

**Regional Depository Libraries in the 21st Century:
Regional Depository Librarians' Perspective**

Introduction

In the wake of the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) request for a study on regional depository libraries, the regional depository community would like to take this opportunity to articulate the work that regional depository libraries and librarians do. With this joint statement, regional depository librarians are attempting to describe factors affecting service, the various resource demands on our institutions, and the ways in which we evolve to meet the needs of the public. Most importantly, regional depositories are advocates for robust government information services in a state or region.

The following sections describe some of the general trends and issues that regional depository libraries currently face. While each issue is not necessarily experienced by all regional depositories, each one factors into a large number of regional depositories' environments. Although this document is intended to be a "sense of the regional depositories" statement, it does not necessarily reflect the views of any single regional depository librarian or their administration. However, as a group regional depository librarians believe that the information environment is constantly changing, and regional depositories must have the flexibility to develop services to meet new challenges and to provide expert help to selective depositories and the general public in finding and using government information.

Collections

With the passage of the Depository Library Act of 1962 (PL 87-579) the landscape of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), managed by the U. S. Government Printing Office (GPO), was dramatically changed. The creation of a two-tiered depository system significantly affected the FDLP in two major areas: 1) the creation of regional depository libraries which accepted the responsibility of retaining all depository publications; 2) allowing newly created "selective depositories" to discard government publications with the permission of the regional depository library. Further, regional depository libraries "within the region served will provide interlibrary loan, reference service, and assistance for depository libraries in the disposal of unwanted Government publications." (44USC1912) Over the years, many regional depositories have expanded their services to selective depositories and the public to include training, site visits, in-depth consultation, and other services.

Ironically, the same space pressures felt by the 594 depositories which, in 1962, could not discard any "unwanted Government publications" are now forcing the FDLP to realistically evaluate how many "complete" depository collections are necessary. Importantly, Congress recognized the need to ensure access to government information by creating regional depositories which were charged with retaining all depository materials. At that time slow delivery methods, no scanning or digital delivery technology, poor interlibrary loan turn-around times, lack of bibliographic control for federal materials and similar issues argued for the presence of a full regional depository in every

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state. However, this goal was never achieved. There are currently eight regional depository libraries serving more than one state/territory.

Nevertheless, to ensure that every U.S. citizen had easy, convenient access to government information in 1962 meant that Congress set a goal to establish at least one regional "complete" collection in each state. In 2008 this same level of easy, convenient access can be guaranteed by fewer "complete" collections and smarter collaborations and delivery systems. Now, the ubiquity of federal information on the Internet, much better bibliographic control of federal publications, and improved delivery methods, both physical and digital, make it possible to deliver federal information to U.S. citizens in all parts of the country.

Regional depository librarians continue to believe in the intrinsic value of their tangible collections. Without these collections being available in multiple locations around the country, the American public would be at a significant loss to access permanent, authentic government information in a timely manner. As has been shown in reports by the GPO and confirmed by depository librarians in the field, not all government information is available online, especially historical material. Even government information that is available online is not always presented in a usable form. No one argues the valid need for multiple "complete" depository collections, but new trends of information access, remote delivery, and library use argue for allowing GPO and regional depositories some flexibility in the placement of collections in order to respond to space constraints for all library materials.

While the tangible collections in regional depositories do provide access to government information, there are still issues associated with their access and preservation. One key to using these collections is providing the same level of bibliographic access as the library's other collections. Most regional depository libraries lack complete online catalog access to older (pre-1976) federal publications. The lack of a complete inventory and description of tangible depository collections creates an enormous gap in access which affects all regional depositories' ability to provide reference assistance to the user community. This is one of several places where the expertise of the regional depository staff ensures that this less accessible information is, indeed, found. In addition, many regional depositories house materials that are over 100 years old, and in some cases over 150 years old. There are preservation issues that can be readily identified: acidic paper, general wear and tear from decades of use, lack of archival-level temperature and humidity controls, and degrading microfiche formats. Given the scope of the issue (a regional depository collection can be over one million pieces), it is nearly impossible to successfully preserve all items in 52 legacy collections, and a consortial approach to preservation will be essential to assure sufficient resources are available to permanently preserve government information.

Though acquisition of new tangible publications has slowed for depository libraries, regional depositories continue their work to build complete collections. However, it cannot be assumed that any of the 52 regional depository collections currently existing nationally are complete. Regional depository libraries suffer losses through years of use, theft, and catastrophic events such as fire, flood or weather events. Obtaining replacement or extra copies of publications from selective depositories' discard lists is an important part of a regional depository's mission. The legacy print collections at multiple regional depositories facilitate the recovery of disaster-affected libraries, either through providing extra copies, creating digital surrogates, or filling ILL requests.

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Regionals also collect publications generated by federal agencies at the local or regional levels which escape inclusion into the FDLP. By gathering these publications, regional depository libraries provide government information that may have previously been unavailable to users residing outside of that region. Though information dissemination is changing, regional depository collections are dynamic, distinctive, and important. The current wording in Title 44, Chapter 19, reflects an outdated picture of the government information landscape, and lacks the flexibility needed for management of tangible depository collections in a fast-changing environment.

Staffing and service to selective depositories

Tangible collections, digital technology, education, training, promotion and service to selective depositories are all integral aspects of being a regional depository. The backbone on which all of these initiatives rely is the regional depository staff. As libraries' goals and missions have changed based on the needs of their populations, libraries have re-allocated staff and revised or created new job descriptions. Where a regional depository library may have had a separate department staffed by multiple individuals whose positions were solely dedicated to government information, many regional depositories have now merged their operations with other library units which have staff members with a broader range of public and technical service responsibilities. Past staffing levels were based on collecting and maintaining a tangible collection and providing specialized reference service. As the number of items received in tangible form has dropped and reference questions have become fewer, yet more complex, library administrators have typically chosen to reduce the number of staff devoted to depository operations.

While staffing levels shrink, regional depository libraries are still required to build and preserve a complete tangible collection for the state/region; maintain knowledge of tangible and digital collections to provide necessary reference service; provide training and education opportunities for their institutions, selectives, and the public on government information in all formats; and provide leadership within their state/region regarding government information.

Service to selective depository libraries was a primary goal of the establishment of regional depository libraries. Providing reference service, collection sharing through interlibrary loan, and the responsibility to serve as the region's comprehensive archive for depository materials are functions explicit in the law. Of these requirements, reference service and ILL have always reached across state boundaries, but with digital distribution of depository material and virtual reference services firmly established, boundaries of these services no longer recognize physical geographic limitations.

As greater numbers of selective depository libraries begin to rely on substituting digital products for tangible titles, selective depositories' collections are being heavily weeded of paper publications resulting in an increased number of withdrawal lists. Regional depository services require sufficient staffing for records management, searching, and responding to discard requests. With the choice to rely on electronic resources, selective depository libraries have reduced their selection rate of items or, in many instances, have withdrawn from the FDLP entirely. The impact on the regional depository is apparent: space is consumed by tangible copies that have been added in order to serve as the state's sole archival library; preservation activities and costs increase to care for aging legacy collections; and ILL requests increase in order to deliver relinquished content to former selective depositories.

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Staff downsizing, varying levels of experience or engagement, financial limitations, and inconsistent training support affect the quality of service provided by regional depository librarians. Site visits, which are advocated in order to enhance communication and develop a sense of common purpose within the depository community, are not universally possible due to large numbers of libraries within a region, distance between libraries, or lack of travel funding. One way to address these shortfalls would be to use the established network of regional depository libraries that already exists to share expertise and facilitate information sharing. This is a natural vehicle for cross-border collaboration for not only improved services, particularly training, but for other collaborative initiatives such as preservation and collection building. Developing web-based training opportunities that do not require travel time or costs is another means to improve use of depository resources in the electronic environment.

Regional depository librarians want to serve selective depositories and improve access to government information for the public. However, the number of staff in regional depository libraries will not increase in the near future. Regional depository librarians now require flexibility to shape their services and collections in ways that make the most effective use of staff time and reflect the new realities of access to government information.

Technology

The technological changes that regional depositories face in managing their collections are the same as those faced by all libraries. In the past fifteen years depository libraries have been called upon to add sufficient computer work stations for both the libraries' primary clientele and the general public. These costs are ongoing as libraries must frequently upgrade and replace hardware, software, and network infrastructure to maintain increasing information demands.

Digital access to government information has made materials available from multiple locations, and new partners are being asked to assist the public with finding and using government information. Non-depository libraries are increasingly fielding requests for assistance with government information and e-government services. Therefore, regional depository librarians may be called upon to provide more educational services to libraries and other service centers within their regions in the future. All libraries will face increased resource demands associated with digital information and increased referrals from government agencies. Additional staff time is needed for personalized assistance, more computer workstations for e-government services, and longer operating hours to facilitate access for those without sufficient access at home or work.

Many regional depository libraries participate in efforts to convert legacy government information to digital formats in order to effectively bring their collections to users. These demands will only increase, and it is likely that regional depository libraries will be called upon to provide "scan on demand" services for selective depositories and members of the general public. This can be seen as an expansion of existing ILL services, and this fits with regional depository services. However, such an expansion of service would call for more staff time for digitization activities and additional hardware such as scanners and servers for storing and accessing converted content. Digitized content will expand access for those who have robust internet access at home, work, or school, but regional depository librarians are also cognizant of the digital access problems faced by those in rural and economically-depressed areas. This is one of many reasons that regional depository librarians continue to place value on the maintenance of tangible collections.

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All libraries are dealing with the lack of proven digital preservation for born-digital materials. Born-digital materials that lack geographically distributed back-up copies are susceptible to loss and alteration for many reasons, such as data degradation and corruption, human error, political motivations, and natural disasters. Regional depository librarians understand the tremendous value of born-digital government information and want to make certain this content is available to the public for long-term use. It is possible that regional depository libraries will contribute to a distributed digital preservation program. To make this happen, depositories will need to develop the technological infrastructure, staffing and workflows necessary to facilitate ingest, storage, preservation, and migration of data. A distributed system of preservation, where a particular library may be responsible for the content of a handful of agencies, would provide the security necessary to safeguard information and place more manageable demands on these volunteer libraries.

Funding

Funding plays an integral part in all of the previously addressed issues. An examination of larger trends in regional depository library funding, and library funding in general, will highlight how these trends may affect future services. It is worth noting that all regional depository libraries are situated in public sector institutions (63% in public higher education institutions; 29% in State Library institutions; and 8% in public library institutions). Financial pressures on public sector institutions are increasing in all areas of responsibility, including basic infrastructure, health and public safety, and environmental controls. As public sector institutions, regional depository libraries are heavily affected by the budgets and priorities of their larger "hosts" (i.e., state governments, universities, municipal governments). All libraries, including regional depositories, find that they have to do more with less.

All types of libraries are facing the pressures of finite resources to carry out their missions. Libraries require funding for acquiring information and for providing services to support that information, such as cataloging and metadata and the purchase of resources to provide additional intellectual access. In addition, libraries require funding for user support as well as library outreach and education, both to end users and library staff. Funding is also required for housing and preserving tangible collections of all types, and for supporting the information technology in all of these areas. Libraries must also plan for future initiatives, such as digitization and reformatting analog information into digital, accessible-anywhere collections.

In order to reallocate resources in a changing environment, libraries are increasingly integrating services into merged service points. Multiple service points, built around specialized collections, such as government information, are coming to an end in many libraries. This aggregation holds many benefits—staffing, equipment, and facilities costs can be consolidated and economies of scale may be realized. In this environment, "one stop shopping" becomes a real possibility for the user. However, such a staffing trend incurs more staff training costs for the institution as more staff who have never worked with government information are now expected to do so. It could also lead to libraries where the staff "know a little about a lot," but do not have the depth of expertise to assist with more complicated government information queries.

Space issues are perhaps one of the single biggest drivers and stresses on finite resources. Libraries must continue housing acquired materials (FDLP and other), but they also have a need to

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provide adequate user spaces. An encouraging trend in many libraries these days is that they are very popular spaces for their users. However, this popularity creates its own set of demands on space. In academic libraries, for instance, gate counts and building use are continually rising, not just for research, but because libraries provide spaces for users to work collaboratively, read email, study, and socialize. This means that libraries face two potentially competing space pressures: to house and preserve a growing volume of existing and future content and to provide more user spaces. Bearing in mind that it costs approximately \$250 per square foot to build library space, this is not an insignificant challenge. Offsite storage facilities for materials offer some efficiency in this area but still require local support and capital investment.

What does it cost to be a regional depository and how have those costs changed over time? FY1991-1992 data collected through an Association of Research Libraries (ARL) study of ARL regional depository libraries estimated average annual local expenditures in support of regional depository operations to be \$300,000. These figures include costs for staff, cataloging and processing of collections, additional databases and reference materials in support of FDLP collections, and equipment/supplies, such as computers, microform equipment, and collections maintenance supplies. However, these figures did not account for facilities costs associated with FDLP collections, e.g., the costs for building library spaces, shelving, electricity and other consumable resources.

FY2003-2004 data collected through a similar ARL study of regional depository libraries estimated \$330,000 in the same average yearly expenditures. The relatively small increase in overall expenditures may be a reflection of efforts already underway in many libraries to consolidate technical processing, service points, and public services in libraries. They may also be indicative of the decline in tangible distribution of FDLP materials and associated processing costs.

An FY2007-2008 cost study by two regional depository librarians attempted to factor in the long-term costs of housing FDLP materials as measured by existing occupied space costs. They found that a typical regional depository library spends approximately \$700,000 in yearly amortized costs for facilities to house the collections. This figure reflects what institutions have already spent in building spaces to house collections, not new construction. Regional depositories have already built collections spaces but, given current Title 44, Chapter 19, requirements for collection retention, they will need to build more. In addition, regional depository libraries will need to build more user spaces and provide services. Given finite resources, it will be a challenge to keep up with both demands adequately. User needs are paramount and these needs are changing constantly. It is becoming increasingly important to build or restructure libraries in ways that make them user friendly and supportive, thus putting more pressure on space for collections.

Conclusion

Libraries have a long history of collaborating to offer needed information and support in the face of finite resources. Our system of nationwide resource sharing known as interlibrary loan is a good example of this. All participating libraries in the FDLP are frequent users of this national collaborative library effort. Similarly, the creation of Selective-Regional tiers within the FDLP is another effort at such collaboration between libraries. This tiered system allows selective depository libraries more latitude in their retention of depository materials, but ensures future availability of federal government materials for users at regional depository libraries. Today, more

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collaboration is required for the future success of the FDLP. A revision of Title 44, Chapter 19, that will allow a more flexible approach to regional depository management is needed to ease the pressures of finite resources. The information environment has changed dramatically since 1962, and regional depository libraries need flexibility to shape their services and collections to fit the new modes of information access, to make the best use of their resources, and to best meet the government information needs of the general public.

(revised 5/19/08)