

## **Envisioning the Future of Federal Government Information**

### **Summary of the Spring 2003 Meeting of the Depository Library Council to the Public Printer**

The spring 2003 meeting of the Depository Library Council to the Public Printer, held April 6-9, 2003 in Reno, Nevada, was something more than business as usual. The newly appointed Public Printer of the United States, the Honorable Bruce R. James, and the Superintendent of Documents, Judy Russell, asked Council to devote one and a half days of this meeting to developing a vision of what the Government Printing Office (GPO) and the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) should become, not just in the next few years, but over the next century.

As Mr. James pointed out in his opening remarks at Reno, "The nineteenth century isn't coming back to the GPO." Council agrees with Mr. James that, while there is much worth preserving in the collaboration between GPO and federal depository libraries, the partnership that now exists is based on nineteenth century models of government printing and library collections. The transition to a more electronic FDLP, much discussed during the past ten years in the library community, is nearly complete. Electronic dissemination of federal government information is becoming the rule, rather than the exception. For the public to continue to enjoy the benefits of centralized, mediated, and no-fee access to federal government information, GPO and libraries must develop new models that are appropriate for and sustainable in this century.

#### **The Visioning Process and Participants**

When Mr. James invited federal depository library directors to send representatives to the Depository Library Council's spring meeting in Reno to participate in the visioning process, approximately 300 depository librarians or their designees from every type of depository library came. Representatives from the American Association of Law Libraries, the Association of Research Libraries, and the Special, Medical, and Public Library Associations, former Depository Library Council members, and library administrators attended as well.

GPO arranged for Fynette Eaton of the National Archives and Records Administration to serve as facilitator for our discussions. Council devoted Sunday afternoon and evening to developing a series of broad statements of our vision of the future of federal government information to be used as a starting point for discussion with the Public Printer. The official opening of the meeting on Monday morning was a plenary session in which Mr. James and Council discussed and expanded on these statements. This was followed by an afternoon session with Mr. James in which attendees expressed their comments, ideas, thoughts, and concerns about the morning discussion and the visioning process. Throughout the remainder of the meeting, through discussions with GPO staff and focus groups, a coherent vision of how the library community believes the new GPO and FDLP should develop in the 21<sup>st</sup> century began to emerge. The following statements summarize that vision.

#### **Statements on the Shared Goals of GPO and Libraries**

*The Government Printing Office, in partnership with federal depository libraries, meets the needs of the public for no-fee access to official government information. Government*

information is a strategic national resource owned by the people and held in trust jointly, for the public good, by GPO and by federal depository libraries. Together, these institutions provide stewardship for government information throughout its life cycle, ensuring timely access as new information is produced and permanent public access in the future.

*The new era of partnership between GPO and federal depository libraries should retain the best aspects of the existing system while incorporating new technologies and services to provide a higher degree of dispersion of government information to the public.* During the print era, the process of printing and distributing government information placed GPO in the position of a centralized government information agency with the authority to distribute information to libraries. As we move into a future where the primacy of the printing process is diminished, it is vital that GPO maintain its centralized role in dissemination of federal government information. Other federal agencies have come to rely on GPO to fulfill the role of central disseminator of government information, and the public has come to rely on depository libraries to serve as local distributors of that information. The library community sees a continuing role for GPO as the centralized agency ultimately responsible for provision of no-fee permanent public access and the creation of metadata and bibliographic records. Partner libraries should continue to fulfill their mission of providing services to the public.

*A new more flexible FDLP must be developed to meet institutional missions of partner libraries.* Because some libraries consider ownership of digital content vital while others only want to manage it, a flexible system of GPO partnership with libraries should provide for the needs of both types of institutions. A variety of partner libraries could provide a multitude of entry points, ensuring the public's ability to access no-fee federal information.

*GPO should become an aggregator for federal information.* GPO's role in information dissemination should include use of state-of-the-art technology to harvest and manage federal information, an active role in working with agencies to develop widely usable information products, and cooperation with both partner libraries and private information providers in the creation of databases and other products. This aggregator role is essential to ensuring that federal information is widely accessible to the public. GPO should serve as a driver of new information technologies for its partner libraries, whose role is to use their knowledge of public, academic, and research users of government information to assist with the development and use of government aggregators.

*Partner libraries should become facilitators in the federal information dissemination process rather than repositories of printed government publications.* Through the FDLP, libraries should participate in decisions that affect the federal information life cycle, from development of valued-added products to provision of permanent public access. Key aspects of this joint venture entail collection, description, and no-fee permanent public access to federal information in all formats. Libraries can assist GPO in its mission by helping to meet the information needs of underserved and disadvantaged members of the public, including those facing technological, economic, cultural, and physical challenges. Libraries also can help to meet the needs of specialized user communities, such as scholars, scientists, and public advocates.

*The traditional library role of facilitator to no-fee public access to federal information remains key.* No-fee library services improve the public's utilization of federal information resources and provide agencies with local responders to information requests. The GPO-library partnership should be broadened to include other agencies, thereby improving

the products and service that the FDLP has to offer. Because the costs of providing access to this strategic national resource cannot be borne by nonprofit libraries alone, government agencies should assist them by providing no-fee access to information products for GPO's partner libraries.

## **Changes Needed to Bridge the Gap between Present and Future**

### ***From GPO:***

- *GPO should expand its partnerships with the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, and other federal agencies that can help it achieve its goals in the centralized management of federal government information.* GPO is uniquely positioned to provide public access to federal information, but many other agencies with related missions play key roles in the life cycle of government information and should partner with GPO to the benefit of both government efficiency and public access.
- *GPO should explore information product development that is focused on value-added services.* Federal information is notoriously complex and difficult to use, and technological advances have given government agencies the ability to make vast amounts of information available that can require knowledge of not just government processes, but statistical analysis, geographic information systems and other advanced methods of information manipulation. GPO should be encouraged to develop value-added information products in order to address these issues. In addition, GPO should make its information resources available to commercial aggregators to provide greater value-added access to government information to all libraries, depository and non-depository, that wish to pay for those services.
- *GPO should provide services for varied communities of users.* GPO should recognize that there are different types of partner libraries whose needs vary according to their user communities. In order to help librarians provide appropriate services for diverse groups, GPO must be aware of varying levels of user needs.
- *GPO should focus on marketing and training in the use of government information services.* GPO increasingly provides training in online government information services, particularly in its role as a driver of new technologies for libraries. This is a role that GPO should continue and expand.

### ***From partner libraries:***

- *Libraries must act as service providers rather than warehouse.* The old depository model, which sought to distribute copies of most government printing to libraries around the nation, does not necessarily work in the electronic age. The emphasis in many libraries has shifted from building collections, which may or may not be used, to providing information to users in a timely fashion. With an increasing number of government information titles being disseminated in electronic-only formats, superior service rather than volume counts will become the distinguishing hallmark of GPO's partner libraries.
- *The role of regional federal depository libraries should be reexamined.* Not all states have regional libraries within their boundaries, and the economic realities of state funding mean that some areas are better served by regional libraries than others.

New ways of supporting FDLP libraries should be explored that are tailored to meet local needs and economic realities.

- *Libraries, in their role as facilitators between government agencies and the public, should share their knowledge about providing information services with GPO and other agencies.* As institutions, libraries make it a priority to understand their user communities and to provide effective information services for those communities. Libraries should share their expertise by working with government agencies in order to improve the usefulness and accessibility of information products and services.

### **Responses to the Visioning Process**

Despite the many points of consensus reached during the visioning process, both Council members and attendees of the Reno meeting expressed concern that the current FDLP's mission and benefits not be lost in a rush to implement 21<sup>st</sup> century models. Council wishes to clarify the following principles as GPO moves forward in the planning process:

- *Libraries are partners, not customers, of GPO in the dissemination of federal government information.* While Council recognizes and applauds GPO's efforts to modernize its working relationship with the federal government agencies it serves, the business model cannot be extended to federal depository libraries. As nonprofit institutions dedicated to facilitating the public's access to no-fee information, libraries are and should continue to be regarded as partners of GPO.
- *Libraries must have no-fee access to federal government information.* In order for libraries to fulfill their mission of providing no-fee access to the public, GPO must continue to provide partner libraries with no-fee access to federal government information, including value-added products developed in partnership with the private sector.
- *Authentication, not official publication, should define the universe of federal government information available to the public.* As GPO develops and expands its technical capabilities, public access should be expanded to encompass not just official publications, but all authoritative and authenticated federal government information within the scope of the FDLP.
- *Current regulations governing the FDLP should be changed only in consultation with participating libraries.* For libraries, the costs and benefits of federal depository status are a careful balance. The impact of any regulatory changes to the FDLP should be thoroughly reviewed by the library community.

### **What Happens Next? The Visioning Process Continues**

During the Reno meeting, Mr. James stated that GPO is engaged in a three-year planning process. The current year is devoted to gathering information for the visioning process. The second year will be spent developing a model based on the vision of the future that emerges from the information gathering process. In the third year, GPO plans to implement that model.

The results of the discussions that occurred during the Reno meeting will be condensed and reviewed by Council, GPO staff, the depository community, and other stakeholders in

federal government information dissemination and access. These notes will be widely distributed throughout the depository and library communities and will be made available at the Depository Library Council web site [[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/fdlp/council/index.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/council/index.html)] on GPO Access [<http://www.gpoaccess.gov>]. Superintendent of Documents Judy Russell is holding a series of conference calls with Council, regional depository librarians, and other groups from the library community during the summer. GPO plans to present preliminary findings from its information gathering activities at the next Depository Library Conference, scheduled for October 19-22, 2003 in Arlington, VA.

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