# Ways to Share the Riches: Web-Based Resources for Selective Housing Arrangements

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Selective housing arrangements can be an effective way for law libraries and other smaller selective depositories to improve access to depository information, and simultaneously to increase the percentage of depository materials that they select.[1] By distributing depository materials for storage in other libraries, the selective depository can broaden the potential audience for Federal documents. In addition, selective housing arrangements can relieve shelving congestion in depository print and microfiche collections.

While the advantages of selective housing agreements are clear to many depositories and their patrons, such distributed storage poses considerable administrative challenges. Responsibilities of depository and housing unit personnel must be clearly outlined; documents must be distributed correctly, quickly, and in accordance with GPO's regulations; and housing units must have access to the tools for properly selecting and deselecting the documents to be housed in their facilities. Collection development challenges are among the most formidable for administrators of selective housing arrangements. Until recently, many factors contributed to the complexity of such distributed collection development efforts:

- the geographical distance between the institutions involved;
- the lack of shared catalogs between the depository and the housing units;
- the need to make collective decisions once per year about adding item numbers;
- the difficulty in providing housing units with current and accurate lists of their selections;
- and the availability of many depository selection resources only in printed format.

The University of Colorado Law Library--a 12.4% selective depository library--has encountered all of these obstacles to successful selective housing administration. The Law Library maintains a selective housing arrangement with four other libraries on the Boulder campus of the University of Colorado: the Government Publications Library, the Business

Library, the Engineering Library, and the Earth Sciences Library.

The Government Documents Library is a regional depository library, and each of these four housing libraries shares an online catalog which includes GPO depository bibliographic records from 1976 to present, provided by Marcive. This online catalog permits searching by item number as well as SuDocs number, and supports limiting by library location.

The depository personnel at the Law Library consist of the documents librarian and a serials assistant who processes and catalogs depository materials. The Law Library maintains an online catalog that is separate from the one shared by the housing units. The Law Library's catalog facilitates searching by SuDocs number, but not by item number.

In the past, administration of this housing arrangement required extensive work on the part of the Law Library's limited staff. Because the depository and the housing units did not share a catalog, because the Law Library's online catalog did not offer access by item number, and because it was difficult to maintain and distribute current lists of items stored in each housing library, housing unit personnel frequently needed to contact the Law Library staff to verify that they were supposed to receive a particular title.

Particularly in the two months preceding the depository item selection deadline, the Law Library's depository librarian and serials assistant expended great labor on managing the annual collection development process. The Law Library's duties in this process included:

- distributing multiple copies of printed lists of items stored in the housing units;
- circulating printed copies of the List of Classes;
- copying and distributing information about new depository titles and item numbers from sources such as Administrative Notes and its Technical Supplement;
- answering numerous questions about depository procedures;
- coordinating two or more meetings of personnel from all housing units;
- facilitating communication between housing units -- especially about the availability of items no longer desired by one housing unit but of possible interest to others; and
- collating five sets of printed request forms in order to proceed with adding and deleting the desired item numbers from the depository library's selection profile.

Each year the Law Library incurred very high labor costs, as well as interruptions to workflow on non-depository processing, in order to carry out item selection.

Much of the burden of housing arrangement administration stemmed from the restriction of depository collection development information to the print medium, and from the limitations of telephone communication about highly detailed depository matters. As GPO began to provide Internet access to depository administration tools, and as the libraries involved in the housing arrangement gained access to powerful microcomputer applications and electronic mail, digital resources promised to offer solutions to many of the problems of housing unit administration.

In 1997, Tim Byrne, Head of the University of Colorado Government Publications Library and regional depository librarian for the Law Library, urged the Law Library's documents personnel to offer the four housing units electronic access to item selection information. The

Law Library's documents staff then set out to convert their depository item number database from Microsoft Works to Microsoft Access.

Access was part of the Microsoft Office suite of applications loaded on most of the Law Library's personal computers, and it allowed users to convert databases easily to HTML. Access was also written in the SQL database language, which meant that Access databases could easily be transferred to the MS SQL platform for availability via the Internet.

Access allowed the Law Library to choose between two formats for offering item selection information to housing units: a searchable database, or lists presented in HTML documents. For ease of printing by the housing units, the Law Library chose the latter option. The Law Library's documents serials assistant sorted the Access item number database by location, cut and pasted Access display screens into Microsoft Word, and then saved the documents as HTML. The Law Library's documents librarian then created a Web page with links to item number lists for each of the housing units, along with a link to Item Lister at GPO.

The Law Library's documents staff soon realized that housing units could benefit from Internet access to all of the depository collection development tools available on GPO's servers. The Law Library's documents librarian then created another Web page with links to tools including MOCAT and the List of Classes, as well as current awareness services such as Administrative Notes Technical Supplement, New and Noteworthy Resources from GPO, and New Products and Services Announcements from GPO. Links also gave access to the online catalogs of the housing units and the Law Library.

Instead of juggling several printed sources sent to them by the Law Library's documents staff, housing unit personnel now could manage their own depository materials, and their own collection development process, using electronic resources organized at one location on the World Wide Web. Housing unit personnel particularly appreciated the increased autonomy that Web resources afforded them, and the freedom to schedule depository work in their own time frames.

Further, the Law Library's documents librarian encouraged all parties involved in the housing arrangement to communicate via e-mail. E-mail communication minimized the amount of paper transactions, sped the communications process, allowed accurate and easy transfer of complex data between applications, provided a long-term record of all interactions, and greatly simplified the final work of entering additions and deletions of item numbers. In addition, e-mail facilitated both one-to-one and group conversations about specific selection and administrative issues.

In the summer of 1998, the Law Library and its housing units for the first time conducted item selection using these Web resources. Results were remarkable. The Law Library's documents staff experienced greatly reduced time spent on administering item selection. This also resulted in fewer interruptions of other technical services workflows at the Law Library.

Housing unit personnel asked fewer questions of Law Library staff during preparation, since housing unit personnel could access most depository collection development information directly through the Internet. The number of group meetings held in person was reduced to

one, since all preliminary communication took place via e-mail.

The Law Library's documents staff also felt confident that housing unit personnel were employing the most current and accurate resources available, instead of printed materials that might be out of date or incomplete. Housing unit personnel reported increased satisfaction with the item selection process. This improved morale regarding participation in depository administration bodes well for the long-term continuation -- and even expansion -- of the selective housing arrangement.

Overall, the provision of Internet-based item selection and collection development resources appears to have reduced costs for all parties, and increased the satisfaction of depository and housing unit personnel with the administration of the housing arrangement. The Law Library's documents staff looks forward to learning whether this model of providing networked resources for selective housing administration produces similar results for other selective depositories.

See, for example, Selective Housing of Documents, in Federal Depository Library Manual, 15-17 (1993); and Cheryl Nyberg, Selective Housing of Federal Government Documents in Non-Depository Libraries, 71 Ill. Libr. 479 (1989).