



**Partners in Preservation:  
Government Information for Future Generations  
April 23 – 25, 2013  
Focused Discussion Summary**

The U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) and the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) celebrated Preservation Week 2013 by conducting a virtual meeting with the theme, “Partners in Preservation: Government Information for Future Generations.” The meeting was held over three days and provided an opportunity to convey how GPO and Federal depository libraries are “*Keeping America Informed*” by preserving our nation’s documents of democracy for permanent public access. As part of this virtual meeting, an FDLP Forecast Study Focused Discussion on tangible collection preservation was held. This focused discussion represents entering Phase 2 of the FLDP Forecast Study, which was designed to obtain clarification or additional information on topics found in Forecast Questionnaire responses.

Below is a summary of that discussion.

Wednesday, April 24, 2013

### Tangible Collection Preservation

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#### *An FDLP Forecast Study Focused Discussion*

#### Expected Outcome of Discussion

- GPO seeks your thoughts and ideas as to what strategies should be included in the comprehensive preservation plan that will result in a collection of Government publications and information dissemination products that will be available for use by future generations.

#### Summary of Discussion

This focused discussion, facilitated by Marie Concannon, had 68 attendees.

## QUESTIONS

### 1. How do you define preservation? What activities come to mind when you think of preservation?

There were seven comments associated with this question. The definition “Keep in an unaltered condition” brought to mind digitization. There was a quick response that “digitization does not equate with preservation,” rather digitization is “a new form of access.” Creating a digital master, however, is a preservation activity. One comment reminded us that there is physical preservation, and there is digital preservation – both very different. Another description of preservation included “a union list of who owns copies, cataloging, and appropriate storage facilities.” Two additional statements included the need for both permanent access and cataloging. The final comment stressed the importance of cataloging, “no point in preserving if no one knows it exists.”

### 2. Do you think digitization is a viable means of preserving tangible content?

POLL: Yes: 23/35 (66%) No: 12/35 (34%)

There were 10 comments associated with this question, a couple duplicated comments from the first question. Again, it was pointed out that digitization is part of preservation (not the entire solution) and that preservation of digital content is different from preservation of print products. Half of the comments related to access – either digitization providing an alternate means of access and machine-dependent access. Also there was a broader view, expressed by one, of needing to consider access with any form of preservation (not just digitization) and cataloging was, again, specifically mentioned as the key in accessing both digital and physical content. Three people expressed concern with the assumption or viewpoint held by some that if content is digitized it is ok to get rid of the tangible copy. Another concern mentioned was that digitization projects are launched without careful planning and consideration of other aspects such as preserving the tangible piece and access.

### 3. What is the minimum number of required copies of a tangible publication needed, under the stewardship of the FDLP, to ensure preserved for future generations? What resources can we explore to help answer the question of how many tangible copies are needed?

There were 26 comments associated with this question. Though the question specifically asks about a minimum number of required copies, only five of the respondents mentioned an exact number. These responses varied in number from a suggested one to two copies for each regional, to 100 dispersed copies “scattered around the country.” One respondent felt that five to ten copies were adequate as long as they were not held all in

the same place. The largest number came from a respondent who felt that at least one copy “of the primary legal material” should be available in every state. Other responses were made with the caution that determining the number of copies depends on additional factors such as who has access to those copies and who shares responsibility for preserving them. Preservation was discussed by several participants as the significant issue that needs to be resolved first before trying to determine the number of copies needed. One participant observed “that the minimum number is not the right question - should be asking HOW things are preserved and WHO can make the commitment and HOW does the commitment survive staffing and admin changes.” Other factors influencing preservation such as whether digital copies of publications exist and whether enough redundancy exists to cover for natural disasters.

**4. What is the scope of the historical tangible collection that is to be preserved? What parameters would you put on the definition of this collection?**

There were 13 responses to this question. Participants offered numerous ways of defining the scope of the historical tangible. These were:

- Start with the 1909 Checklist;
- Anything that was distributed as part of the depository program whether as a depository or non-depository items;
- Look at the oldest continuing depository - probably a Regional - and inventory their collection;
- I would ask what is essential in the event of a major disaster in which government would have to restructure;
- Absolutely pre 1976 hearings;
- We have microprint sets of "non-depository" government documents (ie in the Monthly Catalog);
- What if we looked for entire runs of things that are now or have been part of the depository program? (to expand the hearings);
- Yes! (to the hearings);
- Yes agree we need pre-1970 hearings included.;
- I'd include as many Congressional publications as possible.;
- Look at what depositories have bought to supplement/complement their depository collection (sometimes indices were commercial and not depository);
- Scope would be much easier to assess if all collections were completely cataloged - then you could more easily compare holdings across libraries; and
- What has been left out of depository program for logistical reasons?

**5. What would incentivize depository libraries to become a partner to help preserve the historical tangible collection?**

There were 13 responses to this question. Participants discussed a variety of incentives for libraries to become preservation partners. Money in the form of grants and cataloging help was the first suggestion. Sharing in metadata creation was another similar financially-related issue due to the potential cost savings of shared metadata. Several participants said that having a choice in the level of participation would be an important deciding factor. Definitive standards for preservation/digitization and a master list of what has already been digitized were also factors in helping libraries commit to a tangible collection partnership. At least one participant felt that preserving content with a local or state focus would make it easier for their library to justify a preservation commitment. Additional positive factors such as publicity for the participating library would also be an incentive.

**6. What tangible collection preservation role(s) does GPO have? Federal depository libraries? Other entities?**

There were 15 responses to this question. One participant observed that GPO's traditional role was cataloging publishing and distribution. Several participants saw GPO taking a leadership role in setting digitization and metadata standards, coordinating cataloging and metadata creation, "keeping track of who's digitizing what and when" and finally "hosting digital masters in FDsys." One participant also noted that "GPO can have formal partnerships (MOUs) with libraries that agree to permanently preserve tangible collections."

**7. What preservation or permanent public access concerns do you have about your tangible collection?**

There were 28 comments associated with this question that identified 34 concerns for depository tangible collections. Access, lack of cataloging, remote storage, pressure to weed, lost or damaged collections, and determining the correct access/preservation balance are the concerns that received multiple mentions.

- Access (6)
- Access/preservation balance (2)
- Can't digitize
- Changing administrator priorities
- Everything is online myth
- Funding
- Lack of adequate security
- Lack of cataloging (5)
- Lack of permanence

- Lack of preservation
- Lost/damaged collection (2)
- No climate control
- No public libraries
- Not preserving
- Pressure to weed (3)
- Reliance on regional
- Remote storage (4)
- Space (footprint)

**8. What factors do you consider most important in determining digitization priorities?**

There were eight comments associated with this question, some of which provided more than one factor for prioritizing digitization. Factors mentioned were:

- Rarity of item (3);
- Patron need (3);
- Physical condition (3);
- Age (2);
- Commercial availability (2);
- Unique to the local geographic area (1); and
- In concert with the library's collection development plan (1).

**9. You have identified your top five choices for digitization (title, series, date range, agency, etc.) They are:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. ...

There were 19 comments associated with this question. Congressional materials were at the top of several people's list. Some offered more specificity with:

- The Serial Set (5) – with one reminder to be sure to include the Serial Set maps!;
- Hearings (3), particularly those that were not published;
- Bills (2), particularly those that did not pass; and
- Committee prints and the Congressional record rounded out the Congressional materials.

Other top choices for digitization were Statistics and data (3). Time frames also were offered: pre-1950s documents and pre-1980 Environmental Protection Agency documents.

There was one mention of local interest with publications about their geographic area being a digitization priority. And ending the discussion on a comedic yet serious note, offered into the digitization priority mix was, “sexy stuff we can use to promote govdox!” There was agreement on this point.

### **Outcome Achieved?**

While the discussion questions did not spark overwhelming numbers of responses, those who participated offered a variety of viewpoints, suggestions, cautionary notes, and consensus in some areas. The desired outcome was achieved.