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Effective Networking on the Local Level: The SEFLIN Experience

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SEFLIN is the Southeast Florida Library Information Network. It is a non-profit organization comprised of 13 institutions (like 13 colonies) representing 97 library locations - give or take a few depending upon progress of rebuilding some branch libraries destroyed by Hurricane Andrew. The SEFLIN service community covers over 4.4 million people in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties accounting for approximately 1/3 of the state's population. SEFLIN's recent plans are to expand to include an associate membership ranking to small special libraries and small academic institutions. Currently SEFLIN is negotiating with the IRS over its non-profit status in order to include the for-profit libraries.

The thirteen members are: Barry University, Broward Community College, Broward County Library System, Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, Lynn University, Miami-Dade Community College, Miami-Dade Public Library System, Nova University, Palm Beach Community College, Palm Beach County Library System, St. Thomas University, and the University of Miami.

SEFLIN is a network of people striving to eliminate boundaries and obstacles to the "library without walls." It was officially incorporated in 1988 as a non-profit organization after several organizational years prior to that. The Government Documents Committee actually preceded the incorporated SEFLIN. In the Spring of 1987, Tony Harvell of the University of Miami and Chris Kitchens of Broward County Library called together a meeting of librarians representing the federal depository libraries in the tri-county area. There were then and there are now 8 federal depositories in the region with item selection percentages ranging from 12% to 83%.

The original meeting's purpose was to review together our item selections with the idea that we would function as a mini-regional - that every item number would be selected by some federal depository library in the region. No one library was able to commit to trying to take on the responsibility of becoming a regional alone. The huge increase in the population of South Florida: Dade County's population increased by 19.2% between 1980 and 1990; Broward's increased by 23.3% and Palm Beach's increased by 49.7% (FAU is the only depository library in this county) made it imperative that the fairly young depository libraries in the region work closely together to serve this substantial population. As most library institutions in South Florida, we have had to serve this rapidly growing population in competition for the tax dollar against other government agencies. We are a state without a state income tax.

However, with the strengthening of the SEFLIN organization and with the recognition that all depository libraries within the region were also SEFLIN members, we elected to try to become a standing committee of SEFLIN. We met with the SEFLIN project coordinator (this position would later become executive director) in November

1987 with this proposition. The Board of Directors quickly granted us standing committee status.

The current committee consists of documents librarians where government documents are the primary assignment, reference librarians who share documents as part of their assignment, and public service librarians who have some documents cataloged within their collection. We have eleven members appointed by the Board of Directors. Each institution of SEFLIN may elect to have a voting member of a standing committee. Some institutions choose not to have a representative--this is usually more reflective of the size of the institution's professional staff than of interest. In one instance, one institution has two federal depositories--they're just in two different Congressional districts. However, they only have one official vote. The SEFLIN Board of Directors has charged the Government Documents Committee with the following responsibilities:

1. Promote the use of government documents, federal, state, local and international throughout the region;
2. Make recommendations to the SEFLIN Board of Directors concerning accessibility and cooperative development of government documents collections;
3. Provide government documents workshops;
4. Address other government document issues and/or projects as identified by the Board.

In actuality, we wrote these charges up for the Board to give to us.

We hold meetings usually every 2-3 months. These meetings are open to interested visitors. Several of our committee members have neither designated state depository, federal depository or IGO library collections. Their participation has provided rounded and insightful benefits to our meetings. One of the members has requested a depository library "slot" to be held in their congressional district until that time when they can afford to commit the personnel, time and space to participate fully in the program. We refer to her as our "wannabe". She has spent hours at several of our libraries learning about the requirements and responsibilities of the program. Indeed, many of us have spent time at each other's libraries seeing how each has "done it good" or better independent of our SEFLIN meetings.

One of the greatest strengths within the SEFLIN Government Documents Committee has been our focus. Several of the other committees have had to move slowly and cautiously because of the administrative diversity of their institutions. We have small private colleges, large private universities, medium size to large state universities, public libraries, law libraries, etc. Fiscal responsibilities as well as different fiscal calendar years have had to be adjusted to and coordinated. Responsibilities of each institution to its primary clientele has had to be considered. Before SEFLIN, the axiom "neither a borrower nor a lender be" seemed to be the first consideration as strong institutions tried to protect their resources for their clientele first and foremost from the weaker and developing libraries. This library "turf" protection sometimes, though unintentionally, overlaid the depository programs. Now, with SEFLIN, and particularly with the government documents committee, the thrust, the emphasis is to work together - to have a library without walls.

The SEFLIN Government Documents Committee while much of its focus and activities have centered on the federal depository program also are involved with state, local and international governmental organization documents. We are fortunate in having a UN depository (Nova University Law School Library under the capable hands of Iris Caldwell) and an FAO depository at the University of Miami. I might mention that we have two patent depository libraries (Miami-Dade Public Library and Broward Public) within our midst. We also have six of our libraries serve as state documents depositories. The state depository system has just celebrated its 25th year of operation. One of the SEFLIN government document depositories produces a computer KWIC index to state documents with a classification system based on the SuDocs system. The SEFLIN Government

Documents Committee instigated a meeting of state document depository librarians in 1991, the first to be held in 10 years. Plans are in progress for a meeting to be held every two years preferably in the center of the state. From Key West to Pensacola, it is about 860 miles, so meetings among librarians within the state is a challenge.

The diversity of the institutions that comprise SEFLIN has also been a source of strength to the government documents librarians. Each institution's collection has facets about it developed to support their primary clientele. Certain special purchases of microforms or access to specialized online databases are shared beyond the institution for which they were purchased. On occasion, some resources have not been entered into the normal OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog) databases. For example, some libraries have not yet loaded documents, state and/or federal, in their OPACs.

Some of our local libraries are still developing an OPAC. Some special collections aren't listed, and are considered a low cataloging priority. Through our meetings and other get togethers (electronic or what) we share information about these items more easily and readily.

We have been developing a more formal organization in the past few years. We have a chair and a chair-elect (selected from within our ranks and officially appointed by the SEFLIN Board). The executive director of SEFLIN either attends each of our meetings or sends a representative. We attempt to make sure that all types of institutions have their turn at a leadership role - that the aggressive university librarians don't continue to dominate year after year. Though we do follow the committee rule of "one institution - one vote", we operate by consensus. We draw up goals each year and produce a written summary of each year's activities, along with the committee's plans for meetings for the following year. Recently we participated in the strategic planning of SEFLIN with an outside consultant.

We rotate our meeting locations among our members. We grumble about the drive up and down I-95 or the Florida turnpike, always vowing to meet in the middle at SEFLIN headquarters which are located in the Broward County Library's main building in Fort Lauderdale. But there always seems to be something we have to see at another library. One of our recent meetings was at the new Nova University Law School Library which we had to see and then our next meeting in early June will be at Miami-Dade Public Main Library because we all have to see their new computer set up in documents (especially since their documents computer whiz is being wooed away to another part of the library.) We've actually met as a group at one library to "show our presence" when one member did not feel her administration was acknowledging the important role documents played in the collection. You don't ignore a bunch of documents librarians. And an administrator is especially sensitive to being scrutinized by a bunch of librarians from neighboring institutions. There is a little rivalry on being on the "cutting edge of technology" among the libraries. Our visits to each other also helps give us a sense of how we're doing. It's like a mini-inspection. Travel budgets don't let us get out of the state often, but a bunch of documents minds can pretty much figure some things out when we work as one.

What do we do? What have we been doing? What will we be doing?

In our short life as a committee, we have developed themes to each year's activities. One year began an emphasis on electronic technology - to move us into 2001. As all documents librarians know, this electronification of government documents and the depository system has had its repercussions on other areas of libraries and on other committees of SEFLIN. We have been working on stronger communications and interactions with the Reference Committee, the Collection Development Committee and an upcoming meeting with the Interlibrary Loan Committee.

We have representatives on some of the ad hoc committees - because some of the institutions are small, some librarians are on several committees including Government Documents. They bring us communications of their

activities and the impact on us. When SEFLIN formed an Ad Hoc CD-ROM Committee to discuss what CDs to put on their infant CD-ROM network, government documents played an influential role. The price, the software, the projected use, the network licensing fees were very conducive to the inclusion of CDs from the federal government on the network. Currently the CD-ROM Net includes the Census 1A for Florida/Georgia, the Foreign Traders Index, the National Trade Data Bank, the National Economic, Social, and Environmental Databank on it. The others are Auto-Graphics Government Documents Catalog Service, Ethnic News Watch, and the SEFLIN Serials Union List CD. The Government Documents Committee then had to provide cheat sheets for the use of the CDs. Training sessions, centered at Broward County Library and lead by Marie Moisdon for government documents, are in progress. Selected librarians are being sent to the sessions, they are to return and train other librarians--a domino effect of education--each one teach one.

The growth of the SEFLIN electronic movement is slow but steady. Many institutional members have only been recently connecting up to e-mail through SEFLINK which I shall describe later. At some institutions, one central point with one person designated to receive all e-mail messages and route them to the appropriate person. All committee members have a SEFLIN e-mail address. Some, but not all, of the institutions are connected to the Internet. One of the goals of SEFLIN is to connect all to the Internet. SEFLIN is also exploring the establishment of a "Free-Net" system with Broward County Library already active in pursuit of it. About one half of the Government Documents Committee members are on the Internet, regularly accessing Govdoc-L and FLADOCS. FLADOCS is the electronic discussion list started by our regional the University of Florida. Most activity on it are Ns & Os. The Government Documents Committee has an "adopt-a-library" program for those without the Internet. Those on FLADOCS adopt another committee member who is not able to access it and copies or prints out messages of interest for them; messages from Govdoc-L are printed out too. Some of the SEFLIN institutions are able to get computer accounts with a neighboring university to establish their own Internet account.

One of the early priorities of SEFLIN was to provide fax machines for all member institutions. The Government Documents committee is one of the active users--faxing shipping lists to each other, copies of treaties, notices, missing pages, etc. Of course, we fax claims to GPO too. SEFLIN has recently in the last month installed the RLG's (Research Libraries Group) ARIEL system in five of the libraries with the rest to receive it in the next year. The Government Documents committee isn't sure yet about what ARIEL can do for us beyond super fax, but once we do, you can bet, we'll be involved in it. As mentioned, we have an upcoming meeting planned with the Interlibrary Loan Committee. We have, shall we say, "facilitated" our own ILL by faxing documents to each other or sending documents to each other via the SEFLIN van courier without benefit of the ILL clergy or their forms.

Most of us haven't kept statistics on this activity. Every documents librarian would look at an official ILL ALA approved form and mutter "this is too complicated" and therefore, bypass the ILL procedures. It has been an unwritten policy for us to pass things back and forth this way with little scratch notes on who has what. However, we believe that meeting with ILL and working with them, that genuine statistics can be kept on the use of documents. We believe that by cooperating and working closer with them will help them recognize, retrieve and share government documents. Many of them look at documents citations that they have received and don't have a clue what to do if it's not in the OPAC. They freeze. We hope to thaw them out.

And the mention of OPAC brings me to SEFLINK. SEFLINK is the overall computer network which is the basis for a variety of online SEFLIN products including SEFCAT - that is SEFLIN's bibliographic network linking the online public access catalogs of SEFLIN member libraries in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. SEFCAT users can follow a common command structure to search the catalogs of six SEFLIN members with access to over 6.8 million of their libraries' records and an additional 6 million more records of the State University System of Florida (including government documents on a NOTIS system).

This was an accomplishment to bring in so many dissimilar library systems including the SUS's FCLA/NOTIS IBM system; the BCL's UTLAS (ALIS) system; MDPL's GEAC; UM's Innopac; and PBCL's DRA/DEC system. Backdoor or front door, each institution is being brought in. Currently SEFLINK is reached via limited dial access. SEFLINK also provides the e-mail utility. SEFLINK has a SE@L component which is SEFLIN's Serials Union List.

Based on the OCLC Union List of serial holdings of all SEFLIN members, it is available on SEFCAT, CD-ROM and microfiche. The Government Documents Committee is participating in having government documents serial records included. This has been labor intensive since, like I mentioned, many libraries do not yet have their documents loaded into their OPAC and because there are so many serials in documents. We used the list of serials indexed in the now defunct Index to U.S. Government Periodicals as our first priority to be included, followed by those listed in Price List 36 or Government Periodicals and Subscription Services (now called U.S. Government Subscriptions). SEFLINK also includes the CD-ROM NET which can accommodate 23 simultaneous users.

It is not yet what we would call a "mature" product. Placement of the computers to access SEFLINK varies from institutional site to site. SEFLIN has also produced a print directory of CD-ROM Products held by its members. Naturally, government documents CDs occupy a prominent amount of space on it.

The diversity of the members of the Government Documents Committee has also been a strength in the sharing of knowledge. One of our law library members has helped us in sorting out our responsibilities in providing information to prisoners; one of our public libraries which is neither a state nor a federal depository is a HMDA depository. The public libraries have developed local documents collections to which we can refer people.

We have two public libraries that are patent depositories--a godsend in our region. Some of our close working relationships are because many of our institutions share facilities--one public library is the branch library of a university, another community college library shares a facility with a university library, and so on. This feeling of remoteness, of being way down here on the peninsula also has facilitated the cooperative effort. We all genuinely like working together. We network with other librarians, even if not SEFLIN, in the area. Memberships in local library associations, informal lunches with special librarians, bring back information and provide us with means of sharing information about government documents.

We network on a shoestring. One of our earliest endeavors and recently updated is a bookmark listing the local federal depository libraries on it with addresses, telephone numbers, date when each became a depository, percentage of selection, and any other type of depository collection that may be held. We share guide sheets/handouts with each other. When we first heard that we were not going to receive census maps, we listed with each other who bought which maps covering which counties. How we organized them was shared. These were maps that were produced by Florida State University under the auspices of our state data center. We are currently developing a directory based on the Boston Library Consortium GODIG Library Directory and a newsletter which we are calling the I-95 Newsletter since that is the main road to get to each other. The newsletter is intended as a temporary information provider until e-mail is accessible personally to each of us.

Minutes are recorded of each of our meetings, the dubious honor is rotated among the members. Just in the last week, our first transmission electronically of minutes to our members occurred. Besides lobbying for the state documents depository meeting, we also produced a group letter on our concern and support for the future of the depository program. This letter went out to our senators, selected representatives and the usual suspects.

Most of our meetings include an "inhouse" training or familiarization program. When BCL was a test site for the Economic Bulletin Board, we all met for a demonstration program. When Govdoc-L came up, we met for a

demonstration of e-mail. Please note this was before most of us has computers in our libraries to any extent. Some of us did not even have a CD-player.

We've had programs on Lexis/Nexis, state data banks, 1990 census, the 1987 Economic census with extract. Our members have hosted workshops on the 1990 census, the NTDB, "Government Documents: From Asteroids to Zimbabwe", and organizing state documents. Those that have dialup access to the Census Bulletin Board have downloaded software for the others. We share samples of commercially produced software where legal; copy diskettes of things we pick up at far away meetings. Several of us have fiche to fiche copiers where we replicate needed documents. We fax surveys to each other when an envelope arrives empty. Currently we have a large box making the rounds with state publications in it that one library weeded. Each library can dip into it for documents that they want and then send it on via the SEFLIN van courier.

We have been fortunate that one of our founders has also been a member of the Federal Depository Library Council - Chris Kitchens of the Broward County Library. She would meet with us, get our input on issues. Some of our members have participated in the revision of the Superseded List with support from the other members' depository collections.

One of our latest quests has been identifying, obtaining, and reporting to each other fugitive hurricane documents - whether they're FEMA, GAO reports that did not get dispersed through the depository program, or local documents, even publications that came from consultants. We're compiling a list of who has what which will appear in our newsletter.

We've been dutiful in determining our congressional district and reporting it to the regional and the GPO. Actually, we've been dutiful when we could determine our district. The boundaries are hilarious. These boundaries are meaningless in our services since we go beyond that in the telephone calls we answer, the people we assist who come into our libraries. And this brings me to the question of outreach--usually a big problem for universities. Bonding through the SEFLIN umbrella has helped all of us to work on this responsibility. The universities are eternally grateful to our public library partners who sponsor workshops under the SEFLIN logo and include us in the machinations of it. At the same time, the more liberal travel time allotments allow the university members to go out and bring materials and ideas back to our public library members. Some of our public libraries have university accounts to the Internet. SEFLIN Government Document librarians have taught courses, given class lectures to students, high school as well as to a branch campus of an ALA accredited library school.

We've even supervised internships in government documents. These library school students later contact us when they are working in area libraries, specialized or not, for government documents.

You would have noted that the development of SEFLIN and growth of the Government Documents Committee came during some of the worst economic hard times in Florida. I cannot stand up here and describe SEFLIN without telling you about some of the dark moments. The recent years have seen not only changes in the federal depository program, but also changes within the SEFLIN libraries.

Economics and how each of the SEFLIN institutions deal with it affects the committees. Most of us pay our own way to our meetings; the administrations have been giving us time for these networking meetings--not everything can be done via e-mail or the telephone. With many of us having our documents listed in OPACs, the demand for documents has grown substantially. The awareness of what the federal government produces is eye-opening--more so to the rest of the library staff. When book and serial budgets have taken enormous hits, it was documents where information and current information at that could be found. Yet, administrations have been pressuring selectives within SEFLIN to cut back on their item selections. The staffing, the upkeep of the

technological aspects of OPAC accessible documents, has come at a time where staff positions have been frozen and decreasing.

The electronification of documents and the minimum technical requirements have placed a much larger monetary burden on federal documents depositories than before. Time away from the institution for networking, training, informational meetings is becoming more scrutinized by administrations. The demand for documents that are not being received through the depository because "they're not on the Core list, or no rain check will be honored, etc." have created an even greater necessity for documents librarians to work together. It's a paradox. We've created the demand, the awareness of the variety, the importance of documents and now we are having problems with delivery of the goods.

That brings me to the current and future plans of the SEFLIN Government Documents Committee. We have gone back to our roots, to our original coming together - that of having the item numbers within our region. Administrators have a bad attitude to the term "mini-regional" or "regional" collection - they know that costs money. So we've coined the term "rational" collection or the "rat's" collection. We are planning what others have done, and that's creating a local item number data base - who within the region gets what. With more of us having fiche to fiche duplicators, we hope to be able to supply quickly the missing or desired document to our clientele. With the fax, and maybe with this ARIEL, and with the SEFLIN courier van service, we hope to expedite our sharing of documents more efficiently.

We hope that every one of our committee members will have their own computer and access to e-mail without intervention. And we believe this is within our grasp. Ridley Kessler on posted a message on Govdoc-L on March 9, 1993 raising several questions regarding Collection development areas, document delivery systems, e-mail systems in the area, training, electronic service systems, sharing administration and development expenses and burdens. We believe SEFLIN is addressing and answering these questions.

As a final example of sharing, let me share a documents joke, for we laugh at our meetings too. If there are any representatives from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, please leave for a few moments.

Part of what we perceive of our outreach is working with a company SIRS, Inc. (Social Issues Resources Series). They have been coming to our library several times a week to go through our depository boxes and copy documents which they have placed in their print products as well as their CD-ROM products. Soon they will be coming out with a full text government documents CD. When we got the recall for the ATF document (or PETA document), we dutifully destroyed it after carefully reading it to see what was in it. Later it occurred to me that maybe our people from SIRS might have seen or copied it too. We checked. They had. But they had not yet entered it into one of their products because they had been waiting to get a date on it. They returned it to us and we destroyed it. We came close to really reaching out. But the most important thing about SEFLIN, and this is true throughout the depository community, comes from our Executive Director Elizabeth Curry who wrote in Florida Libraries on SEFLIN's committee structure, "personal networking is what makes SEFLIN work... Personal connections and communications [are] necessary to make technological networks effective."