FEFDL: Florida Electronic Federal Depository Library

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In April of 1998 the Documents Department of the University of Florida submitted a grant proposal to the State Library of Florida (LSTA) to fund the creation of the Florida Electronic Federal Depository Library. The stated need for this Web page was: *Equitable, no-fee access to Federal Government information for all citizens of the State of Florida.*

An analysis of the location of the Federal depository libraries in Florida showed that the citizens of the State of Florida do not have equal access to a depository library. Of the 67 counties in the State, less than one third have a depository library within their boundaries. One half of all the depositories in the State are located in 5 counties. Citizens in counties without depository libraries in Florida, most of them rural areas with a low income population, must travel a great distance to reach the nearest Federal depository library, pay for a long distance phone call, or depend on interlibrary loan from their local library.

An examination of the widely varying percentages of available Federal publications selected by depository libraries in Florida points out additional inequities in access to Federal information. Citizens of Putnam County have access to only 8% of the Federal publications distributed by the Government Printing Office. Citizens of Alachua County and Leon County, on the other hand, have close to 100% of the information readily available.

While the Federal Depository Library Program was created to ensure equal access to Federal information, the reality for the citizens of the State of Florida is quite different. Access varies according to proximity to a depository library and the completeness of the depository library's holdings. An additional factor impacting equality is the migration of Federal publications to the Internet. The lack of a statutory obligation to make this information available to depository libraries has created an untenable situation. Library staff and users are dependent on unsatisfactory search engines, which return thousands of hits and databases such as GPO Access, which have only a portion of available Federal information.

FEFDL (Florida Electronic Federal Depository Library) was the proposed solution. This free,

one-stop Web interface will provide:

- Access to 100% of the Federal publications distributed to depository libraries

- Single source of links to thousands of Federal Web sites

- Easy to use subject index

- Search capability

- Clickable map of Florida to find nearest Federal depository library along with a listing of county libraries with electronic contacts (e-mail and Web pages) and information about school districts and county government

- Interactive electronic services such as interlibrary loan, reference, and duplication requests

- Federal statistical data for the State of Florida in GIS format

The primary rationale used in the grant proposal came from the State Library's long-range plan ACCESS FOR ALL which states: "Ninety-five percent of public library outlets will have direct digital public access with full graphical interface to the Internet/World Wide Web by 1999." FEFDL would provide access to Federal information in 95% of the libraries in Florida.

The site would have a link to the University of Florida's online catalog, which has bibliographic records for 10% of the documents distributed to depository libraries since 1976. A patron will be able to initiate a request for the material directly via e-mail or use the holdings information for other depository libraries in the State to find a closer location. The site will also provide a link to GPO's sales program, enabling citizens to order material online.

The proposal goes on to state that Federal information migrating to the Internet is not cataloged and libraries can no longer depend on traditional access points. FEFDL is described as an attempt to establish bibliographic control of this electronic material for the entire state. The effort is likened to the development of OCLC, a cooperative cataloging project established to prevent duplication of effort. This site will hopefully prevent every library in the state from attempting to create links to the same Web pages for Federal information.

The proposal went on to describe some added benefits such as publicity for the Federal Depository Library Program, the provision of geographic representations of frequently requested Florida county statistical data, and no cost, rapid communication among the 40 depositories in Florida. In reality, the depository administration benefit was one of the driving forces of this grant. This is not a convincing argument, however, for a State Library, which does not normally fund academic institutions. In fact, no one could remember exactly when the University of Florida had last had a proposal funded by the State.

Happily, the grant was funded and we are now half way to the completion date. We are not,

however, half way to completion.

Not surprisingly, things have not gone as smoothly as described in the proposal. Getting the funds transferred to the correct account was a nightmare. At one point it had been placed in another department's account but fortunately these kind people brought it to the Library's attention. Ordering the hardware has been equally as difficult. The original specs called for an NT Server but the Head of Systems in the end insisted on Linux. This was very ironic because the proposal had originally been written for a UNIX server in order to accommodate the GPO Gateway software.

The bulk of the funding was for staff. Currently two graduate students are working ten hours a week. One, a geography graduate student, is creating the county maps using ArcView. The other, a computer science graduate student, is creating the county links.

One aspect of the grant, the publicity phase, has not been addressed at all. As outlined in the proposal, this will involve a mailing to all public libraries in the state, articles in appropriate newsletters, and a detailed announcement on the Florida public library list-serv. This is, by far, the most critical component of the grant. If people don't know about our page it may as well not exist. The final task will be the mailing of a survey to all Federal depositories and public libraries in the State to determine if they have linked to FEFDL and if they have evaluative comments to share on its content. This will tell us in no uncertain terms if our efforts were worth it!

Check out our progress at: **http://depo.uflib.ufl.edu**.