

# National Plan for Access to U.S. Government Information



*A Framework for a User-centric Service Approach  
To Permanent Public Access*

U.S. Government Publishing Office

February 2016



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*A Framework for a User-centric Service Approach to Permanent  
Public Access*

Office of the Superintendent of Documents  
U.S. Government Publishing Office  
Washington, DC 20401

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## MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT OF DOCUMENTS

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It was an honor to come to work at the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO). Since library school, I've had the same deep commitment to permanent public access that many of you have. I came to GPO in early 2011, and many of you may remember that at the time GPO stood for the U.S. Government Printing Office. The agency's name change is but one indicator of the transformation GPO is making from a print-centric to a content-centric operation.

The Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and the Cataloging and Indexing Program (C&I), both public information programs of the Superintendent of Documents, have been focused on digital content for more than twenty years now. Yet keeping pace with technological innovations and meeting the ever-changing diverse information needs of Congress, Federal agencies, depository libraries, and the American public are challenges we face daily.

I am pleased to share *The National Plan for Access to U.S. Government Information* with the Federal depository libraries, the broader library community, and the public at large. This is the framework for moving forward in the digital age, meeting our challenges, and providing a user-centric approach to permanent public access to the Federal Government's information.

While there were many drivers for this change, the results of the 2012 FDLP Forecast Study were a primary force. GPO learned from depository libraries their vision of the FDLP of the future and how we could better support them in providing better services and access to Government information for the communities they serve. I want to thank all of you for your thoughtful and insightful responses. Many will recognize much of what is contained in this framework document as GPO staff has openly shared findings, ideas, desired outcomes, and actions for the National Plan resulting from the Forecast Study and other subsequent initiatives.

Some outcomes are achievable in the near-term, while others will be achieved over the long-term. Working together, I am confident we will realize our vision of "providing Government information when and where it is needed." We have much to accomplish before our vision is attained. It is a vision on which we all agree and it will serve future generations of Government information users well.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Alice Baish". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MARY ALICE BAISH  
Superintendent of Documents

# INTRODUCTION

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The **National Plan for Access to U.S. Government Information** is a framework document that sets and supports the strategic direction of the Library Services and Content Management (LSCM) business unit of the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO). The National Plan provides desired outcomes, and actions to undertake to achieve them. And though the actions may be modified or changed over time, they all will help to fulfill the statutory mandates of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and the Cataloging and Indexing Program (C&I), while clearing a path for the digital age, and achieving our vision: “To provide Government information when and where it is needed.” This is *Keeping America Informed* in the digital age and ensuring an informed citizenry and an improved quality of life for them.

Since 1861 users have looked to the U.S. Government Printing Office, now the Government Publishing Office, as a trusted source for Federal Government information. The presence of the words “United States Government Publishing Office” on a printed publication assures the public that the content expresses information as it was approved by a government author. This assurance is strengthened by trust relationships established between all parties in the creation, production, and publication process. In the traditional printing environment, a printing specialist from Congress, a Federal agency, or a U.S. Court contacts a GPO customer service specialist to submit a publication to be printed. The resulting printed Government publication is made available to the public through the FDLP, a system of almost 1,160 libraries in the United States and territories, or from GPO’s online bookstore.

The digital age, while making access to information easier, it is not without challenges. We want the users of digital Government information to be as confident that the content they are using is just as official, authentic, and complete as the print products. None of this matters, however, if people cannot discover or find the information they need – print or digital. It’s all about access. It’s all about findability. And it’s all about meeting user needs.

A cornerstone of every democratic society is the public's right of access to its Government’s information. This, and the other Principles of Government Information, guide our work in *Keeping America Informed*:

- ◆ The public has the right of access to Government information.
- ◆ Government has the obligation to disseminate and provide broad public access to its information.
- ◆ Government has an obligation to guarantee the authenticity and integrity of its information.
- ◆ Government has an obligation to preserve its information.
- ◆ Government information created or compiled by government employees or at government expense should remain in the public domain.

The National Plan outcomes and actions are conveyed by the Principle they support.

## DRIVERS OF CHANGE

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### FDLP Forecast Study

The [Federal Depository Library Program Forecast Study](#) was conducted by GPO in collaboration with Federal depository libraries. The data-gathering effort was launched in February 2012 with a goal of obtaining results that would allow GPO to:

- ◆ Understand pressing issues, goals, and viewpoints of depositories from all library types.
- ◆ Document the needs, vision, and environment in which individual depositories exist at the state level.
- ◆ Document the goals and initiatives of states and multi-state Federal depository regions.
- ◆ Obtain a clear vision, based on consensus, about the FDLP's future direction.

The response rate was high with 67% (802) of the depository libraries and 84% of states completing and submitting questionnaires by the November 30, 2012 deadline. Both the library and state forecast responses provided a confidence level of 95%. Throughout the study process measures were taken to ensure the integrity of the data, the reliability of the results, and the validity of the findings – ensuring a solid foundation for any inferences made from the data.

Major findings from the Forecast Study were for GPO to:

- ◆ Increase access to online Government information.
- ◆ Provide improved and easy to use tools and services for discovery and findability of Government information.
- ◆ Digitize the historical collection of Government publications or coordinate a national digitization effort to do so.
- ◆ Deliver more and enhanced cataloging.
- ◆ Provide more educational opportunities.
- ◆ Allow more flexibility and collaboration among depository libraries for collection management than the statutory authority for the FDLP currently permits.
- ◆ Preserve the tangible and digital collections for future generations.

### National Academy of Public Administration Report

[Rebooting the Government Printing Office: Keeping America Informed in the Digital Age](#) was released in January 2013 after a 10-month study of the, then, Government Printing Office. The study was undertaken by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) at the request of Congress. The study panel concluded that, *“In the digital age, GPO’s core mission of authenticating, preserving, and distributing federal information remains critically important to American democracy.”* To position GPO and the Federal Government for the digital age, recommendations were made that included:

- ◆ To enable the federal government to carry out its role of providing information to its citizens, Congress should establish a collaborative interagency process, and designate a lead agency or interagency organization, to develop and implement a government-wide strategy for managing the lifecycle of digital government information.
- ◆ To safeguard the historical documents of our democracy for future generations, GPO should work with depository libraries and other library groups to develop a comprehensive plan for preserving the print collection of government documents. This plan should include cataloging, digitizing, and preserving tangible copies of government publications, a timeline for completion, and options for supporting the effort financially, as well as a process for ingesting digitized copies into the Federal Digital System. Congress should appropriate funds for the purpose of cataloging, digitizing, and preserving the government collection.

### External Influences

- ◆ Technological change and innovation
- ◆ Federal agencies publishing increasingly online
- ◆ Changing business model of libraries – Focus moving away from collections to providing access and services that facilitate access
- ◆ Information seeking behavior in the digital age

## PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

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For the June 1996 report to Congress, *Study to Identify Measures Necessary for a Successful Transition to a More Electronic Federal Depository Library Program As Required by Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, 1996 Public Law 104-53*<sup>1</sup>, the GPO brought together representatives from a variety of organizations who shared an interest in the continued dissemination of, and access to, Federal Government information. Despite differing viewpoints, agendas and responsibilities, study participants did reach consensus on several basic principles for Federal Government information.

Over the years, these principles have been expressed by a wide variety of organizations many times and in many different ways. Below are the Principles of Government Information that GPO adopted in 1996. They are just as valid today as they were almost 20 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> *Study to Identify Measures Necessary for a Successful Transition to a More Electronic Federal Depository Library Program* can be found online at: <http://www.fdlp.gov/file-repository/about-the-fdlp/reports/1768-report-to-the-congress-study-to-identify-measures-necessary-for-a-successful-transition-to-a-more-e?path=about-the-fdlp/reports>



## **PRINCIPLE 1: THE PUBLIC HAS THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION**

Open and uninhibited access to Government information ensures that the public has the opportunity to monitor and participate in the full range of Government activities. Access to Government information, except where restricted by law, is a basic right of every American citizen. It should not be format dependent, nor should it be compromised by the imposition of excessive fees, time delays, or copyright like restrictions imposed by the Government in a manner that hinders timely access, use, or re-dissemination.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: GOVERNMENT HAS THE OBLIGATION TO DISSEMINATE AND PROVIDE BROAD PUBLIC ACCESS TO ITS INFORMATION**

The Government should not only allow public participation in the democratic process by providing access to its information, but should encourage public participation and use of Government information through proactive dissemination efforts that ensure timely and equitable public access. This responsibility entails providing public access to Government information in such a way that even those citizens without special equipment or training can find, access, and use it. This principle covers access to both Government information products and the underlying data from which they are created.

## **PRINCIPLE 3: GOVERNMENT HAS AN OBLIGATION TO GUARANTEE THE AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY OF ITS INFORMATION**

Government information is used in many ways, some of which affect the continued health and livelihood of the American public. Any corruption of Government information poses a serious and real threat to the common good. Therefore the Government has an obligation to protect its citizens by guaranteeing, to the maximum extent possible, the authenticity and integrity of its information. Due to the ease in which it currently is possible to manipulate electronic source files, the obligation to provide long range assurances of authenticity are increasingly important.

## **PRINCIPLE 4: GOVERNMENT HAS AN OBLIGATION TO PRESERVE ITS INFORMATION**

Government information is part of our national heritage. It documents the fundamental rights of American citizens, the actions of Federal officials in all three branches of our Government, and the characteristics of our national experience. Therefore, it is a Government obligation to guarantee the preservation of Government information for future generations of Americans. Public access to Government information in a meaningful format must be maintained in perpetuity to ensure the continued accountability of the Government to its present and future citizens.

## **PRINCIPLE 5: GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CREATED OR COMPILED BY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES OR AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE SHOULD REMAIN IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Except where exempt by law, Government information created or compiled at Government expense or by Government employees as part of their official duties, regardless of the format

in which it is published, is in the public domain. The Government is precluded by 17 U.S.C. Chapter 1 from holding copyright protection for its published and/or unpublished works. This prohibition on copyright should not be undermined by the Government's imposition of copyright like restrictions on the use or reuse of Government information, such as the imposition of royalties, establishment of exclusive distribution arrangements, or denying timely access to underlying data.

## ASSUMPTIONS

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- ◆ The principles of Government information adopted by GPO in 1996 remain valid for the digital age.
- ◆ Government information is a national asset and library collections of tangible and digital Government content are valuable to ensuring an informed citizenry.
- ◆ The Federal Depository Library Program continues to be relevant in the digital age.
- ◆ No one library or institution can do all that is required to preserve the entire corpus of Government information.
- ◆ GPO will lead and coordinate a government-wide strategy for managing the lifecycle<sup>2</sup> of the comprehensive collection of tangible and digital Government information.
- ◆ Collaboration and partnerships with Federal depository libraries, Federal agencies, and with additional public and private sector entities are necessary to accomplish lifecycle management of tangible and digital Government information.
- ◆ Geographically dispersed collections of tangible publications and redundancy of digital files are necessary to ensure local access to Federal Government information.

## VISION AND MISSION

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### Vision

To provide Government information when and where it is needed.

### Mission

To provide readily discoverable and free public access to Federal Government information, now and for future generations.

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<sup>2</sup> Elements of information dissemination products' lifecycle include: discovery and acquisition; bibliographic control and metadata; collection care and conservation; digitization; authentication; access and dissemination; storage of tangible; and digital repository management.

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

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### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: LIFECYCLE MANAGEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION**

Establish Library Services and Content Management processes and procedures that apply lifecycle management best practices for all formats, and ensure permanent public access to Government information dissemination products in the digital age.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE OF THE FDLP**

Provide a governance process and a sustainable network structure that ensures coordination across the Federal Depository Library Program and allows the most flexible and effective management of depository libraries and their resources.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: SERVICES**

Deliver dynamic, innovative, strategic services and mechanisms to support the needs of Federal depository libraries in providing accurate Government information to the public at large in a timely manner.

## DESIRED OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

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### **PRINCIPLE 1: THE PUBLIC HAS THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION**

Federal depository libraries will meet the Government information needs of the communities they serve and become more engaged with those communities.

- ◆ Implement outcomes based assessments of depository libraries

The public at large will have tools and services that will help facilitate efficiency and ease of access to Federal Government information.

- ◆ Employ a user-centric participatory design approach to user interface and system development
- ◆ Conduct a public user survey of the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications
- ◆ Seek technological solutions toward expanding access to new user audiences

Federal depository libraries will have Government information subject matter experts on staff to assist patrons in finding and using Government publications and information products.

- ◆ Provide the depository library community with enriched continuing education opportunities through:
  - Implementation of a certificate program for depository library coordinators
  - Development of CEU opportunities for depository library staff

- Development of Federal Government information/depository library competencies
- ◆ Support Government Information Online – Ask a Librarian (GIO), a national reference service
  - Promote GIO

## **PRINCIPLE 2: GOVERNMENT HAS THE OBLIGATION TO DISSEMINATE AND PROVIDE BROAD PUBLIC ACCESS TO ITS INFORMATION**

More online official Government content will be accessible to depository libraries and the public at large.

- ◆ Transform LSCM from a print-centric operation to a content centric operation
- ◆ Expand Web harvesting activities
- ◆ Digitize the historical collection of Government publications

Depository libraries will have system tools and services that support workflow optimization.

- ◆ Conduct an ethnographic study of depository library operations
- ◆ Establish methods for monitoring library technology to ensure GPO automated services stay current
- ◆ Establish methods for continuous improvements for system services

The FDLP will have a governance process and a sustainable network structure that facilitate efficient management of operations, collections, and services.

- ◆ Implement the draft regional depository discard policy
- ◆ Allow for shared regionals across state boundaries
- ◆ Encourage collaboration, partnerships, and resource sharing among depository libraries
- ◆ Investigate the ability to have online as a format selection option for regionals, in place of paper or microfiche
- ◆ Review and revise *Legal Requirements and Program Regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program*
- ◆ Provide a new depository designation for tribal libraries
- ◆ Provide a new depository designation of affiliate access libraries for public, community college, military base libraries, and school or school system libraries

More depository libraries will provide access to digital Government information.

- ◆ Increase the number of all digital depositories in the FDLP
- ◆ Implement the Access Affiliate Libraries designation

GPO's *Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* will be a comprehensive index to the corpus of Federal Government information.

- ◆ Continue to add records for pre-1976 and current publications to the National Bibliographic Records Inventory
- ◆ Increase the number of depository libraries in the cataloging record distribution program
- ◆ Engage in record sharing opportunities
- ◆ Enter into more cataloging and metadata creation partnerships
- ◆ Explore implementation of linked data

GPO's Federal Digital System (FDsys) content will be available from more access points.

- ◆ Make the full text of FDsys content available through discovery services
- ◆ Increase the amount of born digital and converted content available through FDsys
- ◆ Create a plan and develop requirements for deposit or pushing of FDsys content to depository libraries
- ◆ Investigate opportunities and cost for a print on demand service for depository libraries

LSCM staff will have system management support for a secure and stable suite of necessary tools.

- ◆ Implement training programs for the tools
- ◆ Create a flexible technology environment

### **PRINCIPLE 3: GOVERNMENT HAS AN OBLIGATION TO GUARANTEE THE AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY OF ITS INFORMATION**

Users will be confident that the digital Government information they use is official, authentic, and complete.

- ◆ Authenticate digital content sourced from FDLs and other third parties for ingest into FDsys
- ◆ Achieve trusted digital repository certification for FDsys
- ◆ Monitor advancements in authentication of digital content and implement as appropriate

Tangible collections in Federal depository libraries will be maintained for access.

- ◆ Conduct or facilitate collection care and preservation training for Federal depository library staff

### **PRINCIPLE 4: GOVERNMENT HAS AN OBLIGATION TO PRESERVE ITS INFORMATION**

The National Collection of U.S. Government Information will be accessible to future generations.

- ◆ Implement the Federal Information Preservation Network (FIPNet)
- ◆ Develop a Preservation Program within the LSCM business unit of GPO
- ◆ Endeavor to have the preservation of Government publications and information products a national priority

- ◆ Digitize, through partnerships, the historical tangible collection of Government publications
- ◆ Maintain an inventory of preservation copies of record
- ◆ Continue to participate in the development of preservation guidelines and standards

**PRINCIPLE 5: GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CREATED OR COMPILED BY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES OR AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE SHOULD REMAIN IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Federal agencies will have more awareness of and contribute their content to the Federal Depository Library Program, the Cataloging and Indexing Program, and the Federal Information Preservation Network.

- ◆ Develop a proactive agency liaison program
- ◆ Increase the number of content partnerships with Federal agencies
- ◆ Work with agencies to identify and define their corpus of Government information
- ◆ Participate in Government-wide activities that relate to information lifecycle management

## CONCLUSION

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The National Plan for Access to U.S. Government Information framework document is guided by the GPO mission of *Keeping America Informed* and the fundamental principles of Government information necessary for a democratic society. While some of the specified outcomes are achievable in the near-term, others are long-term. This framework document is flexible, allowing for modification when necessary, enabling us to provide Government information available when and where it is needed, attaining our vision, and thus ensuring an informed citizenry and an improved quality of life.