Proceedings of the 8th Annual
Federal Depository Library Conference
April 12 - 15, 1999

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Partnerships on the Web: FDLP Partnering to Provide Access to Electronic Resources
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Good morning! When I first arrived at GPO almost two years ago, I found myself being referred to as "the new Duncan," since I followed Duncan Aldrich as expert consultant. As my time in the big red buildings has worn on, I've acquired a new moniker, "Mr. Partnership." So it's in that role that I'm thought to have a contribution here this morning.

In reality, taking Duncan's name in vain is not completely in jest here, since it was his white paper that first collected and made clear the notion that GPO is assuming responsibility for permanent access, in a way that we see as analogous to our role in continuing accessibility for paper documents distributed to depositories. We delegate the specific tasks and responsibilities to a partner, via a written agreement.

Two of the principal challenges in our commitment to providing permanent accessibility to electronic Government information products, which Duncan identified in the white paper, are the issues of the capacity required for storage of the data and the expertise required for making it available. Both of these tasks are formidable. Partnerships are a way for us to model various strategies for redefining the FDLP, taking advantage of the possibilities of the electronic environment.

To date, we've tried out several basic models for working in partnership with agencies and libraries:

- Content partnerships, in which an agreement for storage and service of specified electronic publications is struck between the agency, a library, and GPO;
- Service partnerships in which the partner produces a resource or tool of use in administering the FDLP;
- Gateways, in which partners provide useful alternative views and locally tailored interpretive information for GPO Access; and
- agency agreements in which we're experimenting with agencies on providing access directly to their information.

We can identify a number of potential benefits in these arrangements:

- Permanent public accessibility
- Assured bibliographic control
- Distributed workload
- Increased involvement of libraries
- Strengthened relationships between agencies, GPO, and libraries

The common thread, from GPO's point of view, that runs through all these arrangements, and which differentiates them from the traditional relationship between depository libraries and the FDLP, is that there is in all these cases some formalized, written agreement defining the terms and goals of the partnership. For content and service partnerships, there is a Memorandum of Understanding, signed by all participating parties, which details specific expectations by which the performance of all parties can be measured. For Gateways, a letter from the Superintendent of Documents summarizes GPO's expectations. Agency projects are formalized by an Interagency Agreement which functions much like the Memorandum of Understanding.

The other common denominator, in all our agreements to date except one, is that GPO makes no direct monetary payment to the partner.

I've spent some time considering a number of issues about how GPO can make the most of partnerships. For a time, we were looking very hard for ways to "streamline" - that is, move the formation of the partnership and the written agreement process from the "work of art" stage to more a regular process.

I've come to believe that the more important issue than that is the whole way partnerships should germinate. I've been asking lots of questions: If a library wants to be a participant, what's the best way to get it together with an agency? Is the best approach to work with agencies and actively seek library partners according to their needs? Or should we work to reduce the administrative obligations on agencies as active participants? Is the single agency/single host model the only one we should consider, or could partner libraries derive more value from a topical approach? What about partners who are interested in scanning retrospective content? And what do we at GPO do when a library approaches us with a really good idea?

All of these are questions we're pondering, and that have in many cases been brought to mind by the other folks on this panel and their projects. We're still searching for a set of models that will be as effective and inclusive as possible. Inclusivity is the key - there is probably not a single answer, no one-size-fits-all approach.

We have recently been much encouraged by a meeting with some agency Webmasters in the idea of placing a far greater responsibility on the partner and GPO to discover and capture information, and involving the agency "after the fact." The cold fact seems to be

that while there may be some interest in the idea of permanent accessibility on the part of the agencies, it's not much of a priority for them, and no large allocation of their resources is going to be given over to initiating it. This approach may lend itself to our "topical" idea, in which we feel that libraries may have an interest in being the FDLP partner site for information on whatever, and it may be all information from one agency, or from several.

One piece of my work in recent weeks has been the revision of our basic Memorandum of Understanding document. We originally thought to work from a "boilerplate" document that could be adapted for each individual situation. I'm now at work on what I'm calling a "drafting guide" that will give sample language and guidance on what content fits what situation, in a sort of "two from column A, one from column B" format. It's my hope that this guide will make the mechanics of starting partnerships a good deal easier.

So, that's the view from "the two Duncans:" where we've come from and where it might be leading us. Now Donna Koepp, who (fortunately for me) needs no introduction, will describe her recent experience in trying to create a partnership project.