

Depository Library Council
Fall 2005 Meeting
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Depository Library Council is “[t]o assist the Government Printing Office in identifying and evaluating alternatives for improving public access to government information through the Depository Library Program,” and “to provide advice on policy matters dealing with the Depository Library Program as provided in Title 44 U.S.C.” Over the years of its existence DLC meetings have ranged from small meetings held at the GPO, to large open mike town hall type meetings, to presentations from GPO with responses from members of the Council. Results of these meetings have similarly ranged from a set of “recommendations” from DLC to GPO, to minutes of the meetings, to responses and requests for clarifications on presented white papers.

GPO, under the direction of Public Printer Bruce James, has undertaken an ongoing strategic planning initiative to move the agency from primarily a printing operation to an information access and delivery operation. The Council and the federal depository library community have largely reacted to these GPO planning initiatives. During the Summer of 2005 the Council decided it was time to become more proactive in envisioning the future of government information provision and the part that libraries will play in that future.

To this end the DLC wrote a discussion paper *The Federal Government Information Environment of the 21st Century: Towards a Vision Statement and Plan of Action for Federal Depository Libraries* (http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/pubs/dlc_vision_09_02_2005.pdf), began a blog, encouraged input in other ways, and worked with GPO to dedicate the Fall 2005 DLC meeting to envisioning the future of government information provision.

DLC MEETING

Through four days of meetings in October 2005 the Council solicited more direct feedback on its discussion paper from the depository community. Clifford Lynch, in his keynote address, set the stage by scanning the information environment expected to emerge in the next several years. DLC members put the visioning process in historical and situational context with short talks. The DLC meeting was structured into topical and “library type” breakout sessions. The Council summarized and presented major points to the Public Printer on the last day of the meeting.

The Depository Library Council identified four issues:

- Roles of FDLs in the non-exclusive environment of the Internet
- Managing collections and delivering content
- Deploying expertise
- Adding value

The discussions and breakout meetings further identified six overarching themes:

- Customer focus
- Increase flexibility
- Education
- Promotion (Marketing)
- Collaboration
- Innovation

In what were basically very large brainstorming sessions, participants came up with many interesting and innovative ideas for the provision of government information and the role of libraries. As might be expected, all agreed that any future system should leverage the vast expertise of government information professionals. Expert registries, collaborative chat reference, training - both giving and receiving, and local library partnerships were among the many ideas floated that would exploit the knowledge of current experts. As a community, we could both widely deploy our content expertise and extend its impact by partnering with such technical experts as Google, Yahoo, Internet Archive, Memory Hole and other Internet memory organizations.

While acknowledging the continuing importance of print collections participants expressed great interest in the possibilities of digital deposit of files, and collaborative digitization projects – both collaboration with GPO and among depository libraries. Participants acknowledged GPO’s concern for authenticity of digital files, but want to explore options for hosting files, and locally digitizing materials in partnership with GPO. There were good suggestions, as well, to explore options for archiving electronic and print resources made available by GPO or directly by federal agencies.

It was suggested in our discussions at DLC that we invite Internet search and memory organizations to the Spring 2006 DLC meeting as observers and participants. Whether one believes that the future of digital government information resides with GPO, Google and Yahoo, or some combination of each, it has to be the case that we can learn from one another, and benefit from more ongoing sharing of information and coordination of efforts.

A strong theme throughout the sessions was the importance of promotion and marketing to instill the idea that “if Google fails you, your FDL won’t.” This message should be directed to the public and fellow information professionals, including library administrators. Promoting our services and expertise is closely tied to the theme of customer focus. Government information professionals know there are complex information needs which neither the Internet nor a good search engine can meet. If we can successfully market our services and expertise then we can help the researcher who needs that elusive 19th century statistic or the elderly person looking for an explanation of the new prescription drug plan.

NEXT STEPS

The Council will share all notes, comments, and meeting summaries as widely as possible. As announced at the meeting the process will open up from this point forward. Our next steps are to solicit active participation from the federal depository library community in revising the vision discussion paper into a truer “vision paper,” and then to identify concrete actionable items as the basis of a community action plan. We expect that this plan will be ready for further review by Midwinter ALA, and finalized by the spring DLC meeting. As the discussion proceeds, we very much want to broaden participation to include library administrators, Internet memory organizations, other technology organizations, and, most importantly, the public.