


Depository Library Council

Advisory body to the Director of the U.S. Government Publishing Office

TO: Susanne Caro, Chair, Depository Library Council

FROM: Hayley Johnson, Chair, Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services 

SUBJECT: Working Group Report and Recommendations

DATE: October 18, 2024

As Chair of Council's Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services, I am honored to transmit to you *Second Report of the Depository Library Council's Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services*.

The Working Group was established in July 2021 to assess the immediate and long-term impact of COVID-19 mitigation policies within Federal depository libraries. This resulted in the [first report](#) of the Working Group published in October 2023.

This second report of the Working Group offers an ongoing analysis of how the operations of Federal depository libraries (FDLs) have continued to be affected by COVID-19. Examination of the quantitative data from the 2023 *Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries* revealed that 553 (53%) of the 1,045 respondents indicated changes were made to their policies and procedures during COVID-19, but their libraries are now back to pre-COVID policies. Though only 174 libraries (17%) indicated that COVID-19 changes remained in effect, those areas of library operation are Public Access (14.4% respondents), Staffing (12.7%), Reference Services (11.4%), and Instructional & Educational Services (11.3%).

Analysis of the qualitative data provides much more insight. For the first time two data sets are available that allow for direct comparisons of multiple years of Biennial Survey results. The Working Group had the pleasure of working with Andee Oberosler, a graduate of Maryville University, who [developed a user-friendly tool](#) to assist with further ongoing study of how operations in Federal depository libraries are impacted by COVID-19. It allows others to access, reuse, and customize COVID-related data from the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Surveys of Depository Libraries.

After much consideration of its findings, the Working Group offers the following recommendations for Council's consideration to transmit to the Government Publishing Office:

- Monitor the potential trend of decreasing physical access to depository libraries and consider updating the legal requirements regarding public access accordingly, with appropriate flexibilities for the digital FDLP.
- Increase outreach efforts and guidance to depository library staff, whose roles and responsibilities are shifting and still evolving. This will provide them with some assurances, and it will help GPO gain a clearer understanding of the needs and challenges depository libraries are facing.
- Revisit and update the COVID questions for the upcoming 2025 Biennial Survey to better reflect the current needs and nature of the FDLP in a digital and post-COVID world. The Working Group welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with GPO on devising the questions.

I wish to express my thanks to current and former members of the Working Group including Council, members of the depository library community, Andee Oberosler, and GPO staff for their amazing efforts which resulted in this report and the recommendations.

Attached: *Second Report of the Depository Library Council's Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services*

Second Report of the Depository Library Council's
Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of
COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access,
Collections, and Services

October 2024

D e p o s i t o r y L i b r a r y C o u n c i l

Advisory body to the Director of the U.S. Government Publishing Office

Acknowledgement

The Depository Library Council's Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services Working Group gives a very special thanks to Andee Oberosler (Maryville University) for her consultation and assistance in providing greater access to the Working Group's research data. Andee developed a user-friendly [R Shiny tool](#) that will allow others to access, reuse, and customize COVID-related data from the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Surveys of Depository Libraries.

Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on FDL Access, Collections, and Services Working Group Members

Depository Library Council

Susanne Caro

New Mexico State Library

Hayley Johnson (Chair)

Louisiana State University

Depository Library Community

Rick Mikulski

William & Mary

Lisa Pritchard

Jefferson College Library

Aimée Quinn

Northern Arizona University, Yuma Campus

Government Publishing Office

Cynthia Etkin (Designated Federal Officer)

Office of the Superintendent of Documents

Lara Flint

Library Services and Content Management

Abigail McDermott

Library Services and Content Management

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	i
Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on FDL Access, Collections, and Services Working Group Members	ii
Executive Summary	1
Introduction	3
Methodology	3
Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collected.....	4
Processing and Analysis of Qualitative Data	5
Processing and Analysis of Quantitative Data	5
Quantitative Data Analysis	5
Qualitative Data Analysis	6
Q04 [1][a]- If “Collection maintenance and weeding” please explain:	7
Q04 [1][b]- If “Instructional and Educational Services” please explain:	7
Q04 [1][c]- If “Interlibrary Loan Services” please explain:	8
Q04 [1][d]- If “Item selection / FDL selection profile” please explain:	8
Q04[1][e]- If “Outreach Services” please explain:	8
Q04 [1][f]- If "Processing" please explain:	9
Q04 [1][g]- If “Public access” please explain:	9
Q04 [1][h]- If “Reference Services” please explain:	9
Q04 [1][i]- If "Shelving" please explain:	10
Q04 [1][j]- If “Staffing” please explain:	10
Q04 [1][k]- If "Storage" please explain:	10
Q04 [1][l]- If "Other" please explain:	10
Comparative Analysis of the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Survey Data	11
Q04 [1][a]- If “Collection maintenance and weeding” please explain:	13
Q04 [1][b]- If “Instructional and Educational Services” please explain:	13
Q04 [1][c]- If “Interlibrary Loan Services” please explain:	14

Q04 [1][d]- If “Item selection / FDLP selection profile” please explain:	14
Q04[1][e]- If “Outreach Services” please explain:	15
Q04 [1][f]- If "Processing" please explain:	15
Q04 [1][g]- If “Public access” please explain:.....	16
Q04 [1][h]- If “Reference Services” please explain:.....	17
Q04 [1][i]- If "Shelving" please explain:	17
Q04 [1][j]- If “Staffing” please explain:	18
Q04 [1][k]- If "Storage" please explain:	18
Q04 [1][l]- If "Other" please explain:	19
Recommendations	19
Appendix I	21
Appendix II	22

Executive Summary

The Depository Library Council’s Working Group to Explore the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library (FDL) Access, Collections, and Services (Working Group) was established in July 2021 to examine questions and issues raised during the Spring 2021 Depository Library Council (DLC) Open Forum Discussion, [*COVID-19 a Year Later: Returning to Normal? Or an Emerging New Normal?*](#) The Working Group was tasked with assessing the immediate and long-term impact of COVID-19 mitigation policies and procedures in Federal depository libraries. To do this, the group collected and analyzed data from the 2021 Biennial Survey which resulted in the [*First Report of the Depository Library Council’s Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services*](#) released on October 13, 2023.

In order to begin to assess the long-term impacts of COVID-19, the group again collected and analyzed data from the 2023 Biennial Survey. Data used in this report were collected during the 2023 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries, which all Federal depository libraries (FDLs) are required to complete. Question 4 of the survey, which appeared in the same format as the 2021 survey, was again used so that FDLs could provide written feedback about the impact of COVID-19

policies upon the operations of their institutions and depositories. Examination of the data began in March 2024 when the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) shared the survey results. There were 1,045 respondents, which represented a 94% return rate.

Initial examination of the quantitative data revealed that 318 (30%) FDLs indicated no changes were made to their policies as a result of COVID-19, while 174 (17%) indicated changes were made. There were 553 respondents (53%) that indicated changes made in response to COVID-19 had been reversed. The areas of library operation more commonly impacted by COVID-19 policies were Public Access (14.4% respondents), Staffing (12.7%), Reference Services (11.4%), and Instructional and Educational Services (11.3%).

A qualitative analysis of written responses offered initial insights into the ongoing effects of COVID-19 policies on Federal Depository Libraries (FDLs). Changes to public access remained a significant factor, with 27 libraries reporting reduced hours and 45 libraries indicating restricted or limited public access. Staffing changes also continue to affect FDLs with reduced staffing (27 libraries) and flexible schedules and work from home options

“The results of both surveys indicated a significant shift toward digital resources and services with many libraries making these digital transitions a permanent component of their operations and services.”

(51 libraries) remaining post-pandemic. In terms of continuing effects on library services, 85 libraries reported an increase in online reference services, with plans to continue offering them, paralleling the 89 libraries that noted the creation or expansion of online instructional and educational services.

In this second report, the Working Group provides a comparative analysis of the results of the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Surveys. While the response rate remained high for both surveys, the data reveals a significant decline in libraries reporting changes made during COVID-19, dropping from 86.1% in 2021 to 17% in 2023, suggesting stabilization. A continued trend toward digital and hybrid service models, reduced staffing and hours, and prioritization of electronic publications became apparent when comparing survey results.

This report concludes by encouraging further exploration of some of the themes which have emerged when examining the survey data as well as reexamining a future COVID-19 Biennial Survey question to ensure that the effects of the pandemic on FDLs is accurately captured. The Working Group proposed that the Depository Library Council consider transmitting the following recommendations to the Government Publishing Office Director:

- Monitor the potential trend of decreasing physical access to depository libraries and consider updating the legal requirements regarding public access accordingly, with appropriate flexibilities for the digital FDLP.
- Increase outreach efforts and guidance to depository library staff, whose roles and responsibilities are shifting and still evolving. This will provide them with some assurances, and it will help GPO gain a clearer understanding of the needs and challenges depository libraries are facing.
- Revisit and update the COVID questions for the upcoming 2025 Biennial Survey to better reflect the current needs and nature of the FDLP in a digital and post-COVID world. The Working Group welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with GPO on devising the questions.

Introduction

The first report of the Working Group analyzed how COVID-19 changed Federal depository library (FDL) operations between March 2020 and December 2021. Examination of the quantitative data from the 2021 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries revealed that 917 (86.1%) respondents indicated changes were made to their policies and procedures during COVID-19. Of those, 51.8% indicated that changes had been reversed. The areas of library operation most commonly impacted by COVID-19 policies were Public Access (39% respondents), Reference Services (32%), and Instructional & Educational Services (32%). While qualitative data provided deeper insights, a full understanding of the long-term effects requires ongoing data collection and analysis. As such, the first report recommended that a question about the impact of COVID-19 policies and practices be included in the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries at least through the 2025 survey.

This second report builds on the Working Group's previous work, with analysis of responses to the COVID questions in the 2023 Biennial Survey, to find continuing trends and possible new impacts resulting from COVID-19 policies. In the 2023 survey results, 553 (53%) responding libraries reported that while they had implemented changes during the pandemic, they have since reverted to pre-COVID policies. Meanwhile, 174 libraries (17%) indicated that some changes remain in effect. The areas of library operation that have continued to see changes reflected as a result COVID-19 are Public Access (14.4%), Staffing (12.7%), Reference Services (11.4%), and Instruction and Educational Services (11.3%). These results mirror the findings from the 2021 survey, highlighting ongoing trends that continue to shape library operations.

Methodology

The methodology outlined was established when analyzing the 2021 Biennial Survey Data and was maintained in order to ensure consistency and comparability of data across the two surveys. For this study, data was collected through the 2023 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries. The survey was sent to 1,106 Federal depository libraries. The dataset contains 1,045 responses, for a 94% return rate.

In the 2023 Biennial Survey, Question 4, a two-part question, sought to identify changes implemented between 2021 and 2023 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first part of the question, Q04[a], depository coordinators were asked, "In which areas, if any, has your institution implemented new policies and/or procedural changes as a result of COVID-19?" Respondents selected from thirteen fields and were invited to provide descriptive responses for each. The categories were: Collection Maintenance and Weeding; Instructional and Educational Services; Interlibrary Loan Services; Item Selection / FDLP

Selection Profile; Outreach Services; Processing; Public Access; Reference Services; Shelving; Staffing; Storage; Other. Respondents could select all applicable options.

Part two of the question Q04[b], then asked, “Which of these implemented changes, if any, do you anticipate will remain part of your normal operations?” The purpose of this follow-up question was to determine which of the COVID-19 policy changes might remain in place into the near future.

In the initial report of the Working Group, the group initially conceptualized the 2023 Biennial Survey question as containing only one field for written feedback rather than the thirteen fields in the 2021 survey. “The new format of the question, in which respondents will check boxes rather than provide written replies, will also make the data immediately machine readable, removing the need for time-consuming data clean-up.”¹ Upon further discussion during the development of the 2023 Biennial Survey questions, however, the Working Group decided that keeping the feedback fields associated with each topic area the same would ensure that the explanations for any 2023 changes would be accurate.

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collected

In March 2024, GPO provided the Working Group an Excel file of 2023 Biennial Survey data for Question 4. The file has 44 columns of identifying attributes and 1,045 respondent rows, resulting in 45,980 datapoints, of which 2,251 were the open-ended written responses. The remaining fields represent information about each institution, including Cataloging Record Distribution Program (CRDP) participation status; partnership agreement status; state; depository type; library type; library size; and depository number. This unaltered data, [2023 Biennial Survey Data Sheet](#), can be downloaded and viewed by the public.

The qualitative data included the written answers provided by the respondents. Analysis of this data involved close reading and coding of responses in an effort to identify important themes, ideas, and specific policy changes. The quantitative data included the compiled statistical figures from the respondents, which, when analyzed, provided a broad overview of trends in policy adoption and retention throughout the FDLP.

Subgroups examined the written responses for their assigned category, keeping track of important themes or surprising responses. They used coded terms and controlled language to better track the trends within the replies.

¹ [First Report of the Depository Library Council's Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services](#), p.14. October 13, 2023.

Processing and Analysis of Qualitative Data

After the qualitative data from Q04[a] was analyzed and summarized, examination began of the written replies to Q04[b]. To determine those changes that were still in place as of December 2023, the same subgroups examined responses by category again utilizing a coding method. They identified themes and noted policies that were still in place.

Processing and Analysis of Quantitative Data

The Working Group created a machine-readable Excel file of the data. The file, which can be viewed as a standalone Excel file or through analysis software, will allow members of the community to compose, explore, compare, and answer important questions for themselves. The Working Group is again using RStudio for its analysis.

To make a machine-readable data file, written responses were replaced in the Excel file with an “X” and blank responses were kept as empty cells. Written negative responses such as “no changes,” “NA,” “N/A,” and “Null” were changed to blank cells. This [publicly accessible file](#) was used for the quantitative data analysis section of the study.

Quantitative Data Analysis

When asked in the 2023 Biennial Survey, “In which areas, if any, has your institution implemented new policies and / or procedural changes as a result of COVID-19?” The 1,045 libraries reported the following:

RESPONSE	NUMBER OF FDLs
<i>Changes were made due to COVID-19 but now are back to pre-COVID policies</i>	553
<i>Public Access</i>	150
<i>Instructional and Educational Services</i>	118
<i>Reference Services</i>	119
<i>Staffing</i>	133
<i>Outreach Services</i>	62
<i>Interlibrary Loan Services</i>	48
<i>No new policies or procedures implemented</i>	318
<i>Collection Maintenance and Weeding</i>	58
<i>Processing</i>	27

RESPONSE	NUMBER OF FDLs
<i>Shelving</i>	21
<i>Other</i>	47
<i>Item Selection / FDL Selection Profile</i>	45
<i>Storage</i>	7

Of the 1,045 respondent institutions, 318 (30%) indicated no new policies or procedures were implemented. 553 respondents (53%) indicated that changes made in response to COVID-19 had been reversed, and only 174 respondents (17%) indicated instituted changes were still in effect.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative examination of written responses to questions Q04[a] and Q04[b] from the 2023 Biennial Survey addresses those identified changes institutions implemented as a result of COVID-19. The respondents were asked to provide specific examples of changes at their institution (Q04[a]) and to indicate which of the changes were expected to remain as part of the institution’s normal operations.

Responses to Q04[a] indicate that changes implemented as a result of COVID-19 remain in effect and continue to influence how libraries and library staff provide public access, conduct instructional and educational services, provide reference, and staff their libraries. Of the 1,045 libraries surveyed 17% indicated changes were instituted and were still in effect.

The responses to the 2023 Biennial Survey indicated that multiple library services remained impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Collection Maintenance and Weeding, there was an increased focus on digital collections, with 19 libraries noting a shift towards digital resources and 23 libraries mentioning weeding projects. Ten libraries adopted a digital-first model for federal depository collections, while eight paused weeding activities. In Instructional and Educational Services, 89 libraries reported maintaining or expanding online instruction options, with many viewing virtual and hybrid models as permanent enhancements.

Interlibrary Loan (ILL) Services saw continued emphasis on digital delivery options, such as Rapid ILL and scan on demand, with home delivery and curbside pickup also remaining popular. For Item Selection, a significant shift to electronic formats was noted, with 22 libraries preferring electronic publications and 11 deselecting tangible titles.

Outreach Services continued to focus on digital or virtual outreach, although 56 libraries reported a return to normal outreach. Processing workflows mostly returned to pre-pandemic norms, though staffing changes led to lasting adjustments. Public Access was still affected, with 27 libraries reducing open hours and others requiring appointments or limiting building access.

In Reference Services, 85 libraries reported increased online reference offerings, with some shifting away from traditional reference desks. Shelving changes included physical reorganizations that persisted post-pandemic, and in Staffing, flexible schedules and remote work options were retained by 51 libraries, while others experienced staff reductions. Storage changes largely reflected a shift toward increased use of electronic publications and reduced physical collections. Lastly, many libraries continued pandemic-related policies limiting direct interactions, such as contactless circulation and appointment-based services.

What follows is the analysis for each area of change as reported in the 2023 Biennial Survey:

Q04 [1][a]- If “Collection maintenance and weeding” please explain:

There are two themes that stand out in this area: weeding and adding more digital resources. There were nineteen respondents who specifically mentioned weeding

Q04[1][a]- If “Collection maintenance and weeding,” please explain:	
Weeding	23
Increased Digital	19
Digital First FDL	10
Weeding Paused	8
Print Deprioritized	2
Added Sanitization	1
No Changes	1
Unclear/Not Counted	5

projects, either as standalone projects or connected to a shift to digital resources. Ten respondents mention moving to an all-digital or digital first FDL model. Eight respondents said that they paused weeding and collections maintenance activities. Two responses mention a decreased emphasis on the collection and maintenance of print collections. One respondent said they haven’t weeded since 2019. There were five unclear responses that may or may not have been related to weeding and collection maintenance.

Q04 [1][b]- If “Instructional and Educational Services” please explain:

By far, most libraries (89) responded that they created or expanded online instructional and educational services and have kept these options post-pandemic. Only eleven mentioned not returning to in-person options and only having online instruction. Several institutions mentioned fewer in-person options, even if these weren’t eliminated entirely.

A return to in-person only was mentioned by three institutions and hygiene protocols, an appointment only model, self-service checkouts & reserves, and new remote work resources were mentioned one time each. An increase of new online instructional and educational services were the major themes. Besides synchronous and asynchronous options for instructional and educational sessions, additional research guides, new video tutorials, new databases, and additional support of chat and email reference were mentioned. The access these initiatives created was almost universally kept in place and seen as an improvement over pre-pandemic in-person only services. Zoom as a preferred platform was mentioned fifteen times. There were six unclear responses.

Q04 [1][c]- If “Interlibrary Loan Services” please explain:

Responding libraries noted that they will continue to offer services such as Rapid ILL, scan on demand and other expanded digital/electronic options for ILL services. Delivery of ILL items via mail was noted as a continuing service amongst twelve responding libraries. Several libraries also were continuing to offer curbside pickup or locker pickup of ILL materials. One library did mention the continued practice of quarantining materials. Additionally, increased usage of ILL was noted.

Q04 [1][d]- If “Item selection / FDLP selection profile” please explain:

The majority of responding libraries noted an increase and/or preference for electronic (22) with eleven libraries noting their deselection of tangible titles. Seven libraries noted that they were electronic only. A request digital copy feature, patron-driven acquisition, and not having an official profile were all mentioned one time.

Q04[1][e]- If “Outreach Services” please explain:

A large number of respondents indicated that their focus is still on digital or virtual outreach, which is expected. Notable is that only 5 note a decrease in levels of outreach, and 7 explicitly state it has become a priority. The majority of respondents, about 56, suggest returning to normal outreach has been an activity during this biennial period. Overall, the results suggest the preference and priority is still placed on digital/virtual outreach.

Q04[1][a]- If “Outreach Services,” please explain:	
Increase Virtual Instruction, Reference, Training, Services, & Outreach	20
Online Presence and Communication Methods (Website, Social Media, Digital Displays)	11
Changed or Added Delivery Methods (Including Curbside Pickup, Bibliobus, Personal Delivery, Item Pickup)	10
Increased In-Person Outreach	4

Q04[1][a]- If “Outreach Services,” please explain:	
Outreach Decreased	7
Hiring/Personnel	3
No Changes	1
Unclear	9

Q04 [1][f]- If "Processing" please explain:

Most libraries have returned to previous workflows and procedures. The more common, lasting changes in processing are the result of staff reduction, reassignment, or remote work. Workflow changes include not using tattle tape, not having a different procedure for government publications, cataloging all federal publications, and extending the timeframe for processing materials from weekly to monthly. Two libraries indicated that they are still working on a backlog of materials. One library joined the Cataloging Records Distribution Program, this shift leads to different processing workflows for the participating libraries. Also, because so many libraries mentioned a shift to more or exclusively digital FDL collections, processing can be assumed to require different skills and workflows, some of which may not have been fully realized at the time of the survey.

Q04 [1][g]- If “Public access” please explain:

The most commonly retained change to public access is a reduction of hours with 27 libraries reporting fewer hours open than before the pandemic. Although the public can access many libraries again, twenty now require or strongly encourage an appointment. Public access to the whole library building or portion of building was listed by 19 libraries, and this includes limits to only those with card access. Related to this, six libraries require users to register or be checked in by security or at a central desk.

Efforts to increase access include seven libraries maintaining curb-side service and an increase of digital materials available on the library website (7). Ten libraries offer holds or a page service.

Changes resulting in reduced access to the library building, although related to the pandemic may also be related to a desire to reduce public access on university college due to safety concerns and the occurrence of shootings.

Q04 [1][h]- If “Reference Services” please explain:

The most significant theme for reference services is the increase or continuation of online reference services with eighty-five respondents noting an increase in these services. For in-person or online reference, nine libraries required appointments and six libraries no longer have traditional reference desks. Five libraries listed decreased reference hours.

Q04 [1][i]- If "Shelving" please explain:

The two prominent themes are that physical changes and organizational changes were made during COVID, the impacts of which remain.

Q04 [1][j]- If "Staffing" please explain:

Of the changes implemented during the pandemic, the option for flexible schedules and working from home have continued for fifty-one libraries. The second most common change is in a reduction of staff, which was reported by twenty-seven libraries. Only three respondents indicated active hiring. Four libraries listed a budget reduction as a reason for reduced staffing. To meet the challenges of a smaller workforce nine libraries indicated a change in work priorities and re-assignment of duties. Three libraries stated cross-training was practiced for a more flexible workforce. The issue of staff reduction here is consistent with the Biennial survey question, Q5 What challenges or significant events have affected your FDLP operation in the last two years? The most common response, 418 respondents, listed staffing and was the most common response.

Q04 [1][k]- If "Storage" please explain:

With only six responses to this question is it not possible to have a clear view of themes for this topic. Four responses did indicate moving collections off site, one of these was due to remodeling and is only tangentially connected to the pandemic.

Q04 [1][l]- If "Other" please explain:

Respondents of the 2023 Biennial Survey had the option of "other" when describing the impact of COVID-19 policies on their libraries. Many of the responses were duplicated in other questions, however two major themes emerged. The first related to the continued impact of physical changes to libraries during the pandemic. Lockers, plexiglass dividers, and curbside dropboxing installed during the pandemic remain in use. The second theme relates to the continuation of policies that limit direct interactions between staff and the public. These policies include contactless circulation and pickup policies, reduced hours, emphasis on digital rather than direct interaction, and "by appointment only" reference consultations.

Overall, most of the "other" replies relate to large institutional changes related to policy changes, physical changes, space changes, and operational procedures. Contactless and reduced human-interaction pickups continue, institutions are less likely to let external organizations to use their space, and there is a move to appointment or "on call" interactions for circulation and reference.

Comparative Analysis of the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Survey Data

In comparing the results of the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Surveys, the data reveals key trends in how libraries have adapted to and evolved from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The response rate for both surveys was high with a 96% return rate in 2021 and a 94% return rate in 2023.

When comparing the data regarding whether changes were made, changes were reversed, or no changes were made during COVID-19, the percentages of respondents in each category provide larger insight into the state of FDLs today. The responses show a significant decline in those libraries reporting changes that remain in effect. In 2021, 86.1% indicated that changes were made, and that percentage dropped to 17% in 2023. The percentage of respondents that reported no changes increased from 13.9% in 2021 to 30% in 2023 suggesting that changes in response to COVID-19 have stabilized within FDLs. There was a small increase in the percentage of libraries that indicated that changes made in response to COVID-19 had been reversed, from 44.6% in 2021 to 53% in 2023.

The results of both surveys indicated a significant shift toward digital resources and services with many libraries making these digital transitions a permanent component of their operations and services.

In 2021, libraries shifted to include both virtual and hybrid models for both reference services as well as instructional and educational services, and the data from the 2023 survey makes clear that libraries are retaining and plan to continue to retain the virtual and hybrid models as another modality of their services. Additionally, Interlibrary Loan (ILL) services continued to emphasize digital delivery options, such as Rapid ILL and scan on demand, with curbside pickup and home delivery becoming standard. Outreach services followed a similar trend toward reliance on digital services, with digital outreach efforts continuing beyond the pandemic.

Both the 2021 and 2023 surveys indicated a marked increase in the prioritization of electronic publications in item selection, with libraries moving away from tangible collections. The 2023 Biennial Survey was launched in late September 2023 with responses due in December 2023. Responses reflect a trend toward electronic publications prior to the digital FDLP announcement in February 2023. The transition to a digital FDLP and the implementation of the Print Distribution Titles (PDT) List will necessitate revising the Item selection / FDLP selection profile field as an option on the 2025 Biennial Survey.

Staffing challenges persisted, with many libraries reducing staff or reassigning duties, while some maintained flexible schedules and remote work options. Public access hours were reduced in many libraries, and some continued to limit in-person services through appointment-based or restricted access models.

Overall, the 2021 and 2023 surveys reflect a sustained shift toward digital and hybrid service models, flexible workflows, and adjusted public access models in response to the challenges presented or exacerbated by the pandemic.

In comparing the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Survey responses, it became apparent that comparing open-ended survey questions across multiple years poses significant challenges due to the qualitative nature of the responses. Unlike standardized, quantitative data, open-ended answers can vary widely in length, tone, and detail, making it difficult to establish consistent metrics for comparison. Changes in language or respondent demographics can also influence the way participants articulate their thoughts, making direct comparison between multiple biennial surveys more difficult as time progresses.

What follows is the comparison analysis for each area of change as reported in the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Surveys.

RESPONSE	2021 NUMBER OF FDLs	2023 NUMBER OF FDLs
<i>Changes were made due to COVID-19 but now back to pre-COVID policies</i>	475	553
<i>Public Access</i>	419	150
<i>Instructional and Educational Services</i>	344	118
<i>Reference Services</i>	344	119
<i>Staffing</i>	239	133
<i>Outreach Services</i>	230	62
<i>Interlibrary Loan Services</i>	172	48
<i>No new policies or procedures implemented</i>	148	318
<i>Collection Maintenance and Weeding</i>	115	58
<i>Processing</i>	114	27
<i>Shelving</i>	94	21
<i>Other</i>	69	47

RESPONSE	2021 NUMBER OF FDLs	2023 NUMBER OF FDLs
<i>Item Selection / FDLP Selection Profile</i>	44	45
<i>Storage</i>	26	7

Q04 [1][a]- If “Collection maintenance and weeding” please explain:

There were 118 libraries that paused, suspended, started, or altered weeding and collection development practices during the pandemic, as noted in the *First Report of the Depository Library Council’s Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services* (October 13, 2023). In the 2021 Biennial Survey Q06[1][a], respondents were asked if pandemic policies were still in place for weeding and collection maintenance. The question was asked with a free-text response field and the responses were coded. 54 respondents indicated that pandemic weeding and collection development policies and procedures were still in place, 54 also indicated that they were no longer in effect, and 10 were uncertain. Libraries that indicated a shift to digital resources (and the implied impacts on weeding and collection maintenance) also noted that this appeared to be a permanent shift. Also, the 2021 survey asked if changes that were still in place would become part of normal operations. The purpose of asking this question was two-fold: gauge what permanent changes were in place and think about relevant questions for the 2023 survey.

For the 2023 Biennial Survey, respondents were again asked about pandemic policies and procedures that were still in place at their libraries. The biggest take-aways from this question were restatements of the fact that libraries shifted to digital resources, including digital first depository collections and how this changed their approach to collections maintenance. This shift often necessitated large weeding projects, created new workflows for library staff working with depository collections, and required new skills for better integrating and providing access to digital collections. 23 libraries mentioned new weeding projects, 8 said that weeding projects were paused, 19 stated that they have an increased emphasis on digital collections and 10 specifically said their institution was shifted to a digital FDLP model moving forward. The remaining responses were insignificant in number or too unclear to tag.

Q04 [1][b]- If “Instructional and Educational Services” please explain:

Comparing 2021 and 2023 responses regarding Instruction and Educational Services reveals that the expected continuation of the virtual, hybrid, synchronous, and asynchronous options for individual and group instruction enhanced or initiated during the pandemic proved some of the most significant and long-lasting of the changes for both library workers and patrons. As reported in *First Report of the Depository Library Council’s Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access,*

Collections, and Services (October 13, 2023), of the 1065 libraries surveyed, Q06[2], 161 out of the 348 responses regarding instruction and education indicated that virtual or hybrid

Survey Responses	2021	2023
Increased, new, or enhanced online instruction options	161	89
Online only instruction	0	11
Hybrid: In-person and online (duplicate count)	17	10
Unclear Responses	0	6
Back to in-person only	0	3
Hygiene Protocols	0	1
New remote work resources	0	1
Appointment Model	0	1
Self-Service Checkouts & Reserves	0	1
Zoom Platform Mentioned (duplicate count–included in Online Instruction Options)	0	15
Video Tutorials	9	
Not counted	5	4

instruction and programs were added and would continue as of the date of the survey (December 2021) and responses to Q04[b] during the 2023 survey show that 84 libraries anticipated Virtual Instruction/ Reference services implemented during the pandemic would remain a normal part of operations. Because the terms "instructional and educational services" can be conflated or used to describe programming, there is some lack of clarity about what respondents meant in 2021 and what they meant in 2023 when discussing these two areas. For the most part, this report assumes

that the majority of respondents referred to virtual or hybrid instruction and reference models. The table above shows the responses.

Q04 [1][c]- If “Interlibrary Loan Services” please explain:

The themes remained similar with libraries noting the continuation of services such as home delivery, curbside pickup and expanded digital/electronic options such as scan on demand and Rapid ILL. Three libraries specifically noted an increase in ILL usage with only one library reporting a continuation of quarantine procedures.

Q04 [1][d]- If “Item selection / FDLP selection profile” please explain:

Responses to Q06[1][d] of the 2021 survey indicated an overall increased focus on digital selections or a changed focus to the prioritization of electronic publications. As expected, this trend continued in the 2023 survey with 22 libraries indicating the continued change to and preference for electronic publications. Additionally, two libraries indicated they were replacing tangible items with their digital equivalents when possible. The number of libraries that indicated they were reducing their selection profiles increased from two libraries in 2021 to nine libraries in 2023.

With the transition to a digital FDLP and the implementation of the Print Distribution Titles (PDT) List occurring after the survey was distributed, the selection profiles of depository libraries will have been even more greatly changed to reflect the new

depository distribution framework of the limited print titles. With this shift in the program, it is recommended that this question be removed from the 2025 Biennial Survey.

Q04[1][e]- If “Outreach Services” please explain:

The 2023 Biennial Survey had 65 answers (some libraries provided more than one answer) to this question, as compared to 231 answers in 2021. The categorization of the replies was similar, as was the theme of increased virtual outreach and reliance on or an increase in an online presence to do outreach. Libraries also continued to change or add delivery methods, according to the 2023 survey. Some libraries indicated their outreach decreased, sometimes due to staffing shortages. Overall, it appears that a trend toward virtual outreach and services and adjusting in-person services continued, and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on outreach was much less pronounced in 2023 than in 2021.

Q04 [1][f]- If "Processing" please explain:

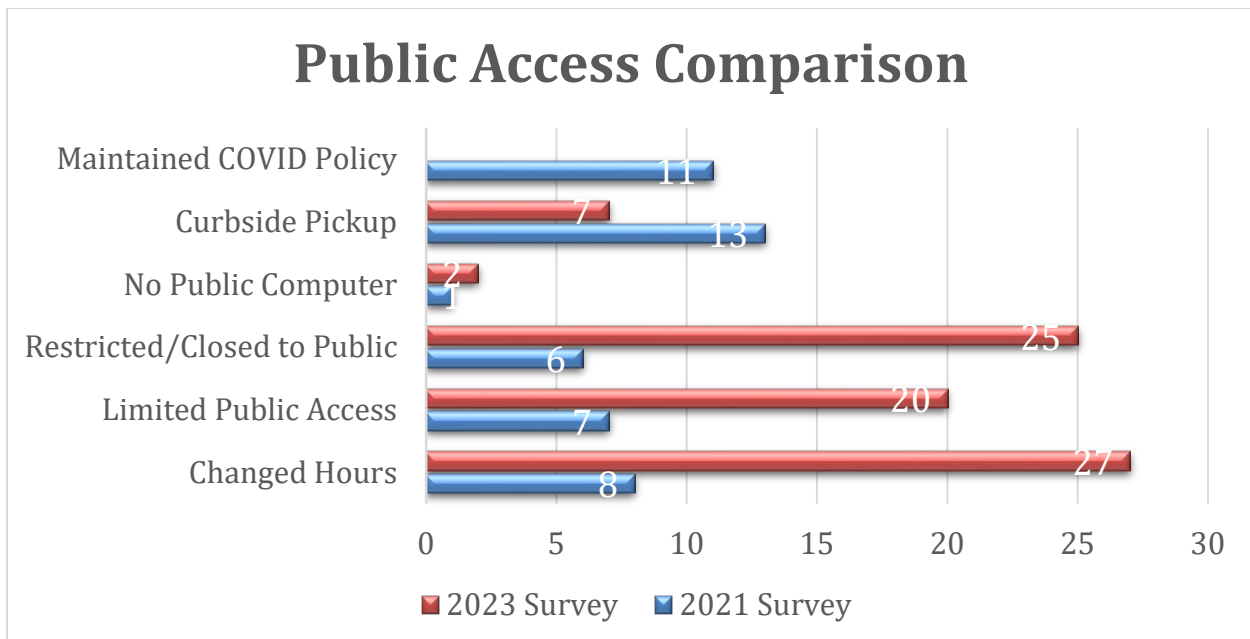
Not surprisingly, very few libraries indicated that changes made to processing workflows were still in place at the time of the 2023 survey. In 2021, 148 libraries (13.9%) indicated that there were no changes to their policies regarding processing. In 2023, 3 libraries (as opposed to twenty-one in 2021) said that staffing changes were impacting FDLP processing, 2 indicated dealing with backlogged work in 2023 compared to the 34 that noted slowed or suspended shipments in 2021. In 2021, 114 libraries responded that changes to processing were made, but 57 libraries indicated that these changes would not remain in place as a normal part of operation. And where 4 libraries noted that they updated workflows in 2021, 3 indicated such in 2023. The transition to a digital FDLP had not yet occurred at the time of the survey, but many libraries were already moving toward a digital-first model of collection development that had impacts on processing, both as it relates to tangible items and digital items and their lifecycle.

SURVEY RESPONSE	2021	2023
Materials cleaned/quarantined	21	1
Social Distancing/other measure	5	0
Suspended or slowed shipments/ receiving/processing	34	0
Changed selection/e-reference	9	0
Building closed	10	0
Virtual work/ from home	16	2
Staff changes	21	3
Self-checkout	1	0
Changed process	13	0
No change	1	0
Nothing related to processing will remain in place	57	0
Updated processing workflows	4	3

SURVEY RESPONSE	2021	2023
Shift to digital items	15	0
Deselection of print	9	0
Shift to remote work, including processing	1	2
Replace rather than repair	1	0
Fewer staff processing items	2	0
Increased sanitary considerations/ procedures	1	1

Q04 [1][g]- If “Public access” please explain:

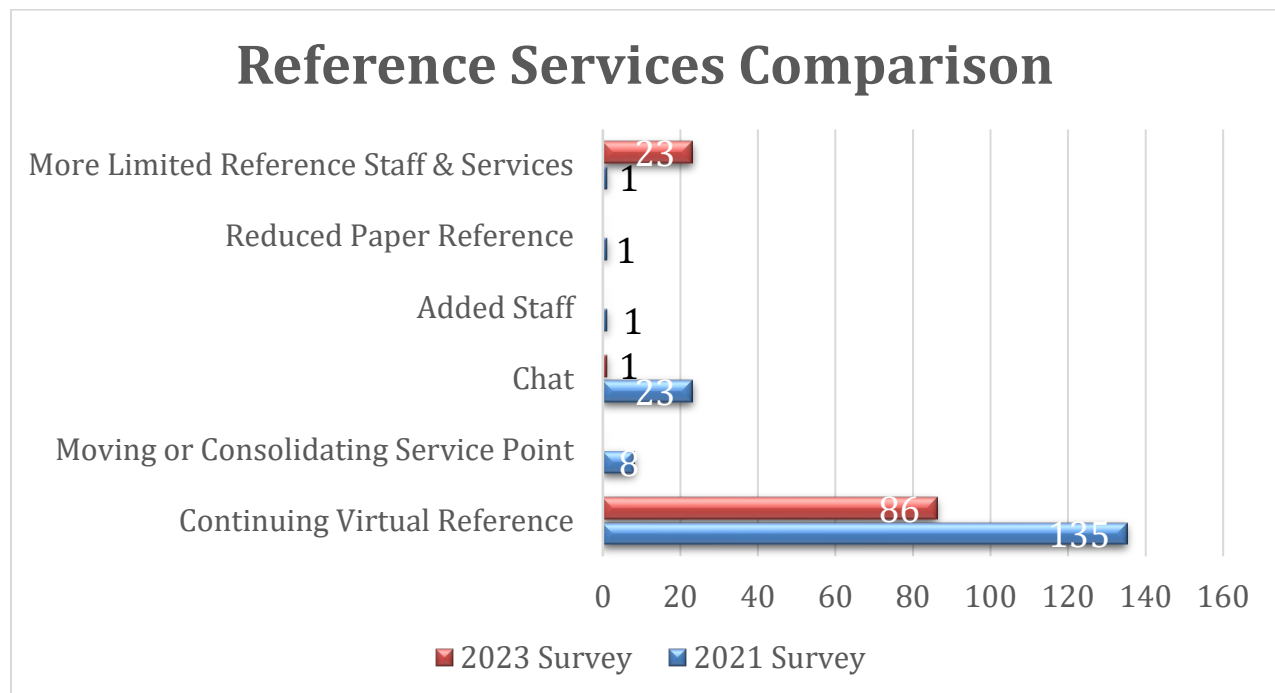
The comparative responses for public access between 2021 and 2023 raise unexpected questions, as they indicate that COVID-19 policies that restrict public access to collections increased between 2021 and 2023. The responses suggest a significant increase in libraries with limited or restricted public access, up from 13 in 2021 to 45 in 2023. The results similarly show an increase in amended access hours, with 8 libraries reporting changed hours in 2021 to 27 such reports in 2023. The Working Group suspects these data points, though compelling, are ultimately misleading. No libraries in the 2023 survey explicitly indicate that these changes are maintained COVID-19 era policies, and it is possible these changes are related to larger and potentially unrelated trends within librarianship (e.g. budget limitations, unfilled positions, etc.). It is also possible respondents in 2021 under-reported limited public access or reported it in other sections of the 2021 Survey. The increase in overall responses and the unexpected implication that COVID era access restrictions have somehow increased since 2021 may reflect current practice in libraries, whether COVID-related or not. It also may be attributed to differences in the way responses were categorized and analyzed between the 2021 and 2023 surveys.



Q04 [1][h]- If “Reference Services” please explain:

Respondents were able to enter their own responses. There was a significant difference in the response in 2023, and, as a result, a correlation with previous survey results was less direct. The categories in the table to the right are based on the 2021 responses for direct comparison. The category of More limited reference staff and services has combined responses that indicate a variety of reductions to access.

2023 responses included in more limited reference staff and services	
Reduction in drop-in	1
Reduced access/ in person	2
No reference desk	6
Appointment needed	9
Reduced reference hours	5

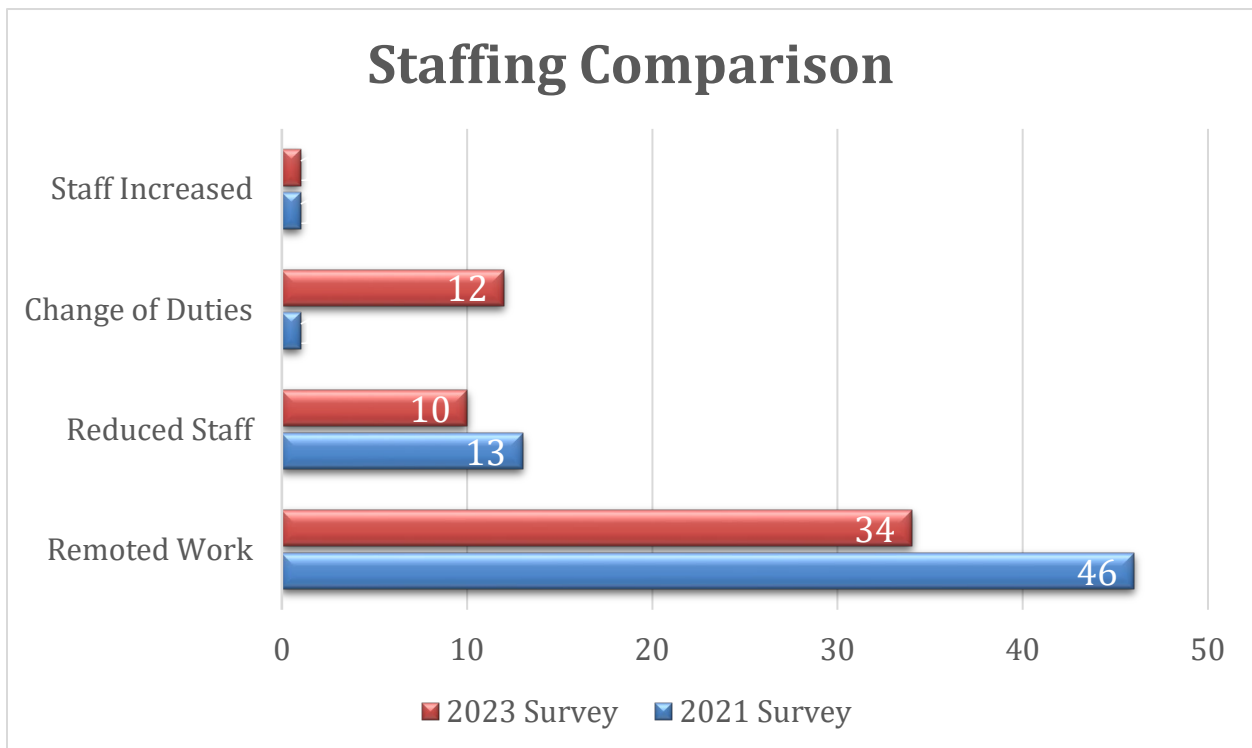


Q04 [1][i]- If "Shelving" please explain:

Comparing the 2021 responses to the 2023 responses, although the two survey years’ qualitative input did not match well, the main similarity seems to be that during the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries made changes to shelving locations. This might have meant moving to closed stacks, consolidating within a building or between two different locations, changing circulation practices, or reducing available shelving. Additionally, some libraries maintained stricter sanitation practices from 2021 to 2023. However, adjustments and changes in shelving are standard at all times in library maintenance, so it may not be valid to state that shelving changes were definitely a result of the pandemic.

Q04 [1][j]- If "Staffing" please explain:

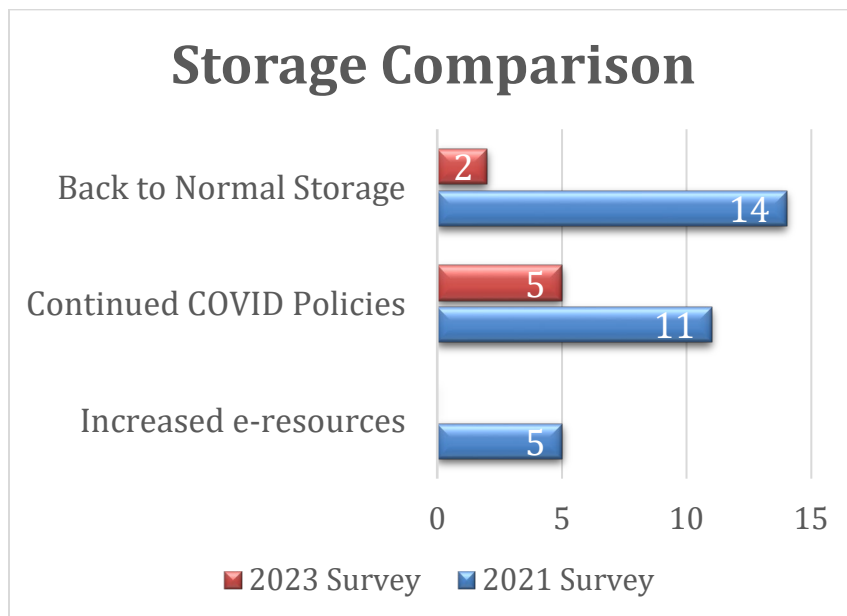
Of 1,045 responses, 318 said no new policies or procedures were implemented. One hundred and thirteen (113) out of 1,045 indicated staffing as an area where "your institution implemented new policies and/or procedural changes as a result of COVID-19". However, 47 of those 113 state that the changes made to staffing are no longer in place. Of those 113, the comments mentioned increased telework as a major impact of COVID policies in the area of staffing, although there are many comments that indicate this is not an option for all library staff. There are also many references to staff cuts and positions not being filled after a staff member departure, and a few references to cutting student workers completely. The increase in the number of responses that describe a change in staff positions due to COVID may be attributed to a difference in the way the responses were categorized and analyzed between 2021 and 2023.



Q04 [1][k]- If "Storage" please explain:

Of the 1,045 responses, 318 indicated no new policies or procedures implemented. Few responses (7) indicated storage as an area where "your institution implemented new policies and/or procedural changes as a result of COVID-19." However, 2 of those 7 state that the changes made to FDLP collection storage are no longer in practice. Therefore, 5 continued COVID storage policies. Of those 7, the comments contributed mention FDLP publications in offsite storage, new processing space allocated in the facility and changes to acquisitions delivery schedules due to backlogs that developed during the COVID

period, and weeding of the tangible FDLP collection, which is assumed to be mentioned in relationship to the amount of storage space required as the collection diminishes in size.



Q04 [1][I]- If "Other" please explain:

These 47 replies from the 2023 Biennial Survey mirror many of the 69 “Other” responses from the 2021 Survey. In both cases, respondents report the continued use of newly installed equipment like lockers, barriers, plexiglass, hand sanitation devices, and drop boxes. Both Biennial Surveys similarly reflect a trend toward limiting direct interactions between staff and the public. In the 2023 survey, as in the 2021 survey, the overall thread is that libraries continue to utilize the changes to physical spaces made during the pandemic, presumably because the equipment has already been purchased and the related policies implemented, e.g., pickup lockers and contactless check-out.

The Other section does not lend itself to quantitative examination because the replies are all over the place. Only 3 libraries in 2021, for example, indicate limited access in this section, but many more indicate limited access in other sections of the survey. The other section does, however, provide insights into general trends.

Recommendations

Upon analyzing the responses to the 2023 Biennial Survey as well as comparing them to the initial 2021 survey results, it is clear that the impact of COVID-19 mitigation policies continues to have a lasting impact on FDL operations and libraries. The findings from the

second iteration of this survey shows that long-term trends have developed and are continuing to shape the FDLP landscape.

The Working Group on the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Federal Depository Library Access, Collections, and Services has three recommendations for Council's consideration to transmit to GPO:

- Monitor the potential trend of decreasing physical access to depository libraries and consider updating the legal requirements regarding public access accordingly, with appropriate flexibilities for the digital FDLP.
- Increase outreach efforts and guidance to depository library staff, whose roles and responsibilities are shifting and still evolving. This will provide them with some assurances, and it will help GPO gain a clearer understanding of the needs and challenges depository libraries are facing.
- Revisit and update the COVID questions for the upcoming 2025 Biennial Survey to better reflect the current needs and nature of the FDLP in a digital and post-COVID world. The Working Group welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with GPO on devising the questions.

Appendix I

2023 Biennial Survey Questions 4[1] and 4[2]

Q4(1). In which areas, if any, has your institution implemented new policies and/or procedural changes as a result of COVID-19? Select all that apply, and if you select an answer, please provide details in the text box. *

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collection maintenance and weeding | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instructional and Educational Services | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interlibrary Loan Services | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Item selection / FDLP selection profile | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach Services | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Processing | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public access | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reference services | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelving | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staffing | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Storage | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes were made due to COVID-19 but now back to pre-COVID policies | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No new policies or procedures implemented | |

Q4(2). Which of these implemented changes, if any, do you anticipate will remain part of your normal operations? *

Appendix II

The expansive amount of data collected from Q04 of the 2023 Biennial Survey, coupled with the inclusion of data fields from the [Federal Depository Library Directory](#), provides numerous possibilities for comparing and contrasting responses beyond what the Working Group reported. The ability to generate findings by state, library type, and library size, provides opportunities to create reports of local interest. Additionally, there is now the opportunity to compare data from the 2021 Biennial Survey to the 2023 Biennial Survey data allowing for even more comparisons and exploration.

With the release of the Working Group's first report, R and RStudio were selected as the software solution that would allow members of the community to directly analyze the data file themselves. R and RStudio were selected because they are open-source software, comparatively easy to use, they provide a range of search options, and there is a large amount of free online training and support from the R community. Continuing with this use of R and RStudio, the Working Group enlisted the invaluable assistance of Ms. Andee Oberosler, a student in the Data Analytics program at Maryville University. Ms. Oberosler developed an R Shiny application that allows exploration of the Biennial Survey COVID-19 data from both the 2021 and 2023 Biennial Survey independently while also providing the ability to compare and analyze the results across both surveys collectively.

The development of this application simplifies data use by enabling users with minimal R experience to easily download and manipulate survey data, making it more accessible and user-friendly for a broader range of the depository community.

In addition to developing the application which allows users to upload the survey data directly into the application environment, apply various filters, and then save the resulting data in a .csv file, Ms. Oberosler also created a read.me file that provides directions on using the application.

The application file, read.me instructions, and the Excel file containing the 2021 and 2023 survey data can be [accessed here](#).