

# Public Access Assessments

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April 18, 2007

## Overview

The goal of depository library assessments, formerly known as inspections, is to ensure that depositories comply with Federal Depository Library Program legal requirements. The U.S. Government Printing Office has the responsibility to ensure that the resources it distributes to Federal depository libraries are made accessible to the general public.

The Superintendent of Documents shall make firsthand investigation of conditions for which need is indicated and include the results of investigations in his annual report.  
(44 USC §1909)

This has been primarily accomplished since the early 1970s through an inspection program, a formal onsite review of the depository conditions at Federal depository libraries. A Self-Study reporting process was also used between 1996 and 2005. After GPO review of individual library self-studies, about half of the reviewed depositories were scheduled for full onsite inspections. Prior to the 1970s, GPO relied on review of the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries, inaugurated in 1947, to evaluate conditions at depository libraries.

The inspection program is now being revitalized as public access assessments to emphasize public access to all formats of depository resources and related library services. Of special concern in Title 44 is the provision in Section 1911 which states in part that “depository libraries shall make Government publications available for the free use of the general public.” There are always several ways to perform depository operations and provide services; however, the end result is to “keep America informed”, to provide each library’s local community with free public access to Federal depository resources.

Assessments of depository conditions continue to offer the opportunity to share depository management best practices in order to enhance depository services and promote greater efficiency and effectiveness of depository operations.

Assessments and consultation about depository library conditions focus on the responsibilities of depository libraries, which fall into the broad categories of access, collections, and service.

- Access: Providing for free public access to Federal Government information products regardless of format.
- Collections: Providing for proper selection, bibliographic control, and maintenance to promote accessibility and use of the Federal depository library materials entrusted to an individual depository.
- Service: Providing services and professional expertise to meet Federal government information needs of the local community.

## Issues

- GPO plans to take a progressive approach to public access assessments. Initial assessment of all depository libraries will be offsite, potentially through review of individual library Biennial Survey responses as well as their corresponding library Web pages. When further assessment by GPO is warranted, additional action will take place, such as telephone interviews, review of library documentation (e.g., library policies or a self-assessment report), or onsite public access assessments.
- GPO expects to perform public access assessments of all libraries on a regular schedule. However, GPO will continue to investigate any complaints or concerns relating to access to depository resources at the time they arise and could schedule an onsite visit then if warranted. GPO will also follow up after public access assessments to ensure that any public access issues noted in an assessment are rectified.
- Each depository library will receive an official report from GPO providing the findings of an assessment. The regional library will also receive a copy.
- The Federal Depository Library Handbook is scheduled to replace the Instructions to Depository Libraries as the official rules and regulations of the FDLP for depository libraries, supplementing Title 44 of the U.S. Code. Assessments may be performed now according to the Instructions to Depository Libraries. Any assessments performed shortly after release of the Handbook will take into account a learning period for review of the new official rules and regulations. GPO personnel will continue to assist depository personnel with any questions they may have about interpretation of the Handbook or other GPO policies.
- The official rules and regulations of the FDLP for the depository community must be up-to-date and consistently understood within the depository community for assessments to accurately reflect upon the conditions in depository libraries, especially in light of the rapidly changing environment within libraries and at GPO. Currently, there are many questions on the part of libraries about FDLP rules and regulations relating to management of online resources. GPO is aware that it must review its related policies and update them as appropriate.
- GPO personnel will continue to visit regional and other depository libraries even if these libraries are not scheduled for a full onsite assessment. The focus of these visits will be consultation, not assessment, and sharing of depository management best practices.

## General Assumptions

- Public access assessments emphasize how depository libraries serve the general public's Federal information needs by reviewing how they provide access to and services for their Federal depository resources. Public access includes bibliographic, physical building, tangible collection, Internet, and onsite computer access.
- Public access assessments emphasize qualitative review (e.g., review of self-assessment or peer reviews of depository operations, library patron satisfaction surveys or comments, and written library collection development, bibliographic control, and access policies) rather than quantitative review (e.g., analysis of a library's item number selection rate or tangible collection size) of depository conditions.
- The public access assessment process will be flexible in reviewing depository operations. Every library is different, and GPO must continue to assess each situation in context.

- Communication and sharing of best practices between GPO and depository library personnel should work to reduce any confusion about FDLP policies and provide libraries options in the operational ways they choose to meet their legal requirements.
- Assessments are a review of conditions in depository libraries according to the current rules and regulations of the FDLP at the time of the assessment.
- GPO will continue to solicit and gain feedback from the Depository Library Council and the depository library community about public access assessments in order to reinstate a valuable and effective assessment program for all depositories.
- GPO personnel performing assessments will be professional librarians with up-to-date knowledge of depository management best practices.
- Assessments should be viewed as a positive process designed to help libraries meet responsibilities as Federal depository libraries, but there should be consequences for failure to provide public access to Federal depository resources. Probationary status may be an option when public access to depository resources is denied.
- Anyone (e.g., member of the general public, library director, library personnel, or regional librarian) may request an onsite public access assessment.
- GPO expects to establish a regular individual library assessment schedule, but GPO also may perform some assessments outside of this schedule to accommodate or address individual library needs.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Are the assumptions in this document correct?
2. What do you think of the name Public Access Assessments? Do you have a suggestion for a different name?
3. What specifically have you found regarding any inspections and/or self-studies in the past, and believe you could find in public access assessments in the future, to be especially beneficial to your depository library?
4. Shall GPO routinely perform depository patron satisfaction surveys about each library's depository access, collections, and service?
5. Would you be interested in a self-assessment tool, i.e., an updated Self-Study template, and in what format would you like this to be available?
6. What type of information, e.g., metrics about assessments, would be useful for GPO to disseminate about public access assessments?



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# Public Access Assessments: An Overview

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# Introduction

The goal of depository library assessments, formerly commonly known as inspections, is to ensure that depositories comply with FDLDP legal requirements.

GPO has the responsibility to ensure that the resources it distributes to Federal depository libraries are made accessible to the general public.

# Citations

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Depository libraries shall make Government publications available for the free use of the general public. (44 USC §1911)

# Background

Individual library conditions have been evaluated by:

- Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries (1947 - )
- Inspections onsite (1970s – 2003)
- Self-Study of a Federal Depository Library (1996-2005) and follow-up inspections when further evaluation was deemed appropriate
- Less formal onsite visits and phone consultations (ongoing)

What is your experience?

# Public Access Assessments

Public access to all formats of depository resources and related services is emphasized.

Individual depository conditions are evaluated.

Assessments of depository conditions continue to offer the opportunity to share depository management best practices (recommendations) in order to enhance depository services and promote greater efficiency and effectiveness of depository operations.



# Responsibilities Of Depositories

**Access:** Providing for free public access to Federal Government information products regardless of format.

**Collections:** Providing for proper selection, bibliographic control, and maintenance to promote accessibility and use of the Federal depository library materials entrusted to an individual depository.

**Service:** Providing services and professional expertise to meet Federal government information needs of the local community.

# Process Under Consideration

GPO is planning a progressive review of individual library conditions.

Assess individual conditions at all depositories through review of:

- Biennial Survey
- Library Web pages

When further review is warranted, additional action may include:

- Phone conferences
- Review of library policies or a voluntary self-study
- Onsite assessment

## Major Issues

- Any concerns about public access will be evaluated as they arise and may include follow-up actions.
- Assessments are based on the current rules and regulations for depositories.
- Courtesy visits with a focus of consultation and sharing of best practices will continue.

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