

# Modeling a Sustainable Future for the Federal Depository Library Program in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Recommended Direction

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*Note: Ithaka S+R has been commissioned by the Government Printing Office (GPO) to analyze the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and recommend a sustainable and practical model or models, consistent with its existing vision and mission, for its future. This document describes a single broad strategic Direction for the Program that builds upon the previously released sections; subject to further substantive revision and copy-editing, this document will be incorporated into the final report.*

*The Direction described in this document is meant to provide a broad strategic direction for the Program, rather than detailed models for specific restructuring of the Program, which will be provided at a later stage in the process. We welcome feedback on this and its implications for the development of new models for the Program.*

*For more project background or to provide comments, please visit <http://fdlpmodeling.net> or email the project team at [fdlp-modeling@ithaka.org](mailto:fdlp-modeling@ithaka.org). Reactions provided by February 10, 2011 will be especially helpful in the development of new models for the Program, so we will be most grateful for your immediate review. In addition, we expect that any further comments made before February 28, 2011, can be accommodated in the final report.*

## Modeling a Sustainable Future for the Federal Depository Library Program in the 21st Century: Recommended Direction

The goal of this project is to propose one or more practical and sustainable models that will support the Federal Depository Library Program in continuing to provide the American public with permanent, no-fee public access to government information in a manner consistent with its long-standing mission, vision, and values, described below. Each of these models, which will be presented in a later section, proceeds from a single broad strategic Direction for the Program. In this document, we outline the Direction that has emerged from our research findings. The models we develop will then propose several different approaches to more or less completely implement the recommended Direction. This section begins by laying out several key Assumptions, shares our recommended Functional Direction, and finally shares our recommended Structural Direction.

The Direction laid out in this document proceeds from the project's Findings and the following vision, mission, and values of the FDLP, which were laid out in the draft "Federal Depository Library Program Strategic Plan, 2009-2014"<sup>1</sup> and are not under reconsideration as part of this project:

**Vision:** The Federal Depository Library Program will provide Government information when and where it is needed in order to create an informed citizenry and an improved quality of life.

**Mission:** The mission of the Federal Depository Library Program is to provide for no-fee ready and permanent public access to Federal Government information, now and for future generations. The mission is achieved through:

- Organizing processes that enable desired information to be identified and located;
- Expert assistance rendered by trained professionals in a network of libraries;
- Collections of publications at a network of libraries; and
- Archived online information dissemination products from GPO Access, Federal agency Web sites, and partner Web sites.

**Values:**

- **Access:** No-fee access for anyone, from anywhere, to use Federal depository resources or services
- **Collections:** Tangible and online collections of official Federal information dissemination products built to support user and community needs
- **Collaboration and communication:** A strong depository library network built on transparent, open communication and collaboration between and among depository libraries, Federal agencies, and GPO

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<sup>1</sup> Depository Library Council, "Federal Depository Library Program Strategic Plan, 2009-2014 (Draft Discussion Document, 04/17/2009)" (Government Printing Office, April 17, 2009), [http://www.fdlp.gov/component/docman/doc\\_download/37-fdlp-stratigic-plan-2009-2014-draft-3?ItemId=45](http://www.fdlp.gov/component/docman/doc_download/37-fdlp-stratigic-plan-2009-2014-draft-3?ItemId=45).

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- Expertise and professionalism: Dedicated and knowledgeable staff in depository libraries; dedicated to the mission of the FDLP, to increasing their knowledge, and to their profession
- Service: Enrich one's library experience by providing quality user-centric services; strong commitment to service
- Stewardship: Good stewards of the resources entrusted to us by the American people

### Assumptions

Our remit in this project is exclusively to develop sustainable and practical models for how the network of libraries that makes up the FDLP can best support its historic vision, mission, and values; it is not within the scope of this project to recommend activities by GPO or elsewhere that support the success of the Program but are not achieved via the network of libraries. As such, we feel it necessary to lay out two key assumptions about activities that will take place within the FDLP context but not necessarily be led formally by the network of libraries. While we earnestly believe both of these assumptions will bear themselves out, it is neither within the scope of this project to make a thorough assessment of progress and risks on them nor to issue recommendations to support them. These assumptions do, however, provide critical context for our recommendations, and if the developing environment radically deviates from these assumptions, reconsideration of our Direction and associated model may be required.

First: This project assumes that GPO will continue to provide an increasingly high-quality centralized and freely available access point for FDLP materials. Although many other digital access points tailored to the needs of specific user communities may exist – including digital collections developed by individual libraries and networks of them, added-value services by vendors, and more – we believe that this GPO-provided centralized and freely available system will support the needs of a wide range of users for digital FDLP materials. This centralized access point will support the development of these alternative access points by making materials available for easy reuse and integration by non-GPO service providers. And although users will have access to FDLP materials via a robust spectrum of alternative access points that may provide tailored services for particular user communities, this GPO-provided service will provide a baseline level of no-fee access to seekers of government information.

Second: This project also assumes that over time, the historic collection of FDLP materials will be comprehensively (or very nearly so) digitized, but that this digitization will require patience and coordination. We assume that digitization will continue to develop through a variety of GPO partnership agreements and independent initiatives but will not (unfortunately) be conducted through a single comprehensive program. Also, although there may be many access points to digitized historic FDLP materials, we assume that all these materials will also be made freely available via GPO's centralized access point as described above, through procedures that are out of scope of this project but whose development should be guided by the library community. Consequently, we believe that the Program's structure must accommodate a medium-term or even lengthy transitional phase in which tangible materials remain the only means of access to some content. But where digital versions of FDLP materials

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are available, however they are formally integrated into the Program, we assume that many (although not all) users will prefer digital access over tangible access.

While we do not believe either of these assumptions to be especially controversial, we feel it is important to state them transparently as they drive certain aspects of the Direction.

### Functional Direction

The Functional Direction for the Program remains fundamentally defined by the Program's long-standing vision, mission, and values; as stated in the Program's mission, for example, the Program exists "to provide for no-fee ready and permanent public access to Federal Government information, now and for future generations." But in an increasingly electronic environment, the specifics of how this mission is performed must evolve in order to ensure that materials are accessible and preserved in formats appropriate for users and that support services to help users discover, interpret, and make effective use of government information keep pace with changing user needs. This Functional Direction describes the objectives that must be addressed by the Program to accomplish this long-standing mission, broken down into three major categories: "access to and preservation of tangible collections," "access to and preservation of digital collections," and "access to government information support services." Although described as independent categories, we have sought to reflect the essential points of interconnection between these classes of activities in the below descriptions.

### Access to and preservation of tangible collections

Tangible collections of FDLP materials have long been at the heart of the Program, and will remain critical to the Program for some time to come, playing essential roles in supporting both the *access* to and the *permanence* of FDLP materials:

- Many FDLP materials are currently *only* available in tangible form; although over time, access needs for these materials will increasingly be met by digitized versions, we anticipate a lengthy transitional period during which many materials will only be accessible in tangible form. The FDLP must continue to provide sufficient levels of access to tangible versions of materials not yet available digitally to effectively support user needs for this content.
- Even once materials are available digitally, tangible versions of FDLP materials will remain essential for long-term preservation purposes, as a key element of a broader strategy to support *permanent* public access to government information. Tangible formats have long been trusted for preservation and integrity purposes, and regardless of whether materials are also available in born-digital or digitized format, at least some number of tangible copies are needed to ensure preservation and integrity priorities.
- Although the need for access to tangible versions is anticipated to decline with digitization and digital availability, it will not disappear entirely. Some user communities will remain best served by tangible versions of government information; libraries must have the flexibility to continue to maintain tangible materials to satisfy the needs of their constituents, and a baseline level of tangible materials must be retained across the Program to support ongoing access needs for tangible versions.

## Access to and preservation of digital collections

The overwhelming majority of current FDLP content is available in born-digital form, and an increasing share of originally tangible-only collections is being digitized by Depository Libraries and their partners and made publicly available. Ideally all FDLP collections in digital form (whether born-digital or digitized) should be made centrally available by GPO for permanent public access, including direct end-user access and bulk downloads by participating libraries. But even in a context of a baseline level of central access provided by GPO, essential roles remain for libraries in providing and supporting permanent, no-fee public access to government information:

- Although GPO's efforts to authenticate digital and digitized FDLP materials provide an important level of assurance of the integrity of these materials, there remains an essential role for the network of libraries in defending government information against intentional and accidental changes over time. To support their long-term integrity, multiple copies of born-digital and digitized FDLP materials must be hosted independently of GPO.
- Due to the critical importance of these materials, relying exclusively on GPO (or any government agency, for that matter) to preserve digital FDLP materials constitutes an unacceptable risk to the long-term survival of these materials. Multiple copies of digital FDLP materials must also be *preserved* independently of GPO according to community best practices, to provide critical assurance of their long-term availability to address user needs.
- To support libraries' development of outstanding services, participating libraries should be empowered to build and curate digital collections of FDLP materials, and should be encouraged to find opportunities to develop unique services that take advantage of the synergistic relationship between carefully curated collections and library expertise.

## Access to government information support services

Although digital availability will dramatically broaden the potential reach of FDLP materials, information support services will remain essential in ensuring the American public can effectively discover, interpret, and work with these materials. There exist opportunities to increase access to these services, and thus support not just theoretical access to government information but its productive use:

- The reach of services to support the American public in discovering and using government information must be increased, by increasing awareness of and skills to support the use of government information among a significantly broader set of libraries that will provide improved front-line service to patrons who may not even be aware that government information is relevant to their questions. More libraries nationwide should be equipped to provide at least basic assistance with government information to their patrons, through increased training and outreach that develops basic government information skills among non-specialist librarians.
- In addition to supporting the development of skills among non-specialist librarians, continuing education offerings must be made broadly available to assist libraries in building and maintaining government information expertise, including the development of new skills that help them to most effectively provide service in an increasingly digital environment.

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- The development of a variety of tools and remote services to support online users by libraries should be catalyzed. Unique services, often tailored towards supporting particular user communities or specific types of inquiry and developed by individual libraries or groups of libraries working together, will help users to discover, interpret, and make effective use of government information, as well as providing opportunities for libraries to define valuable new roles for themselves in an increasingly digital environment.

### Structural Direction

The sustainable achievement of these goals will depend on a Program structure that provides appropriate incentives for libraries to contribute towards these priorities and coordinates their activities to in the aggregate accomplish them. Across the network of libraries that makes up the FDLP, there remains substantial enthusiasm for the Program, but the specific interests of participants have grown substantially increasingly diverse. The Program's structure must flexibly accommodate a growing range of interests among its participants, revitalizing participation in the Program by enabling libraries to define prospective roles that are closely aligned with their own institutional priorities, while coming together to provide, individually and collectively, permanent access to the American public. Consequently, coordination will be necessary to ensure that these activities aggregate together to sustainably accomplish Program priorities.

- To be sustainable, the network of libraries should take advantage of the great positive interest in government information that can be found across American libraries, encouraging libraries to view their participation in the Program as in alignment with their own local priorities and the priorities of their parent organization, whether that is a local or state government, an academic institution, etc. Libraries should be empowered to take responsibility for those roles within the Program that best suit them.
- To do so most effectively, the Program must define a broader range of roles that will align with the diverse spectrum of institutional interests that motivate participation in the Program. Given the complexity of the Program and the diversity of its participating libraries, more granular roles are needed than the currently existing Selective and Regional roles; unbundling these roles will allow libraries to focus on those activities that best fit with their own local priorities. New roles must also be defined to incorporate system priorities that are not currently formalized, including print preservation and conservation; digital collecting and preservation; and various types of service provision.
- Overall, libraries should be encouraged to realign their roles to suit their individual mission and incentives. This would include gracefully giving up roles they no longer wish to serve while feeling encouraged to embrace new roles that have emerged. All libraries should have a set of roles and responsibilities within the Program that both their directors and documents coordinators are comfortable with and view as in alignment with institutional priorities.
- In addition, given that certain library roles are increasingly performed collaboratively, libraries should be empowered to take responsibility collectively, and not only individually, for formal roles and responsibilities where aggregate demand supports such approaches.

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- Although in many cases intrinsic incentives and mission alignment will exist at sufficient levels across the Program to motivate enough library participation to collectively achieve the Functional Direction outlined above, there may be some Program priorities that will not be sufficiently addressed based solely on the library community's intrinsic interests. Where critical Program priorities would otherwise be in jeopardy, further benefits of some kind must be coordinated or provided to encourage sufficient levels of participation.

### **Conclusion**

We believe that the Functional and Structural Direction outlined above proceeds logically from this project's Findings, outlines a practical and sustainable path forward for the Program, and supports the continuing achievement of the Program's vision, mission, and values in an increasingly digital environment. In a subsequent deliverable, building on community feedback to this Direction, we will describe several models for different approaches to the implementation of this Direction in varying degrees of completeness.