecedented collaboration across the whole of the government information community. Content can move in real time from place to place, and so too can expertise. Accordingly, FDL librarians should take the lead in organizing systems for transparent, cost effective collaborations to provide services and resources to end-users and colleagues.

Collaboration should take into account resources that can be brought to bear by FDLs, GPO, GODORT, AALL, indexing and abstracting services, and other partners in the process of delivering government information. Among the FDLs, systems for collaboration should take advantage of both the depth of collections and expertise in the regional libraries as well as the breadth of expertise and staffing among selective depositories.

Areas for collaboration are so rich that it would be impossible to list them. However, one area needs special attention. *Internet memory organizations* (memory organizations that focus on the preservation and delivery of internet resources, including for example Google, Yahoo!, Internet Archive, MemoryHole, etc.) cannot be ignored. The Google digitization initiative and the Yahoo!-backed Open Content Alliance provide a value to the public through the potential full-text searchability of documents intermingled with non-government, book-like content. GPO can leverage, exploit, and complement such initiatives given its unique role as government publisher. Such a collection would be particularly useful if it focussed on incorporating as much fugitive government content as possible over time, that is, a comprehensive collection of US Federal government information. The creation of a collection of guaranteed authentic and official government content would provide a useful balance to the hybrid, unauthenticated and unofficial versions that will be available through other internet memory organizations.

7. Expand awareness of both the Federal Depository Library Program and government information generally via excellent public relations and marketing.

Rationale: Public access to federal government information is facilitated by the FDLP in direct proportion to the extent that FDLP services and collections are used by the public and understood by policy makers. Enhancing awareness of the benefits that the FDLP provides both to individuals and society will maximize both use and support. As the digital information glut replaces the paper information dearth, government information experts in the Federal Depository Library Program will be sought after more than in the past to help users sort through information overload. Public awareness of the existence of such experts will increase the likelihood that they will be consulted.

Council recognizes the distinct roles that FDLP librarians and the GPO have in educating public officials regarding the value of the depository library program. Council recommends that GPO collect information on patterns and benefits of use the public derive from FDLs for use in explaining program requests to Congress. Similarly, Council encourages FDL librarians actively to inform their public officials - local, state, and federal - of the services and information their constituents can obtain from the FDLP. Council further recommends that FDL librarians and the GPO work collaboratively to inform library administrations of the continuing benefits the program provides their institutions.

Council believes that a key to making the FDLP as visible as possible is to deploy resources on the Web and elsewhere that will to a large extent assist users in finding FDLP content and services. Branding techniques should be employed to assure end-user awareness of the FDLP as source for these services.

V. Conclusion

These are indeed challenging times for FDLs and their traditional roles in providing government information. The succinctly stated goal – GPO, in partnership with federal depository libraries, meets the need of the public for no-fee access to official government information – states only a partial truth in the 21st century information environment. Many avenues are now available to the person seeking government information.

To ensure the continued relevance and viability of the Federal Depository Library Program, libraries must realign to meet the needs and habits of their 21st century clientele – a clientele whose information-seeking behavior increasingly bypasses libraries and their services as well as the collections they provide via the depository program. Federal depository libraries must seek new ways to provide and assist in using and understanding government information, and incorporate to a greater extent than ever before the values of innovation at the local level. The challenge is to move forward with a collaborative vision and a set of goals to make that vision a reality.

FOOTNOTES

Title “Knowledge Will Forever Govern” “A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.” James Madison, letter to W. T. Barry, August 4, 1822. – *The Writings of James Madison*, ed. Gaillard Hunt, vol. 9, p.103 (1910), as quoted in *Respectfully quoted : a dictionary of quotations requested from the Congressional Research Service* / edited by Suzy Platt. Washington : Library of Congress : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1989. pp. 185-186.

1. From “About the Federal Depository Library Program” (FDLP) - <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fdlp.html>
2. *A Strategic Vision for the 21st Century*. December 1, 2004. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004, p.1. <http://www.gpo.gov/congressional/pdfs/04strategicplan.pdf>
3. For the full texts of the reports from these three meetings see Dupont Circle - <http://www.arl.org/info/frn/gov/dupont.html>; Chicago -<http://www.arl.org/info/frn/gov/chicago.html>; Depository Library Council - http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/council/alternat.html.
4. Full text available at *Envisioning the Future of Federal Government Information: Summary of the Spring 2003 Meeting of the Depository Library Council to the Public Printer*. http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/council/EnvisioningtheFuture.html.
5. *A Strategic Vision for the 21st Century*. Op.cit.
6. See *The Federal Government Information Environment of the 21st Century: Towards a Vision Statement and Plan of Action for Federal Depository Libraries. Discussion paper*. http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/pubs/dlc_vision_09_02_2005.pdf
7. See *Depository Library Council, Fall 2005 Meeting, Executive Summary* (http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/pubs/proceedings/05fall/dlc_ex_summary_111405.pdf) and *Our Preferred Vision: A Strategic Vision for Federal Depository Libraries* (http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/pubs/proceedings/05fall/our_preferred_future_dlcvision_discussion.ppt).
8. Future Digital System - For a description of the FDSys see <http://www.gpo.gov/projects/fdsys.htm>.
9. See <http://www.ims.gov/news/2005/100505.shtm>
10. See *National Collection of U.S. Government Publications*. http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/council/briefing_topics/05sp/nationalcollection.pdf
11. See *Essential Titles for Public Use in Paper Format*. http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/pubs/estitles.html
12. For a description of how cultural memory organizations can and must embrace internet resources, see Clifford Lynch. “Rethinking Stewardship in the Digital Age”. *IS&T's 2004 Archiving Conference*. San Antonio, Texas; April 20, 2004; p. 231.