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Access to and Services for Federal Information in the Networked Environment

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The white paper, "Access to and Services for Federal Information in the Networked Environment," is an initiative of the Coalition for Networked Information. It is being developed over a year long period while I am the Visiting Program Officer at the Coalition on a half-time basis. I am also the Head of the Government Documents and Microforms Department at Georgetown University.

The Coalition for Networked Information was founded in March 1990 to help realize the promise of high performance networks and computers for the advancement of scholarship and the enrichment of intellectual productivity. The Coalition is a partnership of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), CAUSE, and Educom.

The Coalition accomplishes its objectives by focusing on key enablers and obstacles, providing assistance to, promoting communication among, and fostering partnerships with Coalition members; synthesizing progress being made on key initiatives, capturing the experience of Coalition members and others in a coherent, actionable manner; and disseminating lessons learned by those initiatives, amplifying the experience of Coalition members by informing the efforts of others.

The Coalition pursues its mission with the assistance of a task force of over two hundred institutions and organizations that provides focus and resources which are crucial to the ability of the Coalition to articulate and explore shared visions of how information management must change in the 1990s to meet the social and economic opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. Members of the Coalition Task Force include higher education institutions, publishers, network service providers, computer hardware, software, and systems companies, library networks and organizations, public and State libraries.

The basic premise of this white paper is that with the increasing use of information technologies there has been a significant change in how Federal agencies produce and disseminate information. This results in new and changing user needs and expectations which, in turn, necessitate the need for institutions that facilitate the flow of this information to rethink their responsibilities and capacities in this changing environment.

This initiative will result in a white paper that will guide higher education and others, such as State and public libraries, in the development of strategies for providing access to and services by their constituencies in the networked environment. This is **not** a policy paper. The paper will focus primarily on issues and models for collections, preservation, providing access to and services for Federal information. It will address these issues at the enterprise-wide or institutional level. It will also summarize policy and technical directions to provide a framework for understanding the issues involved.

.The primary audience for the paper will be: Institutional Leaders Service Providers/Program Managers

Other audiences will include: Associations Federal Information Producers Commercial Service Providers Policy Makers Users of Federal Information

Evidence for the paper will be gained by:

Issuing a Call for Participation Conducting a literature search Interviewing key players
Convening focus groups

Our vision is: Wide access Convenient access Timely access Long term access Ability to customize and otherwise repackage information

The outline for the paper is as follows:

OVERVIEW

This section will provide an overview of Federal information, as well as define concepts, issues, and parameters, thereby providing a framework for discussion and analysis.

The key points that will be addressed include:

The role of Federal information in a democratic society New patterns of dissemination for Federal information Changes in Federal information policy

.FOCUS OF THIS PAPER

In order to inform institutions of the challenges and opportunities for reaching the vision outlined above, this paper will examine the following areas:

Networked Information Discovery and Retrieval (NIDR)
Service Questions
Collections
Preservation
Management Questions

Networked Information Discovery and Retrieval

Issues:

Mechanisms for locating information are rudimentary and less adequate than systems for other media.

Organization and indexing is chaotic making access haphazard at this time. We will need to develop different strategies to identify, locate, and deliver Federal information.

The necessity of paying for access (which had otherwise been free) and the limiting of passwords, in some access mechanisms, has the potential of hindering access.

Solutions:

Structured document searching capabilities; sophisticated, well-developed search mechanisms to both find and use Federal information.

How is metadata represented in the networked environment?; how to manage machine to machine communication?

GILS will be the standard syntax for describing government information. It should make things coherent so others can come along and add to it.

.Service Questions

Topics to be addressed will include:

Information service

Instruction

Role of data/research centers in the manipulation of Federal data services needed by researchers and citizens

Levels and communities of users

Institutional view of services

Collections

Issues:

Who will house this information?

How does the institution decide what to make available and at what level?

Preservation

Issues:

Access for scholarly (and other types) communication in the long term.

Can institutions house this information?

How long will institutions house the information and the implications?

Management Questions

Issues:

Organizational infrastructure

Impact on staff and institution

Staffing and training

Access to the Net and issues such as broad-band width, etc.

.SCENARIOS

As an aid to thinking about the future with so many unknowns and variables, this section will formulate a wide variety of alternative scenarios. These models will address all aspects of the questions already defined including issues of funding and budget.

CONCLUSION

Summary and recommendations for:

Institutional policies and practices

Consortial or cooperative arrangements

Applicability to the flow of state, local, and global information

Further study