

# Proceedings of the 8th Annual Federal Depository Library Conference

April 12 - 15, 1999

---

## Assessment of Electronic Government Information Products: Final Report

Forest Woody Horton, NCLIS  
Washington, DC

---

### Background

- 1996. GPO/FDLP Electronic Transition Report Recommendations
- 1997. Phase I: NAS/CSTB Review
- 1998. Phase II: Data Collection & Analysis

1999 Phase III: Long Term Evaluation

### Survey Objectives: Phase II

- Identify Medium & Format Standards Most Appropriate for Permanent Public Access
- Assess Cost-Effectiveness of Alternative Mediums and Formats
- Identify Public & Private Standards for Use Throughout Information Life Cycle

### Product Selection Guidelines

Agencies Were Asked to Select Products that Meet One or More of the Following Criteria:

1. Increasing Emphasis on Electronic Dissemination
2. Replacing Older Technologies with Newer Ones
3. Adopting Standard Formats or Mediums
4. Making Plans to Adopt Preferred Formats or Mediums
5. Exemplifying Cost-Effective Alternative Formats or Mediums
6. Exemplifying Improved Permanent Public Access, Authentication and/or Security Encryption Protection

### Agency Participation

- Twenty-Four Different Federal Entities Including Supreme Court, Several Committees

of Congress, One Regulatory Commission and Nineteen Executive Branch Agencies

- Seventy-Four Percent of Survey Forms (242 out of 328) Returned Completed

### **No Surprises or Magic Bullets**

- Findings Will Not Surprise People Aware of Long-Standing Problems of Coping With:
  1. Multiple Mediums and Product Formats
  2. Rapidly Changing Technologies
  3. Absence of Widely Agreed-On Standards
  4. Very Few Cost Effective Alternatives
- No Magic Bullets to Make Problems Go Away Overnight

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **Policy and Planning Issues**

1. Serious Weaknesses in both Government-wide and Individual Agency Electronic Publishing, Dissemination, Permanent Public Access and Information Life Cycle Management Policies And Planning
2. Responsibility for Agency Electronic Publishing Decentralized, Diffuse and Unclear. Agencies Cannot Always Easily Identify Product Managers.
3. Some Agencies Monitoring Information Needs of Users to Enhance Current Access to Electronic Products
4. Lack of Specific Planning for Future Product Development and Technological Migration
5. Lack of Planning for Web Design Approaches that Comply With Americans with Disabilities Act

### **Permanent Public Access**

6. Permanent Public Access Concept Not Well Understood. Confusion between that Concept and NARA's Permanent Records Retention Concept
7. Metadata and Role of GILS Not Well Understood. Only 27% Respondents Reported Metadata Records
8. Host Disseminators like GPO Access are Assisting Agencies to Provide Permanent Public Access

### **Ensuring Authenticity**

9. Lack of Understanding of How to Ensure Authenticity

### **Product Characteristics**

10. Most Surveyed Products in Public Domain
11. Most Prevalent Types of Mediums are the Web, Paper, CD-ROM, and Bulletin Board Systems; Most Prevalent Types of Formats are HTML, PDF, GIF, JPEG, TIFF and ASCII

12. Most Prevalent Types of Data in Surveyed Products are Textual, Numerical, and Bibliographic And Graphical

### **Standards**

13. Lack of Standardization for Using CD-ROM to Produce Products (e.g. Installation Instructions)
14. Most Prevalent Medium and Format Standards are Common Agency Practice, Not Agency-Mandated
15. Some Agencies have Guidelines or Best Practices for Presenting/Organizing Products on Web, But Full Compliance not yet Achieved
16. Some Agencies Exploring Range of Innovative Formats and Web Design Approaches

### **Next Steps**

1. WESTAT, Inc. Delivered Final Report March 30, 1999
2. NCLIS Published the Executive Summary on its Web Site  
<[www.nclis.gov/news/news.html#gpo](http://www.nclis.gov/news/news.html#gpo)>
3. GPO Published the Complete Final Report on GPO Access  
<[www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/nclisassessment/report.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/nclisassessment/report.html)>
4. GPO will Print Limited Copies. All Federal Depository Libraries will receive a copy.
5. Agency Coordinator Meeting scheduled for 9–12 noon, May 11, 1999 at Benton Foundation
6. Advisory Committee Meeting scheduled for 9-12 noon, May 20, 1999 at Benton Foundation
7. NCLIS Begins Phase III Follow-on Activity to Formulate Recommendations for Congress and President (Summer 1999)

### **Selected Questions**

The Optimal Media Mix for Government Information Products

*Question #11:* How do individuals and organizations gain access to Government information?

*Question #12:* What are the factors that affect an individual's or organization's easy access to Government information?

*Question #13:* How does the transition to primarily electronic dissemination affect access to Government information?

Information Formats and Standards

*Question #17:* What are the issues in ensuring the authenticity and integrity of Government electronic information?

Technological Aspects of Permanent Accessibility

*Question #31:* How are agency WWW pages and other on-line information managed to ensure permanent accessibility? What are agency plans?

#### Managing Access to Electronic Government Information

*Question #36:* Besides the development of format standards for information producers and the format conversion alternative, what are other ideas (with respect to formats) to simplify access to electronic Government information?

#### Costs of Electronic Information Products

*Question #43:* What are the elements and costs associated with user access to electronic Government information?

#### The Larger Policy Context

*Question #46:* Which agency(ies) should have the responsibility to ensure that Government electronic information is reasonably locatable across agencies? What alternatives are there to achieve this outcome?

*Question #47:* Which agency(ies) should have the responsibility to ensure that the appropriate set of information is maintained for permanent accessibility? What are the roles of agencies that produce information as compared to Government information intermediaries?

*Question #48:* How does the role of the Federal depository library change in the electronic environment?

*Question #49:* Based on the findings in this study, what are the potential changes in the role of private sector publishers in the electronic environment?

#### **It Would Be Helpful If:**

1. You Prioritize Your Recommendations
2. You Segment Implementation Recommendations into Three Timeframes: Short (1999), Medium (2000-2001), and Long (After 2001) (action begins and ideally is completed)
3. You Identify Key Decision/Action Agents (e.g. Congress, OMB)

#### **Contractor Contact**

Westat, Inc. A Rockville, MD, firm specializing in survey research is doing the data collection & analysis