

Chapter 7 Public Access Assessments

Describes GPO's individual depository library assessment program.

What's New or Important

The Public Access Assessments (PAA) Program fulfills the Superintendent of Documents' responsibility to conduct "firsthand investigations of conditions" at individual depository libraries (44USC§1909); it is one of the primary ways the GPO learns about and monitors individual depository library activities. Library Services and Content Management (LSCM) may conduct individual library assessments at any time upon request, or as need is determined. Scheduled assessments for individual depository libraries are planned to start in winter 2009.

The PAA program focuses upon outcomes. The process selected by your depository library to meet public access requirements continues to be a local determination. If your depository library follows the legal and program requirements, as outlined in Title 44 of the U.S. Code and the Federal Depository Library Handbook to ensure free public access, it is in compliance with the law and shall be successful in a PAA.

PAA emphasizes the general public user and the role Federal depository libraries play in providing access to and services in the use of Federal Government information for this user group. Assessments are organized around the major responsibilities of depository libraries, which fall into the broad categories of access, collections, service, and cooperative efforts.

- ❖ **Access:** Depository libraries provide free public access to Federal Government information products regardless of format.
- ❖ **Collections:** Federal Government information products in all formats are maintained so they are accessible and meet the Federal Government information needs of the general public. Federal depository libraries select and manage collections.
- ❖ **Service:** Activities and professional expertise, oriented to the Federal Government information needs of the local community and surrounding areas, are provided to support the visibility and use of the Federal Government information products of the depository library.

- ❖ **Cooperative efforts:** Activities libraries undertake to participate effectively with LSCM and all libraries in the nationwide network of the FDLP. Federal depository libraries cooperate as partners in the FDLP.

In general, PAA is a progressive review process, although an onsite assessment may be requested at any time. An initial assessment of all depository libraries is conducted offsite by PAA librarians through a review of your individual library Biennial Survey responses and your corresponding library and institution Web pages. If LSCM determines that a more detailed review, or a clarification, is needed to confirm that public access is being provided by your depository library in accordance with legal and program requirements, a PAA librarian will contact you. Additional documentation, such as policies not posted online, may be requested. LSCM may also request that your library revise a policy or procedure within a specified timeframe, e.g., three months. If needed, LSCM may also schedule an onsite visit to your depository library. When an official assessment is conducted, LSCM will provide a written report after the assessment is completed.

When appropriate, PAA activities also include consultation with other library personnel to share best practices in depository management to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of ongoing individual depository operations, and, thus, the FDLP. LSCM's PAA librarians are experienced former depository coordinators who, through the process of reviewing the activities of many individual depositories, are able to exchange information about those activities and practices that have proven to be successful in similar types of depositories.

Additional information in support of the PAA program is [available on the FDLP Desktop](#). On this site you will find a Request for GPO Participation. While this form has many purposes, it may be used to request a public access assessment. Continue to visit the PAA Web page as GPO will continue to add to the PAA pages as additional resources become available in 2008.

Tips, Practical Advice, and Lessons Learned

Interested in a review of your library's depository operations?

You may request a PAA of depository conditions at your library now through the [Request for GPO Participation](#) form. If you are a new Federal depository library coordinator or your library recently reorganized, you may find an assessment useful to validate that your library's depository management practices ensure free public access.

Anyone (e.g., member of the general public, library director, library personnel, or regional librarian) may request an onsite visit by LSCM PAA librarians as part of the library's Public Access Assessment.

What may be done to prepare for a PAA?

Preparation for PAA is not necessary, unless you believe that your library is not following legal and program requirements in accordance with Title 44 of the U.S. Code and the Federal Depository Library Handbook. As previously mentioned, those libraries following legal and program requirements to ensure free public access is provided shall have a successful PAA.

If you must make changes to be in compliance, please refer to the remainder of the Federal Depository Library Handbook for guidance and effect appropriate changes. Remain up-to-date about legal and program requirements through announcements on the FDLP Desktop.

If you have any questions at any time about the interpretation or the proper application of legal and program requirements, please ask LSCM personnel or your regional depository coordinator.

Post the library and, if separate, depository access, collection, and other policies on the main library's Web pages. These policies provide very useful information about a depository and will be reviewed in a PAA.

Review, and update as appropriate, your library and depository policies, Web pages, signage, library handouts or other literature, and other library information on a regular basis to ensure that information disseminated supports FDLP free public access. Inadvertent discrepancies or unintentional statements that have a "chilling effect" on public access may appear in depository library signage, policies, or other information resources when the access needs of the general public have not been completely considered. These types of statements must be revised. A review of such statements provides you with an opportunity to remind your library colleagues about the responsibilities of the Federal Depository Library Program.

Review previous assessment documentation. This includes any Inspection and, if applicable, Self-Study reports. Your depository library receives written reports after an onsite inspection or Self-Study review. Although it's a snapshot of your depository operations and services on the day of review, these reports provide you with valuable historical information about your depository. If you are unable to locate these resources, contact your regional depository coordinator or LSCM through [askGPO](#) for copies of the latest reports. Please note that the focus of earlier reviews was broader than the current PAA program.

Although it is listed as superseded, LSCM is currently still using the existing Self-Study of a Federal Depository Library, Federal Depository Library Manual, Supplement 3, which is available on the [Federal Depository Library Handbook Web site](#) for PAA. This study will be used until the new tool is developed.

LSCM is currently updating this self-study. Look for a new Self-Study to be announced on the PAA web pages. The new self study may be used as an educational or strategic tool to

determine your depository's preparedness for a PAA.

Other helpful information about the PAA program

LSCM continues to take a functional approach to individual library assessment. The method your library selects to meet the public access requirements of a Federal depository remains a local determination. For example, public access to online resources at computer workstations within your library building may be provided through a combination of several mechanisms. Your depository library may provide access to all online depository resources on all of its public access computer workstations in the building. Or, there may be some stations set aside specifically for Federal depository researchers. In some areas of the library, you may ask researchers to log on to computers through a patron authentication mechanism. You may also provide mediated access to Federal resource information at the public services desks. This is just a sampling of possible scenarios. As long as public access is attained, without any "chilling effect" that may inhibit potential depository usage, the outcome is achieved.

If your library has encountered some challenging circumstances that have resulted in areas of non-compliance with legal or program requirements but you are working to make improvements, PAA librarians certainly acknowledge and support these demonstrable efforts and will account for these in a PAA. In some cases, PAA librarians will ask the depository coordinator to communicate with LSCM about certain issues within a specified time period, e.g., 3 or 6 months.

LSCM encourages you to share information about depository assessments with your library's administration and colleagues as a way to emphasize the importance of the FDLP, to reinforce the library's commitment to provide public access to U.S. Government information, and to improve access and services at your depository.

PAA is a great opportunity for you to share information with LSCM. LSCM looks upon PAA as an information exchange with the personnel in individual depository libraries. We welcome suggestions for improvements within the FDLP as we continue to build a more effective and efficient Program.

Did you realize that you don't have to.....?

Expect that your depository will automatically be evaluated through an onsite library visit. LSCM expects to use the information submitted by your depository library in the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries to initially review your operations. Your library and institution Web pages shall be included in this review.

Expect that you will need to complete a self assessment or other report before a PAA.

Important for Library Administrators

LSCM is establishing a regular individual library assessment schedule beginning in winter 2009 but may also perform some assessments outside of this schedule to accommodate or address individual library needs.

The process selected by your depository library to meet public access requirements continues to be a local determination. If your depository library follows the legal and program requirements as outlined in Title 44 of the U.S. Code and the Federal Depository Library Handbook to ensure free public access, it will be in compliance with the law and shall be successful in a Public Access Assessment.