

# Public Access Assessments: Guidelines for Completing the Initial Review



These guidelines detail how the Initial Review Checklist is completed.

GPO Public Access Assessment (PAA) librarians review whether the library achieves the elements identified in Focus on Access, Collections, Service, and Cooperative Efforts. Determinations are based on the library's policies, the latest Biennial Survey submission, the library's Web page content, and other documentation as appropriate. The library's overall situation is reviewed within its own context.

PAA librarians will look for evidence of compliance with each element, including various library outputs and the applicable 2007 Biennial Survey question numbers. They will also note when the library achieves high standards overall or in various activities or makes notable progress from one PAA to the next and will document this in a report to the library. The primary resources that are part of the review of each element are noted in brackets in this document, directly after the review element. Following the bracketed information may be additional information that documents or demonstrates compliance with the element.

This initial review is always performed as part of a Public Access Assessment. When an onsite review is requested, PAA librarians complete the initial review to document background information.

## ACCESS

### **Federal depository libraries provide access.**

**Access** is defined as providing free public access to Federal Government information products regardless of format. It involves making Federal Government information products available and usable for all library patrons, including those with disabilities and those of all ages. It also involves but is not necessarily limited to bibliographic, physical building, tangible collection, onsite computer, and Internet access. It is the degree to which the public is able to retrieve or obtain the information products, either through the FDLP or directly through a digital information service established and maintained by a Government agency or its authorized agent or other delivery channels, in a useful available format or medium, and in a time frame whereby the information has utility.

- a) Any member of the general public may use Federal Government information products in all formats at a Federal depository library free of charge without impediments.

[Library Web page, institution Web page, library access policy, depository access policy, phone recording, published promotional material  
Survey questions: 21, 21a, 22, 24, 25, 28, 28a, 29, 29a, 29b, 30, 32, 32a]

The library demonstrates that access is made available to depository resources.

In addition to the parts of Biennial Survey question 21, other potential impediments are:

- Library Web pages or access policy indicate library is closed to the general public.
- Depository publications are not routinely processed and made available in a timely manner.
- Library charges a fee to gain access to Federal depository resources or requires a certain form of identification that the general public is ineligible to obtain free of charge.

- b) The general public gains access to use Federal Government information products in the collection through public access computer workstations and through direct browsing on open shelves and/or through timely access to resources retrievable from closed stacks or remote storage.

[Library Web page, institution Web page, library access policy, depository access policy, phone recording, published promotional material  
Survey: 5 - 5d, 29 - 29b]

Considerations for review include (but may not be limited to) the following:

- Timely or untimely processing time for new or unprocessed receipts
- Type of shelving used (open or closed stacks and/or remote storage) and level of bibliographic control over these publications
- Timely or untimely retrieval time for publications not in open stacks
- Retrieval options for publications in closed stacks or remote storage available for all library user groups, including the general public
- Public access computer workstation configurations, e.g., login required for all users, logon required for non-primary patrons, filtering employed, authentication used, access is limited by domain, etc., mediated searching offered, set up so that all Federal depository library patrons may gain access.

- c) The general public gains access to use Federal depository online resources onsite in the library and via the Internet (e.g., through the catalog or Web pages).

[Library Web page, institution Web page, library access policy, depository access policy, phone recording, published promotional material  
Survey: 6, 9a, 9b, 29 - 29b]

- d) The library responds to and addresses general public access complaints or concerns made directly to the library or through GPO in a timely manner.

[Communication in the library's official records at GPO]

Check for unresolved complaints. Also check that the library responds to GPO communication in a timely manner to resolve public access issues, if any.

- e) The library selects appropriate secondary resources (e.g., databases and indexes) that support bibliographic access to and use of the Federal Government information products.

[Collection development policy, library Web pages  
Survey: 3b, 28]

- f) The general public may gain specialized assistance for access to depository resources in libraries with limited general public access (e.g., Federal libraries) through such services as resource sharing and remote reference when timely access to the resources is an issue. The

library provides public access to the depository general public when visiting the library is the only option to gain access to needed resources and expertise.

[Library Web page, institution Web page, library access policy, depository access policy, phone recording, published promotional material about the library in general  
Survey: 21, 21a, 25, 29b, 31]

- g) A library designated as a **highest state appellate court** library Federal depository library is exempted by statute from the free public access requirement.

[FDL Directory for library designation status]

## COLLECTIONS

### Federal depository libraries select and manage collections.

**Collections** are defined as the Federal Government information products in all formats maintained so they are accessible and meet the Federal Government information needs of the general public.

- a) The library maintains its collection by technical processing of new receipts for access in an appropriate time period and properly storing and caring for all the resources acquired through the FDLP.

[Collection development and/or maintenance policy, procedures manual, library official file  
Survey: 3, 5 – 14]

- b) The general public has ready access to all parts of the collection. If the Federal Government information products are in closed stacks or housed remotely or must be installed on a public access computer workstation, they are retrieved for use, circulation, or installation in a reasonable period of time.

[Library Web page, institution Web page, library access policy, depository access policy, phone recording, published promotional material  
Survey: 5 - 5d, 21, 21a, 29b]

- c) The library identifies and selects resources that best meet the Federal Government information needs of the community served, in cooperation with neighboring depository libraries.

[Up-to-date collection development policy with community profile, library Web page, and library provides access to the FDLP Basic Collection  
Survey: 3 - 3b, 6, 7, 8]

- d) The library maintains a collection, other than the Federal Government information products received through the FDLP, of at least 10,000 books (i.e., tangible information products).

[Collection development policy, library Web pages  
Survey: 2]

- e) The **selective** depository library served by a regional depository may withdraw tangible Federal Government information products retained for the statutory minimum period of five

years from receipt after securing permission from the regional library for disposal. Unneeded materials must be made available to other depositories per disposition guidelines. (Those libraries designated as **Federal** libraries and the **highest state appellate court** libraries are not subject to this requirement.)

[Check with regional depository report (resulting from a query by email before the Public Access Assessment starts in the state or region), state plan if any, collection development and maintenance policies, needs and offers lists]

- f) The **selective** depository library communicates and cooperates with its regional depository library regarding publication disposition.

[Check with regional depository report (resulting from a query by email before the Public Access Assessment starts in the state or region), instructions for selective disposal process, state plan (if any), and collection development and maintenance policies.]

- g) The **regional** depository library, representing a state or region, retains permanently at least one copy of all tangible Government publications received on deposit, unless they are superseded or the discards are authorized by the Superintendent of Documents.

[Instructions for selective disposal process, state plan (if any), collection development and maintenance policies]

- h) The **regional** depository library communicates and cooperates with the selective depository libraries in its state or region regarding publication disposition.

[Check with selective depository report (resulting from a query by email before the Public Access Assessment starts in the state or region), instructions for selective disposal process, state plan (if any), and collection development and maintenance policies.]

## **SERVICE**

### **Federal depository libraries provide services.**

**Service** is defined as activities and professional expertise oriented to the Federal Government information needs of the local community and surrounding areas and provided to support the visibility and use of the Federal Government information products of the depository library. Visibility is achieved through cataloging, prominence of location of tangible collection and public service points, promotional activities, etc.

- a) The library provides access to and services for the Federal Government information products for the general public in a manner comparable to access to and services for primary users of other library collections.

[Library Web page, institution Web page, library access policy, depository access policy, phone recording, published promotional material about the library in general  
Survey: 5a, 14, 19, 28, 28a, 28b, 30]

- b) Libraries provide reference assistance to the general public.

[Library Web pages, access policies  
Survey: 25 – 30]

- c) The library's personnel have and maintain expertise (i.e., stay current with U.S. Government information resources and trends in information dissemination) in reference services which support research of Federal Government information products in all formats.

[Library Web pages, access policies  
Survey: 15, 16, 18, 19, 30]

- d) The library promotes the Federal Government information products to its primary constituency and the general public, to ensure that the depository resources are utilized and to help ensure that the Federal Government information needs of the community are met.

[Library Web pages, institution Web pages, policies, partnerships, news about promotional activities included in the library's official file, PURL Referrals  
Survey: 28, 28a, 28c, 31]

The library has strategies to provide access and has evidence of the depository's use.

- e) The **regional** depository library works with selective depositories in their region, with GPO, and with depository libraries from other regions to ensure that all depositories in their region have free access to all formats of depository resources --either through online access or through interlibrary loan and additional reference assistance.

[Library Web pages, state plan (if any), policies, check selective and regional depository report (query by email before PAA start in a state or region)]

## **COOPERATIVE EFFORTS**

### **Federal depository libraries cooperate as partners in the FDLP.**

**Cooperative efforts** are the activities libraries undertake to participate effectively with GPO and all libraries in the nationwide network of the FDLP.

- a) The library communicates and cooperates with GPO, their regional or other regional depositories, other depositories, and Federal government information users, in order to ensure the effective functioning of the FDLP.

[Biennial Survey submitted, official library file, library Web pages, FDL Directory is up-to-date]

The depository coordinator (at a minimum) at each library has subscribed to FDLP-L, or successor mechanism.

The library has a designated Federal depository library coordinator. When the position is vacant, another library staff person serves as a coordinator on a temporary basis.

- b) The library receives and responds, as appropriate, completely and in a timely manner to FDLP communications from GPO. This includes reporting the conditions of the depository library to the Superintendent of Documents every two years (i.e., Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries).

[Biennial Survey submitted, official library file, library Web pages]

- c) The **regional** depository library communicates and cooperates regularly with selective depositories in its state or region to facilitate reference assistance, interlibrary loan, and depository publication disposal processing.

[Library Web pages, state plan (if any), policies, check selective and regional depository report (query by email before PAA start in a state or region)]

## **Results of the Initial Review**

1. The initial review concludes when PAA librarians find the library to be in compliance with legal and FDLP requirements and do not have any questions needing clarification. A report is sent to the library documenting the findings.

Or

2. The library has requested an onsite assessment, and the PAA librarians find the library to be in compliance with legal and FDLP requirements. A report is sent to the library documenting the initial assessment findings, and the library is included on a schedule for a future onsite visit.

Or

3. The PAA librarians find that a Follow-up Review is needed because one or more follow-up triggers, noted below, have been identified. A Follow-up Review should not be viewed as direct evidence of non-compliance with legal or FDLP program requirements. Instead, it is a further measure by GPO to validate public access and legal requirement compliance given the limitations of an offsite assessment.

## **Summary of Follow-up Review triggers**

When any of the following issues are identified, further clarification is needed to validate that the library is in compliance with Title 44 of the U.S. Code and the Federal Depository Library Handbook and that free public access is being provided. Depository libraries exhibiting any of the following should expect a Follow-up Review in a Public Access Assessment.

Triggers from the Biennial Survey

- Any response indicating access is not provided at depository or at selective housing sites.
- Biennial Survey not submitted.
- Library has fewer than “10,000 books”.
- Library has discarded depository publications without authorization.
- Library has not responded to request for information or action from GPO.
- Coordinator position remains vacant, i.e., there is no one listed as a contact for GPO in the depository coordinator fields in the Federal Depository Library Directory.

- The depository emblem is not affixed in a prominent place at or near the library entrance.
- Library houses publications off-site at an institution not under the control of the depository library director but does not have a current selective housing site agreement.
- Depository publications are not identified consistently as such or are not marked consistently with a date.
- Current tangible receipts are not consistently identified in a bibliographic record.
- Depository publications are housed in closed stacks or remote storage and are not cataloged or included in another bibliographic resource readily accessible to staff and/or library patrons.

#### Triggers from the Web page

- Library Web pages indicate the library is closed to a user group or groups (e.g., the general public or minors) for access to Federal Government information products.
- Library Web pages do not indicate the library is a depository nor do they indicate the library has services for U.S. Government information products.
- Library Web pages contradict the information reported in the Biennial Survey.
- The pages provide minimal information about public access.
  - Free, public access may be provided, but lack of information about public access in library documentation or on the library's Web pages may lead to a Follow-up Review to validate compliance.

#### Triggers from library user comments about library

- GPO receives a complaint about public access and finds that an onsite visit is necessary to confirm public access is being provided. (An initial assessment involving review of the Biennial Survey submission and institution Web pages will take place.)

Follow-up may also occur to clarify any other areas in order to validate compliance.

Should there be any areas of non-compliance at a library, the PAA librarians will state this in a Follow-up Review.

### **Summary of steps for Follow-up Review**

PAA librarians will contact the:

- Coordinator
- Regional coordinator
- Other library personnel (as appropriate)

PAA librarians will request the following appropriate and available documentation to address questions:

- Responses to the latest Biennial Survey, when not submitted on schedule.
- Library surveys, when available, with information about depository access, collections, service, and/or cooperative efforts
- Policies not posted online
- Other (e.g., library annual report)
- Self-assessment report (*Update of Self-Study of a Federal Depository Library, to be completed by a library on a voluntary basis. In development by GPO*)
- Regional librarian visit report (*In development by GPO*)

The PAA librarians and the depository coordinator will discuss all the options the library has to achieve compliance. The PAA librarians will document the activities that the library chooses to pursue to achieve compliance and a corresponding date for completion, after which a report will be made to GPO. The deadline depends upon the issue.

- When GPO identifies access issues on a library resource (e.g., a Web page indicates the library is closed to the public), these must be addressed ASAP (i.e., within the next few days).
- Other issues (e.g., updating wording in an internal library policy that must be approved by a committee) may be addressed over the next few months, while appropriate access is provided in practice.

The library may request an onsite visit after this initial review.

The PAA librarians will schedule an onsite visit if the actions in the Follow-up Review do not provide sufficient information or the library does not respond to the requested follow-up.