

Depositories in the U.S. Commonwealths & Territories



University of Guam, The University of Guam Library.

As many know, the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) provides Government information to nearly 1,150 libraries serving the needs of people across the Nation for information by and about their Federal Government. Lesser known is the extent of the program around the globe, which spans from the Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean.

Congress first authorized the distribution of one copy of the House and Senate Journals and other Congressional documents to certain universities, historical societies, and state libraries in an act in 1813. In 1860, legislation was approved to establish a Government Printing Office. Originally, GPO's sole responsibility was printing, primarily for Congress. Distribution of documents was a chaotic and largely ad hoc process, with individual agencies, members of Congress, and Congressional committees all playing roles.

In 1895, Congress overhauled existing printing laws and created a number of new authorities for GPO. The law directs Government publications be disseminated

through three channels: deposited in designated libraries; distributed to select Government entities such as Congress, the White House, and the Library of Congress; and sold. From this law, the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) that exists today was born.

In addition to the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the U.S. also includes ten Federal depository libraries in the Commonwealths of Puerto Rico and Northern Marianas Islands; the territories of Guam, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands; and the country of Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), a sovereign nation.

Of these depositories, the oldest is in Puerto Rico at the University of Puerto Rico – Mayaguez Campus, which joined the program in 1928, and the newest is at the University of Puerto Rico Law School Library, which joined in 1991 marking the 30th anniversary of the library in the FDLP. In addition to being depository libraries, the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Biblioteca de Derecho Mons. Fremiot Torres Oliver, Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico,

Encarnacion Valdes Library, and The University of Guam, the University of Guam Library also participate in the GPO Cataloging and Record Distribution Program (CRDP).

“Given the current diversity of languages spoken in the United States, ensuring access to government information in those languages helps to educate an informed citizen,” said Jane Canfield, Coordinator of Federal Documents, Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico. “In Puerto Rico, most of the population speaks Spanish, and access to government information in Spanish is important to educate citizens about the variety of information and services provided by the Federal government. Access to information in other languages can build bridges to greater understanding and trust.”

In the Pacific, the FSM depository was designated in 1982 as a Federal Depository Library (FDL) through the College's land grant status. In 1995, the State Department designated FSM as an independent country and instructed the GPO to remove the library from the FDLP. The FSM library immediately sought to regain FDL status, though apparently the request letters were lost in transit. The issue was finally addressed in

1997, after GPO documented the library-maintained land grant status through the Compact of Free Association, which allows land grants to be designated as depositories. GPO immediately reinstated their designation.

With many of the depository libraries located on islands in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, they are often subject to natural disasters including frequent hurricanes and typhoons. Hurricane Maria had a major impact on Federal depositories in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. On January 7, 2020 Puerto Rico also had a 6.4 magnitude earthquake with damage to the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Encarnacion Valdes Library building, and the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Biblioteca de Derecho Mons. Fremiot Torres Oliver depository collection became inaccessible due to floor buckling. In the Pacific, American Samoa suffered a major typhoon just prior to a GPO staff visit, and Guam had termite concerns after a storm. Through all of the difficulties, the depository libraries have persevered and continued to help keep people informed around the globe.

“One of the really fun aspects of working with the FDLP is getting to meet with



College of Micronesia – FSM, U.S. Government Documents Depository.

library staff from all over the network and learn how GPO can support their unique situations. The libraries in the islands definitely have some unique characteristics, such as the use of Spanish in Puerto Rico or service to residents on multiple islands in the Federated States of Micronesia,” said Kathryn Bayer, GPO Outreach Librarian. Bayer had the privilege of visiting some of these libraries on behalf of GPO and was impressed to see firsthand the dedication of staff to their communities and their support of access to Federal Government information. “When I start my workday, I like to think that folks have already been actively using GPO resources in Guam, ‘Where America’s Day Begins’, on the western side of the International Date Line,” said Bayer.

The Ten Commonwealth Federal Depository Libraries:

- University of Puerto Rico, Library System
- Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Biblioteca de Derecho Mons. Fremiot Torres Oliver
- University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez Campus
- Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Encarnacion Valdes Library
- University of Puerto Rico, Law School Library
- Guam Public Library System, Nieves M. Flores Memorial Library
- University of Guam, The University of Guam Library
- Division of Libraries, Archives & Museums (U.S. Virgin Islands) Florence Williams Public Library
- University of the Virgin Islands, Ralph M. Paiewonsky Library
- College of Micronesia – FSM, U.S. Government Documents Depository



Division of Libraries, Archives & Museums (U.S. Virgin Islands) Florence Williams Public Library.



Earthquake damage from Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Encarnacion Valdes Library.