2024

STATE OF THE FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM

GPO U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

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Introduction

Established by Congress in 1895, the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) ensures Government information is freely accessible to and preserved for the American public. The authority for the FDLP is codified in 44 U.S. Code §§ 1901–1916. The U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) and its Library Services and Content Management (LSCM) business unit work in close collaboration with a network of over 1,100 Federal depository library partners to achieve that goal.

The FDLP includes a wide variety of library types and provides public access to information and excellent customer service for the full range of our community's needs.

Every two years, GPO conducts the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries (Biennial Survey) and examines the results to evaluate trends and current issues. By regularly examining the conditions in depository libraries, the FDLP can evolve and respond to the needs of the community.

In 2021 and 2022, FDLP libraries evaluated the "new normal" as the COVID-19 pandemic persisted, but by the end of 2022, depository libraries were back to providing public access to Government information at the same rate as pre-pandemic.

FDLP libraries nationwide continue to move to a digital-first focus. In response to the ***Feasibility of a Digital Federal Depository Library Program: Report of the GPO Director's Task Force*** (2022), GPO began a phased approach for implementation of a digital FDLP. In consultation with FDLP partners, GPO is evaluating and prioritizing key activities, such as a new limited print distribution framework initiated in late 2023 that decreases the number of titles and copies available for print distribution through the FDLP.

The FDLP is changing, and partners are collaborating in new ways. The Program is moving to a balance of providing tangible copies alongside robust digital services, but the cornerstone of the FDLP remains: our commitment to providing permanent public access to all forms of U.S. Government information.

About This Report

The State of the FDLP report highlights selected data points and themes gathered both from the 2023 Biennial Survey and the outreach and special projects work done by the LSCM unit of the GPO. The report covers January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2023, and fulfills the requirement in 44 U.S. Code § 1909 for the Superintendent of Documents to report on conditions at depository libraries.

The questions and full dataset of responses for the 2023 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries and for previous Biennial Surveys are available on **FDLP.gov**.

Suggested Citation

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Copyright Notice

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Above: Superintendent of Documents Scott Matheson

New Superintendent of Documents

GPO Director Hugh Nathanial Halpern named Scott Matheson as the new Superintendent of Documents in September 2022.

Matheson has over 20 years of experience in libraries and has worked at the University of Colorado and the Lillian Goldman Law Library at Yale Law School, in addition to serving on and chairing GPO's Depository Library Council (DLC).

Matheson joined GPO in October 2022 and will now lead the FDLP in providing public access to Government information and modernizing the FDLP in cooperation with Congress and GPO's library partners.

Methodology

The questions for the 2023 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries were developed by LSCM staff in collaboration with the Depository Library Council (DLC), the advisory body to the Director of GPO and the Superintendent of Documents. The survey was open from September 27, 2023 – December 8, 2023.

Outreach to survey non-responders continued until February 2024. The final dataset of questions and responses to the 2023 Biennial Survey contains 1,045 responses, for a 94% response rate, and is available on FDLP.gov.

This report does not include an analysis of each question on the Biennial Survey, since many of the questions and issues are being analyzed and reported on in other groups or venues.

2023 Biennial Survey Respondents

Table 1. The 1,045 depository libraries that responded to the 2023 Biennial Survey represent the full range of library types in the FDLP.

Depositories by Library Type	Count of FDLs
Academic Community College (AC)	50
Academic General (AG)	576
Academic Law Library (AL)	129
Federal Agency Library (FA)	30
Federal Court Library (FC)	10
Highest State Court Library (SC)	34
Public Library (PU)	162
Service Academy (SA)	4
Special Library (SP)	12
State Library (SL)	38
Total	**1,045**

"Thank you for all your good work! We appreciate all the good people who work for the FDLP, for GPO, for all the diverse citizens, residents, visitors of this country, and for everyone across the world who is interested in the United States of America and in the American people."

–Academic library, Alabama

Returning to Pre-pandemic Life

The 2023 Biennial Survey shows that a majority of Federal Depository Libraries (FDLs) have returned to pre-pandemic operations. *Table 2* displays the acute impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the public accessing FDLP collections. In that year, only 78% of FDLs had accessible collections. By 2023, the accessibility rate for FDLP collections rebounded to a historically consistent 97%.

Only three FDLs explained that their COVID-19 protocols were the reason why they were closed to the public in 2023. Several FDLs also responded in this question that they have added public computers and appointment-only access to onsite collections since the pandemic.

Table 2: Comparing four Biennial Surveys: What percentage of libraries have FDLP collections accessible to the public?

Biennial Survey	Survey Question	Percentage of Survey Respondents
2023	Q3	97%
2021	Q3	78%
2019	Q4	97%
2017	Q8	97%

A Digital FDLP: Accelerating a 30-Year Journey

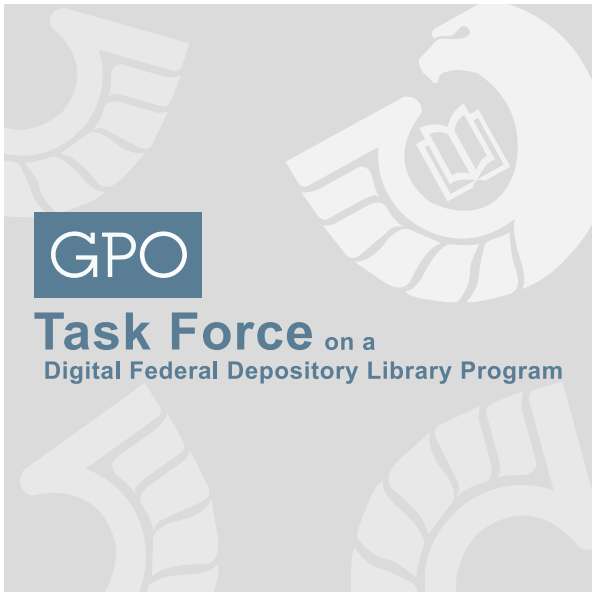
The transition to a digital FDLP has been a lengthy one, beginning in 1993 with the passage of the GPO Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act (Public Law 103–40).

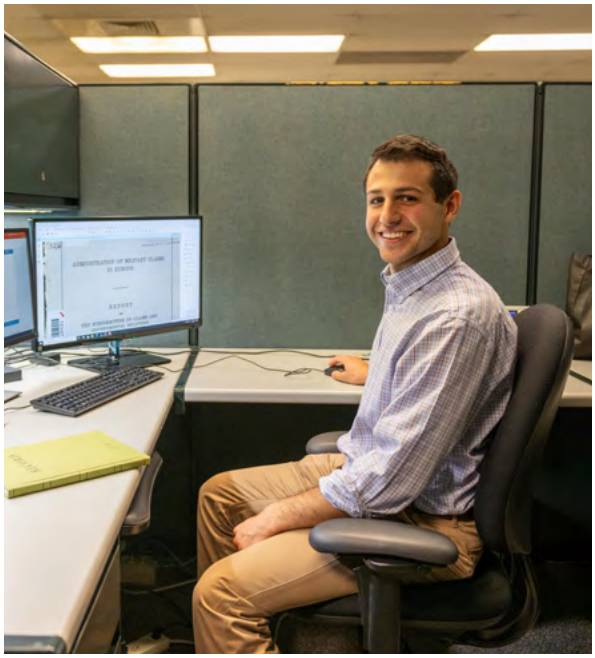
The process accelerated in November 2021, once GPO Director Halpern convened the Task Force on a Digital Federal Depository Library Program. The charge of the Task Force was to study the feasibility of a program that prioritized the digital format first. The conclusion of the Task Force, in December 2022, was that the FDLP can and should move to a digital program. In their report, **Feasibility of a Digital Federal Depository Library Program: Report of the GPO Director's Task Force**, the Task Force defined a digital Federal Depository Library Program as one that "delivers permanent no-fee public access to digital content and essential support services to people seeking U.S. Government Information."

In February 2023, Director Halpern charged Superintendent of Documents Matheson with implementing a transition to a digital FDLP. That summer, LSCM began developing a list of titles to continue in print and a new model for equitable distribution. In August 2023, Superintendent Matheson wrote a letter to all depository library directors and depository coordinators conveying that GPO planned to reduce the number of print titles and copies available for distribution. Meetings with the community began in the fall of 2023 to gather feedback and share updates.

As the FDLP community works together on this transition, Federal depository libraries within the four National Collection Service Areas (NCSAs) have begun to collaborate on collection management in support of the titles that will continue to be distributed in print. A limited print distribution framework allows the FDLP to balance tangible materials with an increase in digital services that will reach more people.

> ***"We are in support of the transition to a fully digital FDLP... Digital resources are faster to find and locate information from, especially for reference assistance."***
>
> –Public library, Michigan





The Flip Side: Tangible FDLP Collections

While the focus of the FDLP moving forward is on digital resources and continuing services, a significant portion of the overall **National Collection of U.S. Government Public Information** (National Collection) remains in FDLs in print and continues to require management and attention.

Responding to *Question 7* of the 2023 Biennial Survey, 61% of FDLs report that they are weeding and describe their collections as either mostly current publications or a blend of current and retrospective holdings and 16% of libraries report little to no weeding.

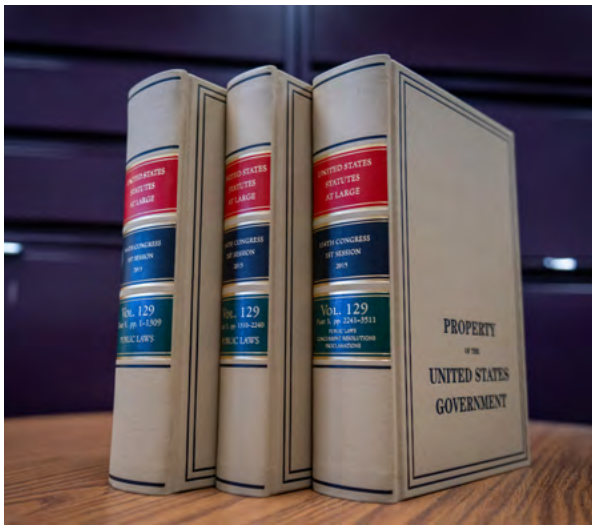
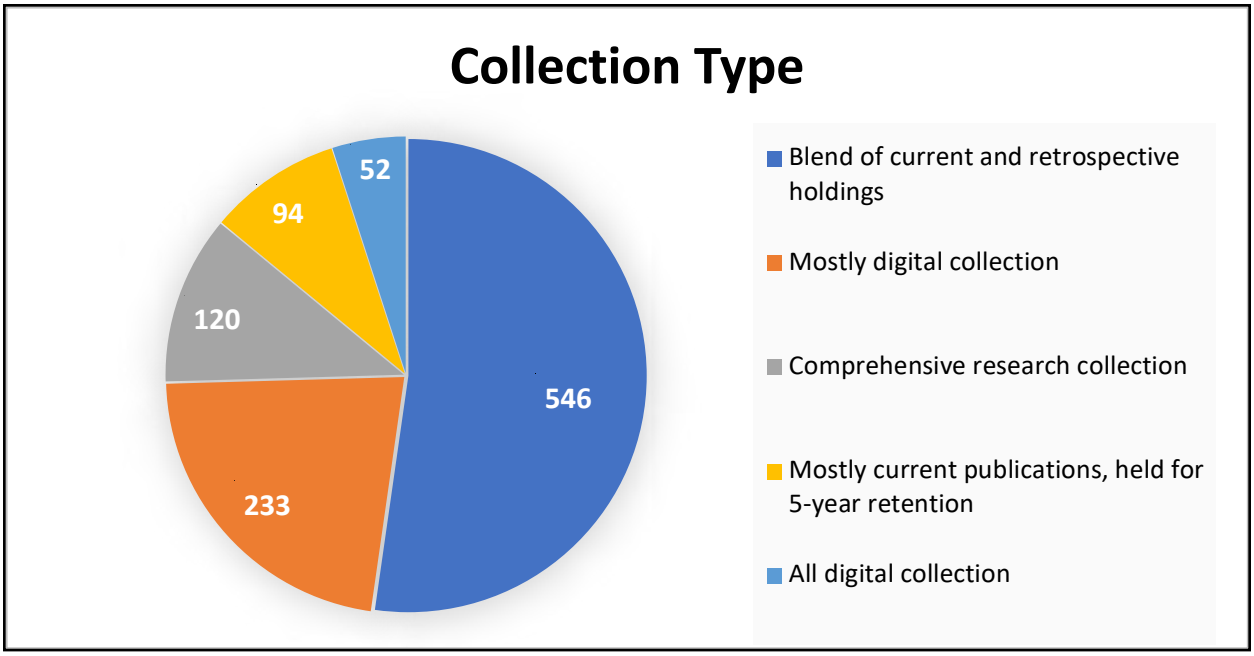


Figure 1: Response to Question 7, "Describe the nature of your depository collection."



In *Question 10*, depository coordinators estimated the size of the tangible collections in four formats: paper, microfiche, maps, and physical media (e.g., DVDs, CD-ROMs, VHS tapes, and floppy diskettes). For the 1,045 responding libraries that have a tangible FDLP collection: 682 libraries have paper (65%); 520 have microfiche (50%); 476 have maps (46%); and 541 have physical media (52%).

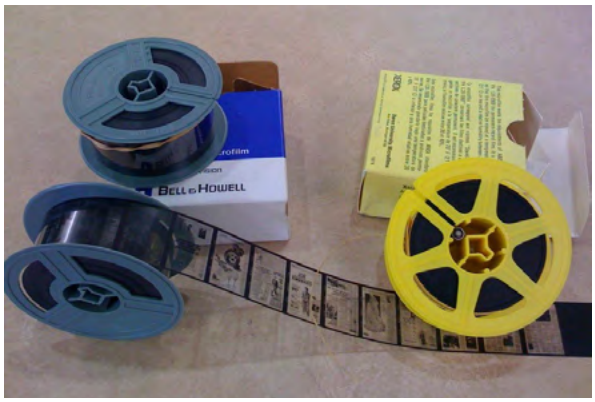
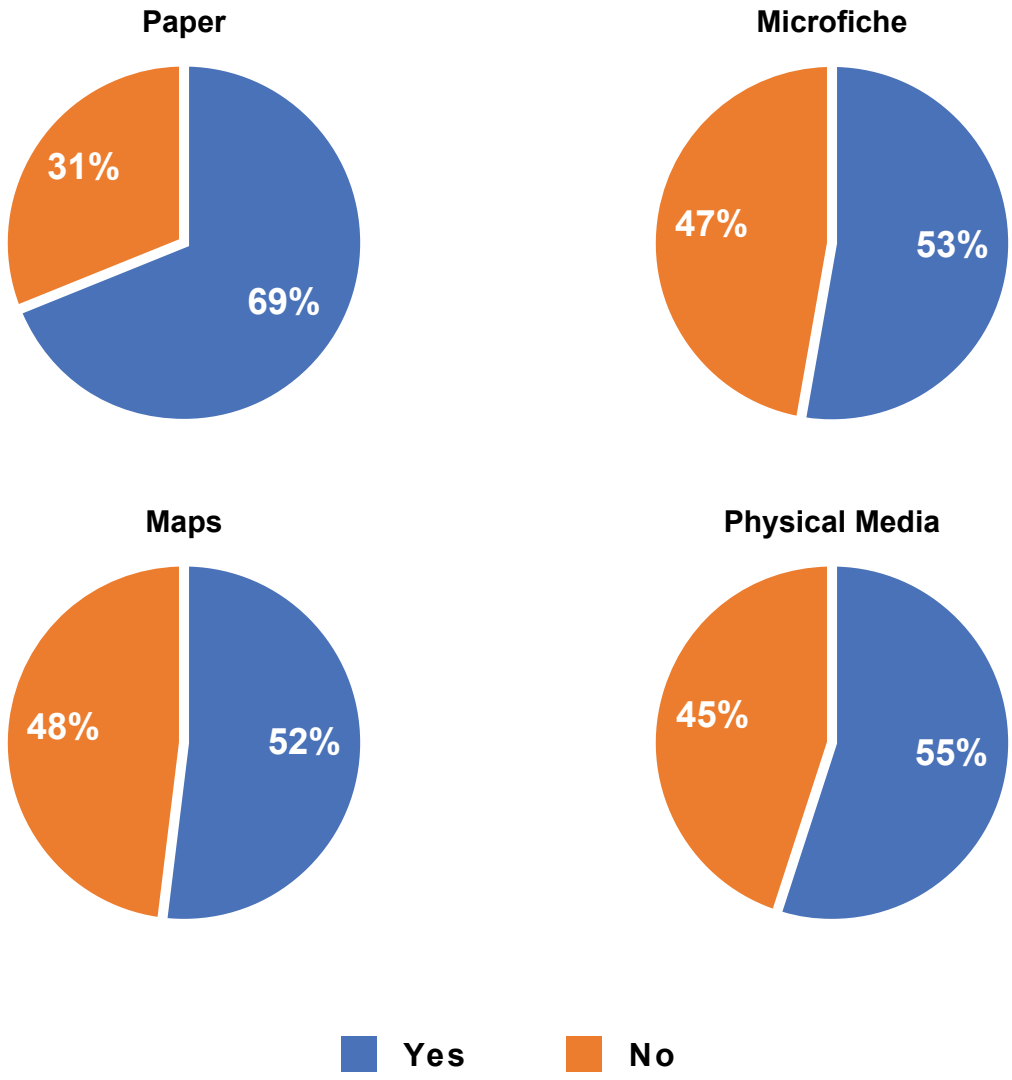


Figure 2: Percentage of 2023 Biennial Survey respondents with tangible collections by format



Question 6 asked about major plans for the depository operations in the coming two years and revealed that just under a quarter of FDLs (23%) plan to inventory tangible collections, and the same number (23%) plan to transition to a digital-only depository and discontinue receipt of future tangible depository material. Under one-fifth of libraries (17%) indicated that they would retrospectively catalog U.S. Government publications in their collection.

FDLP libraries are evaluating and right-sizing their print collections for this new era.

"As a public library supporting a diverse, inner-city community, we hope that GPO will support libraries like us in providing continued print access."

–Public library, Pennsylvania

Table 3. Top six responses regarding FDLs' major plans for the next two years

Response Option	Percentage of total FDLs
Weed tangible collections	55%
Train library staff in the use of U.S. Government information	23%
Inventory tangible collections	23%
Transition to a digital-only depository and discontinue receipt of future tangible depository material	23%
Do not have any plans	20%
Retrospectively catalog U.S. Government publications	17%

FDLP Participation and Staffing

There were 1,105 FDLs of varying types and sizes in the FDLP at the end of the reporting period. Of these, 46 were regional depository libraries. In 2022–2023, five selective depository libraries relinquished their depository designation. One library, Utah Tech University Library (UT) joined the FDLP. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) were represented in the FDLP.

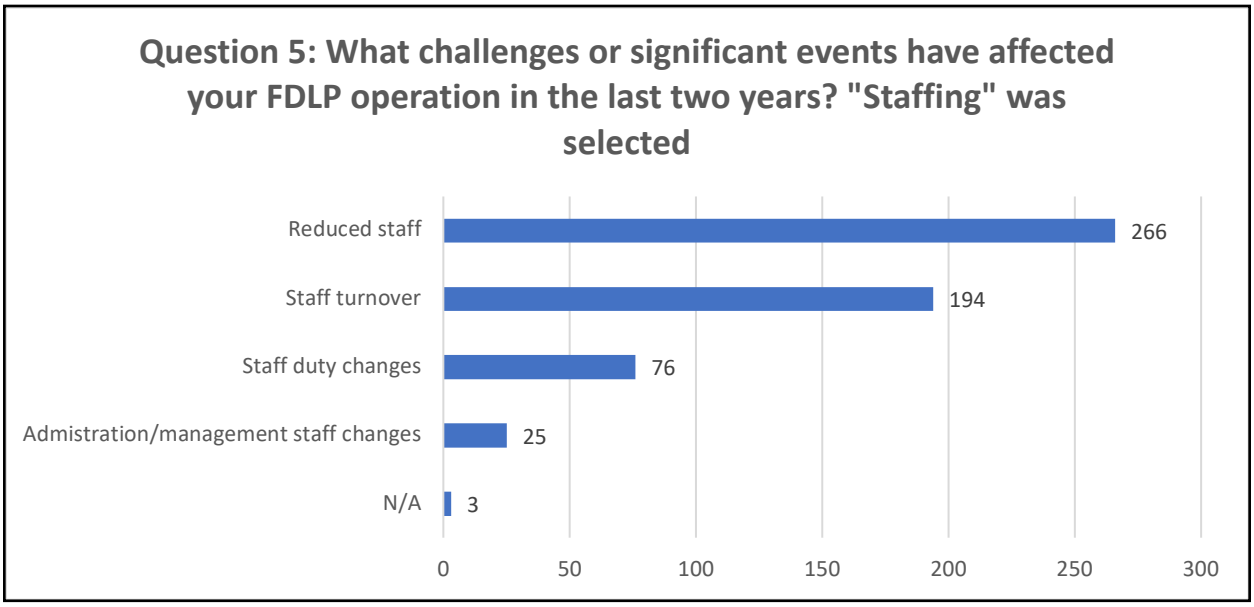
When asked in *Question 2* of the Biennial Survey if their library plans to remain in the FDLP, 90% of FDLs responded that they do plan on remaining in the Program. When libraries indicate they may want to leave the FDLP, LSCM provides consultation services and help. After this type of consultation, 21 libraries during this time period committed to remain in the FDLP. A total of nine libraries (five academic general, three public libraries, and one academic law library) left the FDLP in 2022–2023.

> ***"New staff is not that familiar with government publications and are somewhat unfamiliar with procedures and policies."***
>
> –Academic library, Ohio

Question 5 asked about challenges or significant events faced by FDLs in the past two years and showed that the most significant factors affecting FDLP operations included staffing changes (41%), space constraints (27%), budget cuts (17%), collection moves (17%), and facility renovations (15%). Slightly over a quarter (27%) of FDLs indicated no significant projects or events in the past two years.

Among the libraries that indicated staffing changes had affected their depository operations in the past two years, just under half (47%) of those libraries cited reduced staff. Staff turnover (34%), staff duty changes (13%), and administration/ management staff changes (4%) were also cited.

Figure 3: Response (detail) to Question 5 answer choice of "staffing"



Training

The FDLP provides a variety of training resources useful for the FDLP community and the public. Topics range from depository operations to specific types of U.S. Government resources. LSCM continually evaluates and adjusts the training provided to meet community needs and in response to feedback and national trends for library services and programs.

2023 Biennial Survey: Assessing Training Needs

Two of the 2023 Biennial Survey questions pertained to training. *Question 6* revealed that training their staff is important to FDLs in the near future, and *Question 18* illustrated FDLs' preferences for training formats.

Question 6 of the 2023 Biennial Survey asked about FDLs' major plans for the next two years. Training was the third most popular response to this question, with 11% of libraries indicating that they plan to train library staff in the use of U.S. Government information.

The FDLP community is interested in training on managing tangible collections and providing more access and services to digital works.

Question 18 asked respondents to rank six format options for training and professional development for their organization. *Table 4* lists all the FDLs' responses in ranked order, from most preferred (1 – Online interactive training) to least preferred (6 – In-person national conferences or meetings). *Table 4* combines all responses to indicate trends; the actual number of libraries that chose any particular format as their individual most preferred can be found in the **2023 Biennial Survey dataset on FDLP.gov**.

Not all types of libraries had the same most and least preferred format responses. Special Libraries listed *Online videos (recorded)* as their most preferred format. Meanwhile, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) libraries ranked *interactive online community/email lists* as their least preferred choice. Federal agency libraries placed *written instructions* as their least preferred choice.

Table 4: Ranked responses of all FDLs from most to least preferred format for training and professional development, from Question 18.

Format for Training and Professional Development
1. Online interactive training
2. Online videos (recorded)
3. Written instructions
4. Interactive online community/email lists
5. In-person regional conferences or meetings
6. In-person national conferences or meetings

FDLP Training: Meeting Community Needs

While 2023 survey results will be used to plan future efforts, GPO provided training to the FDLP community through a variety of resources and formats in 2022–2023, including the FDLP Academy and FDLP Resource Guides.

FDLP Academy Webinars and Webcasts

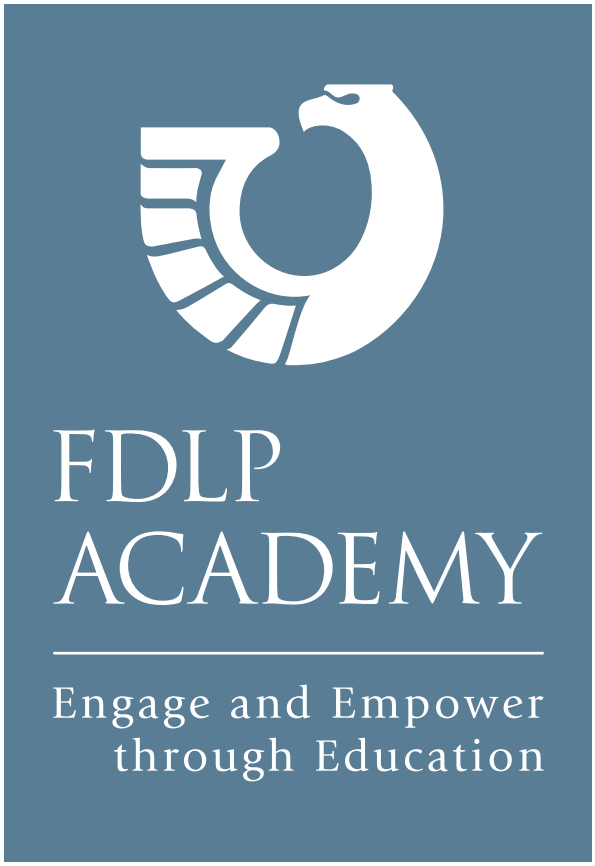
From January 2022 to December 2023, the FDLP Academy presented 103 webinars, with 15,588 registrants and 6,417 live session attendees. Presenters from the FDLP community, Federal Government agencies, and GPO provide subject matter expertise and recommendations on a wide variety of U.S. Government topics and depository concerns.

Table 5 shows the top five 2022–2023 webinars for live attendance. The topics concern the Library of Congress' Chronicling America; the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's networking initiative with libraries to protect older patrons; the basics of discarding materials from a tangible FDL collection; an overview on electronic court records, including PACER; and search strategies for the Library of Congress website.

The FDLP Academy also produces webcasts for asynchronous learning on FDL operations and U.S. Government information. From 2022 through 2023, GPO recorded 20 new webcasts on topics including understanding basic GPO cataloging, analyzing PURL usage reports, searching for works under old Superintendent of Documents classification numbers, and library reference training.

Table 5. Top Five FDLP Academy webinars for live attendance from 2022–2023

Name of FDLP Academy Webinar
1. Chronicling America: Using Historical Newspapers
2. Elder Justice Networks and Libraries
3. Weeding Tangible Federal Depository Collections
4. Access to Court Resources: PACER, Court Records, and More
5. Introducing loc.gov: Orientation and Research Strategies



FDLP Resource Guides

FDLP Resource Guides were rebranded beginning in spring 2023 to make all aspects more accessible, shareable, and streamlined. Existing guides' content was updated, and new guides were created to focus on the U.S. Government in three ways: its structure; highlights of U.S. Government information; and how to learn about a topic using U.S. Government resources. Additionally, a group of guides focuses on FDLP operations to help depository coordinators understand and promote the FDLP more easily and effectively.

> ***"We are tiny, but we do appreciate the resources the FDLP provides. Thank you!"***
>
> –Academic library, New York

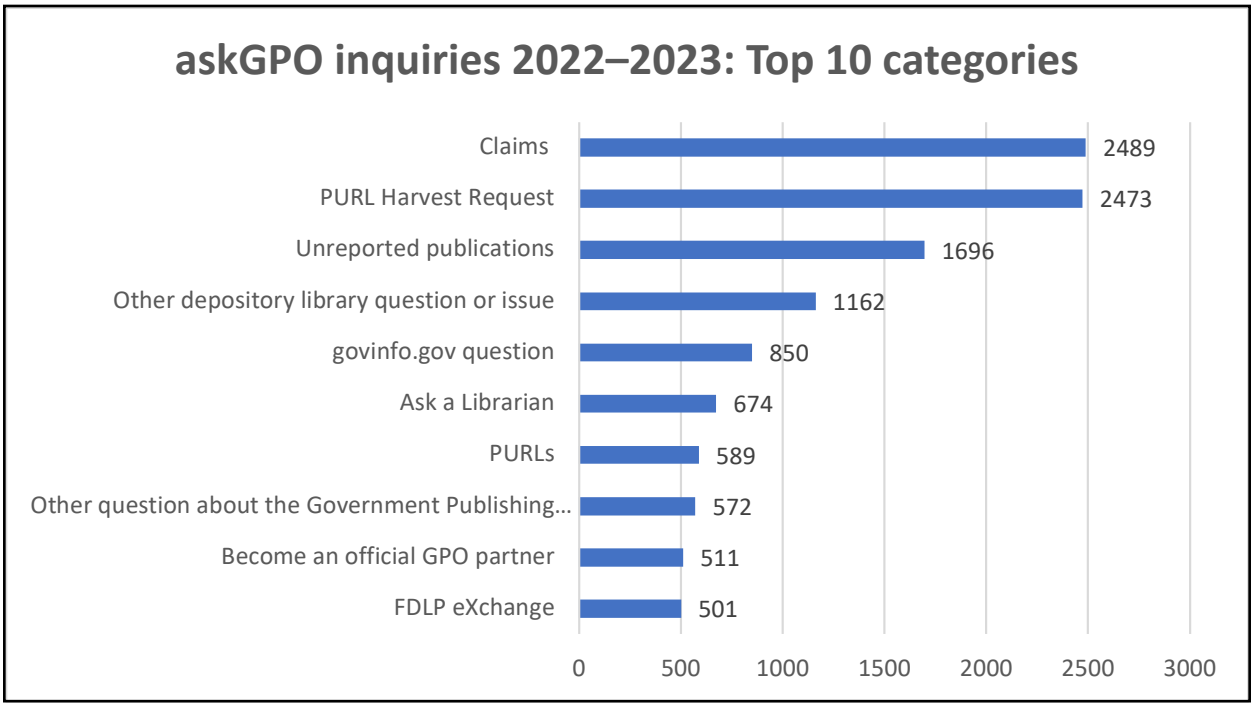
Virtual and In-Person Outreach

Within GPO, LSCM strives to provide a high level of support to all libraries in the FDLP and to respond strategically to the changing professional environment experienced by all our partners.

askGPO is the public website where any user can ask a question of GPO, whether it relates to the entire Agency or to the FDLP. Depository library partners have enhanced access to the site and can perform additional tasks.

LSCM answered 15,549 inquiries in calendar years 2022–2023. The top 10 inquiry categories (those that received over 300 inquiries; these total 11,517) are shown in *Figure 4*. These show an active user community that is working in both the digital and print realms and also indicate a focus on working with GPO to enhance access to digital Government information and quality metadata.

Figure 4: Most frequent categories of askGPO inquiries received by Library Services & Content Management, 2022–2023



LSCM also visits libraries in the FDLP for a variety of reasons: to celebrate anniversaries and significant programs or events; to provide guidance, consultation, and ideas for effective management of depository library collections and operations; to assist with preservation; in conjunction with partnerships or initiatives; and in response to library needs.

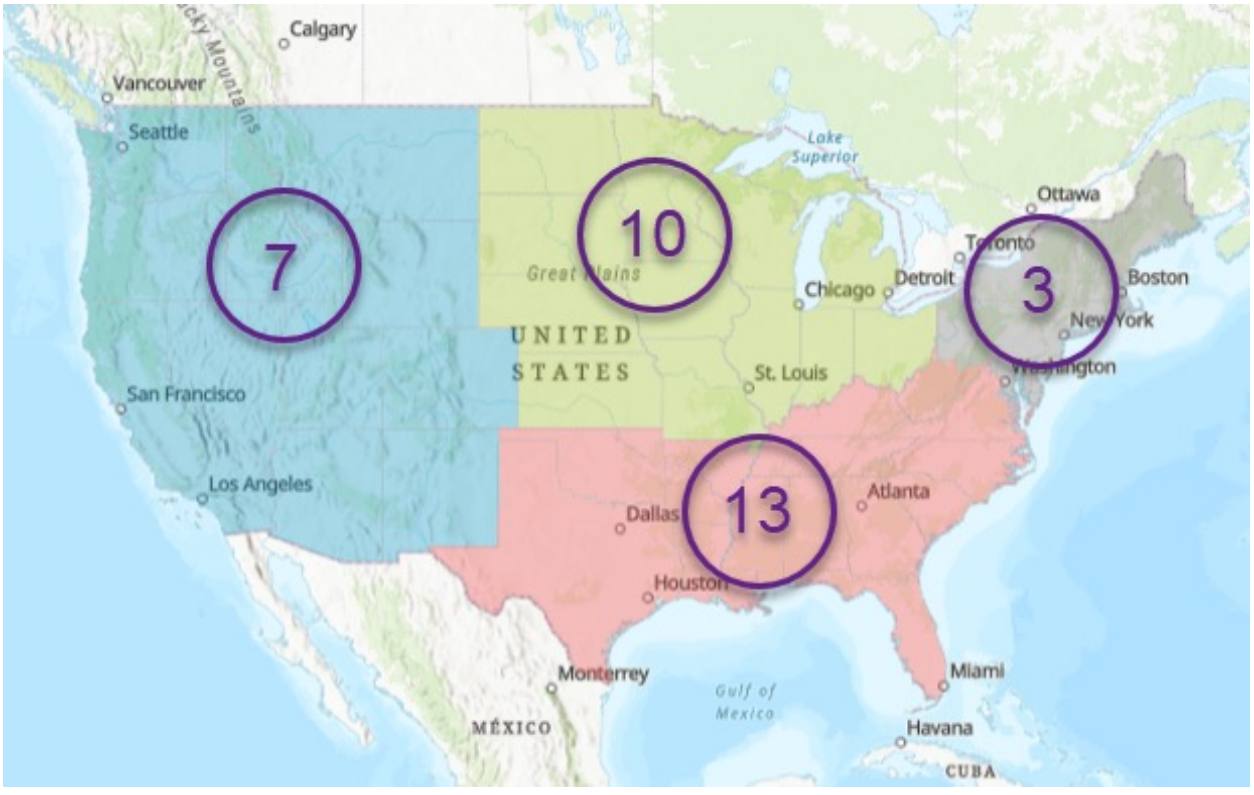
In 2022–2023, LSCM visited 32 active depository libraries and one library that is considering joining the FDLP. These libraries represented all the National Collection Service Areas (see *Figure 5*), and both depository types (4 regionals, 28 selectives). The bulk of the visits were for consultation, with visits also made for significant anniversaries, compliance, and recruitment.

The 200th anniversary of the Library of Virginia's participation in the FDLP in September 2023 was a notable highlight, attended by GPO Director Hugh Halpern and Superintendent of Documents Scott Matheson.

"We're glad we participate in the Program and are thankful for the assistance provided by those individuals at FDLP / GPO whom we interact with."

–Law library, Nevada

Figure 5: Number of in-person visits to FDLs in each National Collection Service Area, 2022–2023



Notable GPO Events

January 2022	GPO Director appoints task force to study making GPO library program digital GPO begins **discontinuing microfiche format** for FDLP publications
April 2022	Depository Library Council's Digital Deposit Working Group was sunset
September 2022	***National Collection of U.S. Government Public Information Strategic Plan*** is released GPO Director names Scott Matheson as **new Superintendent of Documents**
January 2023	Superintendent Matheson issues update on **public access requirements** for FDLs
February 2023	**GPO Director responds** to the final report from the Task Force on a Digital FDLP
March 2023	Depository Library Council transmitted ***Report and Recommendations of the Unique Challenges, Underserved Populations, and Federal Depository Libraries Working Group*** to Director Halpern.
June 2023	GPO and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) partner to **increase permanent access to NOAA publications** GPO responds to DLC's letter regarding **censorship**

Fall 2023	GPO initiates conversations with the FDLP community about implementing a digital FDLP through the Federal Depository Library Conference and NCSA virtual meetings
September 2023	GPO digitizes all **Congressional Directories** back to the 1800s
October 2023	Depository Library Council's PURL Working Group was sunset
November 2023	**FDLP eXchange 1.2 version** is released
December 2023	GPO makes **Congressionally Mandated Reports** available on GovInfo

Future Directions

The 2023 Biennial Survey and GPO's outreach for the two-year period of 2022–2023 indicate that libraries in the FDLP are facing increasingly limited time for FDLP work, are looking to GPO to help facilitate collection management and collection assessments, and are right sizing and re-thinking their collections in a time of transition. In-person visits to FDLs reveal and confirm the same issues and needs.

The FDLP is quickly evolving to a future where more services will be virtual. GPO can help FDLs by working closely with them to protect and understand the tangible portion of the National Collection. Simultaneously, GPO can enhance the FDLP by building digital services and demonstrating their value and potential.

To help understand and cope with changes and new developments in the field, GPO also needs to constantly evaluate the training and services provided through the FDLP Academy and other training and resource sharing initiatives.

A broad coalition of collaborators and partners continues to be essential to the FDLP. A digital FDLP allows the Program to broaden networks even further and to use technology to improve access to collections for a wider audience.

The digital FDLP involves changes in how information and services are delivered, but the goal of the FDLP remains the same: permanent public access, connecting people to their Government's information, and *America Informed*.

Government and Politics

BRIEF BIBS
by
Letter Author
Symbol

Regional Servicing
Model

MARK AMES

Federal Depository Library Program

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