Proposal Comments

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Essential Titles List Revision Proposal: Report of the Feedback

Since the beginning of the transition to a more electronic FDLP, GPO has recognized the need for certain publications to remain available to depositories in paper or tangible format, so long as they are published by the agency in that format. The original "Essential Titles List" was contained in the *FDLP Information Dissemination and Access Strategic Plan, FY 1996 – FY 2001* and included in GPO's 1996 Report to Congress.[1]

BACKGROUND

GPO's Essential Titles List was developed to be fluid, so that titles could be added or removed when an agency no longer publishes a title in a tangible form, or when depository library preferences change. Since the first list in 1996 GPO, with input from the depository library community, has added titles to the Essential Titles List and the definition of "essential" has broadened.

In the Spring of 2005 GPO again added titles to the Essential Titles List and, by surveying depository coordinators, sought to further identify other titles for inclusion with the aim of tailoring the list to more accurately reflect the selection preferences of the different types of depository libraries in the FDLP. The community had reservations about the survey after results were discussed at the Spring 2005 Depository Library Council meeting. Working with Council, GPO developed this alternative proposal.

ESSENTIAL TITLES LIST PROPOSAL

A title is defined as "essential" when it contains critical information about the activities of the U.S. Government or is an important reference publication for libraries and the public. Additionally for a title to be "essential", a preponderance of depository libraries must elect to receive it in tangible form through the FDLP.

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[1] *Study To Identify Measures Necessary For A Successful Transition To A More Electronic Federal Depository Library Program: As Required by Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, 1996, Public Law 104-53: A Report to Congress.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996. (Supt. of Docs. no.: GP 3.2:EL 2/3/FINAL)

The Essential Titles List proposal calls for the creation of multiple lists. One list would be applicable to all depository libraries, as the current list is. Other lists would be based upon type of library and the assumption that what is "essential" for one type of library may not be "essential" for another type. Further, the proposal provides an objective, rather than subjective, means of determining what is "essential". The determination would be based upon item selection profiles of libraries, that is, the collection development decisions of depository coordinators based upon their community's needs. "Preponderance of libraries" is defined as a tangible title selected by 85% of depositories.

For more information see the proposal details and the related documentation, which remain accessible from the FDLP Desktop at: http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/coll-dev/proposed-estitles.html.

CALL FOR COMMENTS

GPO sought feedback on the proposed methodology for determining essential titles, the assumptions, library types, and the process. The depository community was given two months ending August 1, 2006 to submit comments to GPO. By design, the first month coincided with the annual item selection update cycle.

Spreadsheets that depict what the essential titles lists would look like if the proposed methodology was adopted and SOD 301, *Dissemination/Distribution Policy for the Federal Depository Library Program*, were posted on the Desktop to help depository coordinators evaluate the proposal. SOD 301 is an internal policy statement that guides format distribution and dissemination decisions. In addition to titles on the Essentials Title List, SOD 301 stipulates that in certain instances tangible formats will be distributed to depository libraries.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

GPO received 13 comments through the Web form on the FDLP Desktop. Eight submissions were from academic libraries (4 medium-sized and 4 large); three submissions were from public libraries (1 small and 2 large); and there was one submission each from a small community college and a large state court library. Letters were received from the American Association of Law Librarians (AALL), the American Library Association's Government Documents Round Table (GODORT), and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) as well.

Of the 13 Web form submissions, one only asked questions and did not comment, five approved of the proposal, and seven disapproved of the proposal. Of those who disapproved of the proposal, five did so for multiple reasons, one did not like the breakdown by library types and one did not like the 85% threshold when applied to titles with separate item numbers for state breakdowns. The two reasons most often mentioned for not liking the proposal were the lists by library type and "preponderance" defined as 85%. While almost half (6) of the respondents did not like how the libraries were grouped by type, only one suggested that library size be used in the equation. While no other alternative groupings were included in the submitted forms, verbal suggestions were conveyed to create library type categories for land grant institution libraries and public law libraries.

The table below depicts both positive and negative feedback received through the comment form on the FDLP Desktop. The number in parentheses indicates how many times this comment was received.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK	NEGATIVE FEEDBACK
Proposed revision seems logical, looks good, and it covers all necessary aspects. (4)	Determining essential titles needs more evaluation than item selection rates. (1)
Like using item selection percentiles as a basis for decision-making. (5)	The essential titles by library type approach does not allow for collaborative collecting. (1)
It is good that SOD 301 is in effect to work in tandem with the Essential Titles List to determine formats for distribution to depository libraries. (1)	Essential title lists by library type assumes that all libraries within that categorized type serve similar constituencies with comparable priorities. (2)
Agree with the 85% selection rate as a threshold for determining an essential title. (5)	The 85% selection rate threshold leaves out many titles that are essential in print for our patrons. (3)
There's appeal in having specialized lists that would broaden the essential titles for an individual library, receipt of tangible items from the "master" list of essential titles as well as those for my type library. (5)	Expanding the Essential Titles List weakens the essentiality of the truly most essential titles and makes it a popularity contest of the "most selected items". (1)
	Library types with fewer libraries in them are at a disadvantage; tangible distribution will be unequal they will have fewer essential titles. (2)
	Applying the percentage to library types seems arbitrary; will size of library be considered? (1)
	GPO should not be making selection decisions or determining what is "essential". (1)

Some comments revealed a misunderstanding of the proposal generally and of the application of the Essential Titles List as it now exists. A few thought that there would only be essential title lists by library type, not recognizing that the proposal was for both the current structure of titles that are essential to the whole community and a an additional set of lists for specific categories of libraries. A couple of respondents thought that if GPO had removed item numbers under which nothing had been distributed recently that other titles would move up on the list, not understanding that the number of selections was not a ranking. According to the proposal, titles would move up the list only if more libraries selected the corresponding item numbers. Regarding the current Essential Titles List, two respondents are under the impression that depositories are required to select these titles, rather than recognizing that GPO is committed to continuing to offer tangible distribution as an option for libraries so long as the agency continues to make that possible.

All three letters from the library associations recognize that depository librarians have embraced online Government information and many have chosen digital over tangible for much of their collections. The three associations also suggest that the publishing agency's format of choice be added to the criteria of SOD 301 for determining the format for distribution to depository libraries. After these commonalities, only the letter from the ARL supports the proposed methodology for determining an essential title, stating: "While GPO's proposal may seem stark when viewed by segments of the community, it does maintain consistent across the board access – an important goal for all Federal depository libraries".

AALL and GODORT do not support the proposed methodology for determining an essential title. With the 85% selection threshold and the lists for library types, both organizations believe that it does not provide the flexibility required to meet the needs of the diverse constituencies they serve. Further they asserted that because of the differences among libraries they did not think consensus could be reached. These organizations prefer that GPO refine the distribution criteria in SOD 301 rather than try to create a list of essential titles that does not meet the needs of the depository community.

The letters submitted by AALL, ARL, and GODORT are posted for review on the FDLP Desktop at: http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/coll-dev/proposed-estitles.html.

CONCLUSIONS

With such a low response rate from the depository library community on the Essential Titles List revision proposal and with requests from GODORT and AALL that GPO not proceed, GPO will take no further action at this time.

SOD 301 is currently under review.