

Breakout Session by Library Type—2005 Spring DLC

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TOPIC	Future Tangible Distribution to Depositories
LIBRARY TYPE	Public Libraries
MODERATOR: JANET SCHEITLE NOTE TAKER: COURT REPORTER DISCUSSION	<p>Users of depository libraries have differing needs for tangible documents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is unique about your library’s users, and how do those characteristics create a requirement for the use of tangible distribution? • What information needs do tangible documents meet for your users that are not met through electronic information? <p>Answers: For the following public library users, there are unique needs for tangible materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children Certain patron groups need picture books, coloring books, and activity books. • Tribal Nations Indian Nations in the west have no depository library, and their patrons are not necessarily computer literate or adept at using online resources; they need information products in paper format. • Historical documents Some public libraries have older historical government documents that document the expansion of the West; these are only in paper. It is likely that the documents distributed in paper today, will be tomorrow’s historical documents. • Access to Technology and Libraries Some patrons, such as scholars who live in the mountains, do not have technology or the services to use technology. This is especially true of remote rural locations such as in Montana. If you don’t have a home computer, distances in the West prohibit quick access to libraries that offer computers for a limited online time — whereas with the tangible form you could get an interlibrary loan to use for longer periods of time. The Digital Divide exists in the West with places where you can’t get cell phone service, not to mention DSL. • Senior Citizens Senior citizens need Social Security and Medicare information in paper format, and that format often needs to be in bulletin format, not as thick bound books-- to

take home, and keep for reference.

- Foreign language publications
Government information in foreign languages needs to be available in tangible form for users to take home and keep.
- Special products
Ephemeral materials are still high demand items in public libraries, including one-page information sheets from USDA, CDC, NIH, IRS, etc. People want easy to read and follow information sheets or fact sheets; they don't want a 200 page book on West Nile Virus or Diabetes.
- Limited access within Libraries
Public libraries do not have enough public access computers and limit online use to as little as 30-120 minutes a day. This time limit on access to electronic resources impacts the availability of government information. Economically disadvantaged patrons will not be served adequately by making resources available only in electronic format. Some patrons tend not to use depository libraries. In urban areas, public libraries maintain considerable materials in tangible format that economically disadvantaged patrons can take home.
- Special needs patrons
Visually impaired people require large print materials. Many public libraries do not offer computers with large print capabilities. Health materials must be easy to read, one or two pages, and there is high demand for material on serious health issues such as obesity, diabetes, West Nile Virus, child abuse, spousal abuse. This type of material is typically a brochure, poster, or other ephemeral that tends not be digitized, but they are what the public wants.
- Navigation of content
Browsability is important to users of public libraries. With paper documents, librarians could display the recent titles and those that generated interest. Some people read government documents like novels. That is lost in an all electronic environment.
- Size of document
Documents over 200 pages are a problem to download and print out locally. Patrons do not want to pay to print such a large document, and large documents are extremely tedious to read online both from limited online access time and from eyesight, posture, attention, etc. You need paper for some of these large volumes just from the human perspective.

Under ID 71, GPO policy is to continue tangible distribution of essential titles as long as the publishing agency publishes in tangible form. GPO will also continue tangible distribution for those titles for which there are no useable/useful electronic equivalents. GPO will apply the criteria ID 71 to determine how to best provide other information products by assessing:

- a) How the product will be used
- b) The specific characteristics of the online and/or tangible product.
- c) Issues relating to permanent public access.
- d) The cost of providing the material.

Do you concur with these criteria? Are there additional criteria GPO should consider?

Answers: There are many issues here from the inappropriateness of electronic formats for patrons who can't read to the inability of the technology to be adequately preserved indefinitely. The consensus in the community is that there is a disagreement about the criteria to consider when selecting which format for which content. Many reasons were stated, but the librarians from public libraries felt the criteria restricted the program and do not give it flexibility; they also thought the concept was flawed and not well thought out. For example, there were no children's titles or foreign language titles. This gave the impression that public libraries weren't really considered. There was disagreement with the concept of limiting print distribution. The following points were voiced:

- Preservation and long term access
GPO cannot guarantee, nor does it have a proven system, to provide permanent public access. Technology may not be stable for preservation purposes. For example, electronic formats have not been totally stable because people are having trouble opening PDFs from five years ago. This is a critical issue for permanent public access.
- Diversity of use
Information products can and should be used in many ways. For example, children who can't read yet need coloring books and activity books. Native American Indians and economically disadvantaged patrons often do not have computers in their homes and must rely on public libraries that restrict online access time. Senior citizens want simple fact sheets about health issues or senior benefits. Some

people do prefer electronic formats. It's a difficult juggling act, and the group admitted solutions for GPO would be difficult to find. The group additionally stated that it might not be a single solution but many solutions that will be needed to tailor delivery to a variety of user groups.

- **Cost as the only critical factor**
The new policy gives GPO the option to not send out anything that is costly to produce regardless of the information needs of the public.
- **Diversity of content and format**
GPO needs to develop a mechanism to distribute documents that provides for individual (local) needs of each state or geographic region. Every region has different patrons groups with geographic, demographic, and cultural differences. This was why the survey was inconclusive. It's difficult to get a consensus within the FDLP. This is especially true in public libraries where a library in Kansas may need slaughter house material and meat packing information while a depository in a public library in Wyoming or Montana may have critical need for cattle ranching information. GPO would serve the community better by addressing information needs targeted to the geography, such as the cultural, economic, business, manufacturing, health, and demographic make-up of the area which the depository is to serve.
- **Contrary to FDLP principles**
Fundamentally, the group thought the criteria were contrary to long standing GPO principles that government documents and publications were so important that they needed to be in print; they had to be tangible and widely distributed across the country. Now, GPO seems to believe this is not a principle they want to uphold any longer. GPO does not think it important to have disbursed tangible material.
- **Survey was too limiting**
The Essential Titles survey attempts to put everybody into one model. It was a bad survey, and many public libraries did not participate. It should be redone.
- **Public Printer should address the budgetary issues**
Concerns were expressed regarding funding levels. The point was made that the Public Printer should request sufficient funds to meet the needs of the FDLP.
- **Lack of Accountability and Planning**
Concern was expressed about how managers at the GPO were establishing priorities and making spending decisions. Do the priorities reflect the information needs of the public in a democratic society?
- **Librarians, the general public, and the depository community are as much to blame as the Public Printer.** The community

asked for electronic, but we didn't want that to be the ONLY format and we didn't expect it to devastate the program so quickly. There's a timeline for transitioning large communities to a new model and achieving new goals. GPO is trying to rush it.

Approximately 60% of depository libraries participated in the most recent Essential Titles Survey. While many sample surveys would consider this an excellent response rate, the purpose of this survey was to determine if a clear set of additional titles could be identified as essential for the various types of depository libraries.

Answers: The following points were made by the librarians from public libraries:

- The survey was flawed. It was inconclusive by GPO's own admission.
- The results can't be used in any meaningful way as far as Public Libraries are concerned. It should be thrown out, and a new survey constructed.
- The wrong questions were asked. There should be an analysis of trend lines by usage of titles and an historical study done to logically determine the trends in the use of government information at public libraries. The survey needs to be redone as Council has suggested.
- It's not that the survey was good or bad from any one perspective, but from what the survey results indicate. The survey results became a mechanism to limit distribution by title.
- The assumptions should be reframed. For example, does the electronic distribution plan promulgated by GPO provide more or better access to the totality of government information to American citizens, particularly children, the economically disadvantaged, foreign language speaking people, those residing where the Digital Divide is real, and senior citizens who have arthritis or other handicaps that make computer access difficult. Ask Council if they agree with that statement.
- The process by which the survey was conducted and results analyzed was erroneous. It began when GPO announced it was reducing print distribution to public libraries and then framed the discussion around how the GPO can make the best possible deal out of taking print away. Perhaps the large academics would not be significantly impacted by reducing tangible distribution, but public libraries serve everyone, meaning the full spectrum of information needs for all patron groups.
- In a very large public library, the librarians don't know

which information products patrons are locating and using. Patrons may not ask for assistance, and reference counts are down dramatically. It is also difficult to know what government information resources patrons are accessing online. How can librarians accurately determine what information patrons need in electronic format when the librarians are not intermediaries in the information seeking process? Many librarians are facing this same dilemma as was agreed to by some of the public library attendees.

- The librarians from public libraries said they did not trust the government to "get permanent public access right." Will Congress at some point in the future say it cannot afford the online resources and databases leaving the public with no government information?
- Some attendees questioned if what GPO was doing was against the law. Title 44 hasn't been changed, and GPO is making a liberal interpretation of the title. Others thought Mr. James wanted the law changed, but he was trying to do it through the back door rather than through the Oversight Committees.
- Librarianship is an innocent profession; librarians trust people but have to eventually stand up for their beliefs to insure access to information for all Americans.
- GPO used to have little electronic information, but the depository libraries asked for GPO Access and got it. GPO then "fell in love" with electronic access and concentrated less on printing. That's not GPO's fault, but it's ours. Librarians should be saying that there is a happy medium between print and electronic distribution. Further, librarians should be saying it everywhere, everyday.
- Public Libraries understand government budget crunches. Public libraries are subject to budgetary considerations at the federal, state, and local levels all at the same time. GPO should go to Congress, report what work can't be done because of the current budget crunch, and stop pretending things are fine. Also, people in this room should ask Congress to give GPO more money.
- Public libraries don't have technological resources to permit citizens unlimited access to electronic information. Public libraries need additional resources for all aspects of their mission, not simply the FDLP mission.
- It's ironic that the public libraries requested information resources in electronic format ten years ago in order to replace tangible distribution and conserve shelf space.

Today's complaint from the public libraries is that there is not enough tangible distribution.

Additional question: Many public libraries are leaving the depository library program. Could you provide some insights into this? Public libraries are critical to the FDLP, especially in getting federal government information to the general public. We would like to find ways to help keep public libraries in the program. Do you have suggestions?

Answers:

- In some public libraries popular fiction collections are growing at the expense of government documents.
- The problem is complex. There are always internal political pressures in public libraries. Depository libraries must have strong operations with capable staff that have the will to market and push government information. Otherwise, the depository collection will be viewed as an unused and unneeded collection soaking up space, staff, and dollars that administrators think can be redirected to other programs the general public loudly demands.
- Public libraries are in a crisis because library directors read the professional journals and *Administrative Notes* that say the future of information is digital, all information will be digital, and they believe it. In some ways, this is a true statement. If most government documents are online and freely accessible through channels that do not require going through GPO Access, why should FDL members "put up" with the requirements and rules of GPO?
- Public libraries can't afford to meet GPO's staffing, bibliographic control, and technological requirements for operations and access to electronic information.
- Shelf space for government documents is being reduced to meet other local priorities such as creating computer labs.
- Public libraries get "triple hits" which GPO does not recognize. The national debt is impacting public libraries on three levels; federal, state, and local. In this situation, public libraries are forced to make difficult decisions just as GPO had to make the difficult decision to reduce print distribution. In the case of public libraries, administrators weigh the benefits against the investment that must be made locally in terms of space, staff, equipment, etc. If the return on investment does not appear significant, the FDLP membership is dropped.

Additional question: What would it take to keep public libraries in the FDLP?

- Try offering new services such as licensing for databases. Do the hard work that the public libraries aren't resourced to do or can't do such as targeting information to specific user needs, geographic needs, etc. See the earlier discussion on this topic.
- Provide training so that librarians in public libraries know how to use the information that is available.
- Make it so ridiculously simple for public libraries that "it's a no-brainer" to be in the FDLP. Reduce rules, and allow librarians to use their professional judgment.
- The ILS may help with bibliographic control. The processes should be so simple that FDLP librarians no longer have to catalog anything.
- Incentives need to be broad and deep.
- Be sure that public libraries receive documents that meet patron information needs. Information should include national resources that serve a broad national interest like the 9-11 Commission report as well as local resources, such as children's coloring books and activity books. Assess what libraries need from one area of the country to another. Blend national needs with local requirements.
- Focus more on public libraries and their contribution to the FDLP. Understand what their problems are regarding government information access, and find solutions for them. Do a study of public libraries.
- Allow public libraries to select by individual titles to meet the needs of their users, and do not limit them to only 10-50 Essential Titles.

The general conclusions GPO might draw from this breakout session are:

The GPO should consider developing new services for the FDLP members who are public libraries. These services might be announced at the fall conference.

There is a critical need to examine the situation of public libraries and assess why they are leaving the FDLP. A study will be done by the Office of Library Program Planning.

A new survey should be created. Ann Miller and Susan Tullis volunteered to work on a new survey on behalf of the Council.

GPO should publish a diversity of information products in a variety

of formats. There are unique needs that will not be met by reducing tangible distribution as a sweeping solution. Instead, craft a set of solutions that address the needs of public library patrons.