

Challenges that Limit Access to Federal Government Information: Learning from Focus Groups

A Report of the
Unique Challenges, Underserved Populations,
and Federal Depository Libraries
Subcommittee of the Depository Library Council

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Introduction

Depository Library Council's Subcommittee on Unique Challenges, Underserved Populations, and Federal Depository Libraries (UCUP) was established in January 2022, to study affinity groups and offer solutions for depository libraries with unique needs and challenges that impact their ability to provide access to depository resources. Eight¹ segments were researched, and results of the 2023 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries were reviewed for depository libraries in those segments. It was learned they faced many of the same challenges. Following up on this work, UCUP explored those challenges further through a series of focus groups.

Focus groups were conducted with the Federal depository library community over the course of the spring and summer of 2024. The purpose was to discuss best practices and possible solutions to challenges, so the Government Publishing Office is better positioned to offer support for these issues that depository librarians face every day. Each focus group addressed one of the six different challenges that were identified as limiting access to Federal depository library collections and government information:

- Budget and Administration
- Digital Divide
- Language Barriers
- Mistrust of Government
- Outreach
- Training

Methodology

During the fall 2023, UCUP considered frameworks to explore the common challenges facing the affinity groups, which resulted in six focus groups. Each had their own team to investigate. The topics were budget & administration, digital divide, language barriers, mistrust of government, outreach, and training.

To recruit participants, an [FDLP News Alert](#) was posted on March 26, 2024. And there was additional targeted outreach. Eighteen respondents completed the form indicating which focus groups were of interest to them; some indicated interest in multiple groups. Based on participants' responses, the focus groups were held in order of interest, from most to least responses. Two focus group sessions were held for some topics.

An email invitation, which included a copy of the questions² specific to the focus group,

¹ Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians, Community Colleges, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Rural Libraries, Small Public Libraries, Tribal College, and Urban Libraries.

² Questions for the focus groups are in [Appendix I](#).

was sent to each interested respondent. All focus groups were held virtually between May and September 2024. At the beginning of each focus group, participants were informed that the session was being recorded and all provided consent. The recordings were for analytical use by UCUP members only, and participants were assured that any reporting of the focus groups would be anonymized. On the technical side, sound checks were made and instructions for activating live captions were shared. There were at least three UCUP members in attendance — a facilitator, a timekeeper, and technical support.

Though focus groups had unique scopes and questions, a uniform approach was used. Each focus group was a 60-minute session using slides to outline the purpose of the UCUP project, the scope of the specific focus group, definitions for a common understanding, and the questions. Seven minutes were allotted for discussion of each question. Any extra time at the end was used as an opportunity for participants to elaborate on any responses. Participants also were given the email addresses of the facilitator and the timekeeper in case they wanted to provide additional information or thoughts after the focus group session.

UCUP conducted the data analysis in two phases over an eight-month period. First, each focus group team reviewed the data from their own focus group. Transcripts, chat logs, and AI-generated summaries were reviewed, and recordings were viewed to identify key challenges, common themes, and actionable recommendations. In the second phase, UCUP members synthesized the findings of the focus group teams to identify general findings and recommendations.

Focus Group Summaries

Summary of findings of the focus groups are below. All the questions posed during the sessions are in [Appendix I](#).

Budget & Administration

The purpose of this focus group was to discuss the impact of budget cuts and staff reductions on government document collections and services in Federal depository libraries. Key issues identified include the elimination of dedicated government documents positions, increased workloads, and the shift to digital-only collections. The participants noted that many libraries are struggling with reduced hours, limited community services, and the challenge of maintaining historic collections. The transition to digital-first models raises concerns about the sustainability of physical collections and the expertise needed to manage them. Participants highlighted the need for better support and recognition of the value of government documents in academic and public libraries.

Digital Divide

The Digital Divide team sought to understand how the digital divide impacts library services for Federal depository patrons and the methods libraries have developed to overcome these challenges. The team used Education Connection’s definition of the digital divide as “the gap between those who have access to information and communication technologies and those who don’t.”

Focus group participants identified several digital divide-related barriers. Chief among these were economic disparities and lack of civic literacy on the part of patrons. Other barriers included lack of technology skills and digital literacy, educational disparities, and lack of access to technology. Participants also noted that some patrons do not trust electronic government information and prefer printed materials.

Participants indicated that for patrons who have difficulty accessing electronic government information, they use a variety of approaches depending on the patron’s need. For example, they print out small quantities of pages to mail to patrons (which may not work if they need a large document). There is a need for print on demand services and fast interlibrary loan fulfillment to serve patrons who are not able to use devices to use government information.

Focus group participants gave several examples of successful partnerships that could be expanded to address the digital divide. For example, academic libraries have partnered with IT departments to increase loanable technology. A state library partnered with public libraries, academic libraries, and other state agencies to broaden access to resources and training. Partnering with community groups is another way for libraries to expand digital inclusion.

Recent scholarship on the digital divide has discussed the role of libraries in promoting digital inclusion. For example, Grimes and Porter enumerated four strategies for digital inclusion: 1) digital navigators, 2) community networks, 3) facilitated access, and 4) community organizing and advocacy.³ In terms of Federal government information, this framework aligns well with the Digital Divide focus group’s findings. Digital navigators, who are trusted guides who help library users learn how to connect to the internet and use devices, can teach Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) patrons how to connect to electronic government information. Community networks can improve digital infrastructure and have also included a digital literacy component. Facilitated access

³ Grimes, Neil D, and William Porter. “Closing the Digital Divide Through Digital Equity: The Role of Libraries and Librarians.” *Public Library Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2024): 307–38.
doi:10.1080/01616846.2023.2251348.

lowers barriers to using technology. For example, library staff may facilitate patrons' access to services such as telehealth or government services. Libraries can participate in community organizing for digital inclusion by providing expertise, leadership, and space. The challenge is to figure out how libraries can fit digital inclusion initiatives into their already packed workloads.

What is the role of GPO in digital inclusion?

The results of the focus groups reveal three critical areas where GPO can significantly advance digital inclusion: distance education outreach, print-on-demand services, and government information librarian support.

- For distance education students, who represent a growing demographic facing unique information access challenges, GPO should expand digital marketing strategies by leveraging social media platforms like Instagram and developing targeted content specifically tailored to online learners.
- The persistent need for print-on-demand services underscores the importance of creating a comprehensive system for government publications, particularly for individuals with limited digital access, which can be achieved through strategic partnerships with libraries and commercial printing services.
- Additionally, the findings strongly support continuing to empower government information librarians through the FDL, emphasizing free access to government information training and resources as a cornerstone initiative.

By focusing on these interconnected areas—digital outreach, flexible publication delivery, and professional support—GPO can more effectively bridge digital divides, ensuring that government information remains accessible to all, regardless of their technological capabilities or geographical location.

Language Barriers

The intent of this focus group was to obtain a more thorough understanding of the challenges and impacts that language has on the ability of non-native English speakers to access a Federal depository library's government information resources. Further, the focus group sought discussion to learn how libraries are successfully addressing these access challenges, identify best practices, and discover other solutions.

Communication and Cultural Background of Patron

There are various communication challenges to overcome when conducting reference interviews with non-native English speakers. Many reference staff members do not speak multiple languages, and librarians with multilingual capabilities are not always available. Additionally, informal language used by library staff may be misinterpreted.

However, not all challenges are directly related to the spoken language. One's cultural background can be a major influence on how they relate to others. For example, one may prefer to interact with a staff member of the same gender; or, certain gestures may lead to misunderstandings between library staff and patrons who are not native English speakers.

Different cultures experience varying levels of trust in the government that are ingrained. Some patrons may have had negative experiences with government agencies. These experiences may affect their willingness to seek government information and can instill a generalized mistrust.

Staff training is crucial, but it does not have to be exclusively about learning other languages. Cultural awareness and having a better understanding of communities the library serves are also very beneficial. It was encouraging that election cycles and political rhetoric were not a major issue in the focus group's discussions. It was noted that mistrust of government is not a significant issue in state libraries, as patrons understand the government context.

Challenges of Resource Availability

The focus group participants possessed a myriad of diverse experiences. One participant shared an experience with a non-native English speaker in a prison library who needed the U.S. Code in Spanish, which is not officially available. Another individual approached the question from a different perspective, focusing on the challenges of limited resources, qualified instructors, and technology in language learning. However, the limited availability of government information in languages other than English poses a significant barrier to access.

Another participant shared that non-English speakers frequently request legal, tax, and citizenship resources in Spanish. However, due to the numerous Spanish dialects, misunderstandings can happen, even within the same country. The availability of Federal government resources in other languages varies geographically with different languages being more prevalent in different regions. Libraries need to adapt to the specific language needs of their communities.

Finding information quickly and accurately is especially challenging for non-English speakers, as government documents often use formal language and terminology that can be difficult for non-native speakers to understand. The reliability of translations is a major concern, especially with legal or technical documents. Libraries face challenges in ensuring that translated documents are both accurate and accessible.

Mistrust of Government

This subgroup examined how a mistrust of Government affects the use of depository library collections (and Government information generally) and sought to learn to what extent this issue is a challenge and how librarians are addressing it to help their patrons with their Government information needs.

When it comes to trusting the government, focus group participants observed a variety of beliefs among their users. One participant from an academic library indicated that because they are a land grant institution, the university and their users rely on federal government agencies for services whether they want to or not. They also noted that many of their users are veterans who see a distinction between “government” and Government. Additionally, this group of users and others differentiate between government workers and elected officials, becoming frustrated when the latter make national news for negative reasons.

Alternatively, another participant from an academic library commented that their staff and librarians seem to be neutral on their trust in the government because overall political ideology is not discussed. They do notice an uptick in requests for assistance in locating government information during election seasons (e.g., campaign finance information) and observe that students and the public become agitated when authoritative government information fails to align with the information they wanted or were expecting to find.

Another participant added there is also the belief that if the information personally benefits them, they trust that information and those sharing it whereas they tend to reject information that goes against their political views. Agencies are trusted more than “the people in Washington.”

Another topic of discussion centered on how library staff determine if their users trust government publications as reliable information sources. One participant, whose institution is part of state government, commented that their users are already aware that they are the main source for federal and state government information. They have had no pushback against overt distrust about using government publications; in fact, this participant continued that sometimes their users and even the public-facing librarians are unaware they’re using government information, such as census materials.

A participant from an academic library echoed the sentiment of students using government information sources without explicit knowledge of their origins. Conversely, another participant from an academic library remarked that their professors ask students to look for and/or use government information when completing assignments. Due to education tracks at another academic institution, another participant said that using

government information is a given, so no mistrust is observed. Freshmen and students whose education tracks fall outside areas covered by most government information may require a more formal introduction to these resources.

The preferred format of government information seems to vary based on user age, what the information is or is being used for, and whether users have access to computers with internet access. The participant from state government shared that in one instance, a user was concerned that a digitally archived state government document could be hacked and altered. They were able to show the user the original print document and compare it to the digital item which managed to provide reassurance. Overall, they feel the format matters less when it comes to trusting the information; the distrust is directed more at specific agencies.

One participant from an academic library reported that they notice users selecting the format based on their personal preference and what they need the information for. This participant explained that some users find it easier to fill out physical forms as opposed to entering information digitally. Similarly, some users have an easier time reading printed materials than reading the same information on a computer screen.

Another academic library participant shared that their students prefer using digital information because of its convenience and constant availability and accessibility. They noted that students have the option to print any of the materials should they have a need for a tangible copy. At this institution, the convenience of digitally available government information is a selling point for both students and faculty. The preference for digital information was also cited by another academic library participant; however, they have patrons lacking computer access who still ask for materials in print.

In terms of what information users seek but are unable to find, the most common response was statistical information and data. This is mainly due to the complicated nature and frequent reorganization of agency websites. The constant redesigning of any website where government information lives is an impediment to users conducting their own research.

Also, two participants from different academic libraries lamented their users' inability to locate government information that was not originally distributed through the FDLP. Related, users' inability to locate older material—especially material published pre-1970—was a concern shared by most participants. Additionally, the participant from state government shared that their users are typically unaware of which agency would have been responsible for collecting, publishing, or distributing the information they are seeking.

Overall, participants of this focus group reported little vocalization from users regarding their trust when using government information. Participants observed more mistrust directed at politicians and agencies as opposed to information coming from the federal government. This could be in part due to users being unaware that the information they are using was produced by the government. Another hindrance to understanding users' feelings toward government information is that library staff are infrequently asked for assistance locating government information, especially when users' beliefs oppose that of the government. Since many users conduct all their research online, it's nearly impossible to know whether users experience success with their searches unless library staff are contacted directly.

Participants lament being able to convey to users that search engines and generative artificial intelligence programs can be unreliable. Participants from academic libraries teach students how to spot misinformation as part of information literacy classes. They desire to learn about additional strategies they can impart to users to help them determine that the information in front of them has been verified and unaltered. Being able to connect with other library staff to share ideas about what they are doing to provide reliable information and/or help their users assess what is reliable information would help government information professionals bolster their skills and educate their users.

Outreach

This focus group's scope was to gather information on the difficulties of serving infrequent or undeserved library users, and the library's services or programs designed to overcome those challenges. It included all libraries that offer outreach programs to their library community. The questions asked looked at challenges and solutions to provide either in-person or virtual outreach to underserved populations.

During these focus group discussions participants discussed challenges and solutions for outreach services to underserved populations in federal depository libraries. Key issues included the digital divide, information literacy, language barriers, funding, staffing, including succession planning, external pressures from legislation, and building infrastructure, parking, and technology barriers. Effective outreach strategies used by participants include social media, collaborative efforts with other departments within the library or university, the use of screen recording and sharing technology, and proactive engagement.

In one library virtual outreach faces challenges in marketing and engagement, with solutions being asynchronous content and QR codes. Other challenges to virtual outreach include reduced staff and website control issues, which are exacerbated by a flat budget.

Additionally, the importance of maintaining and updating digital resources and guides was emphasized. Suggestions for improvement include more proactive outreach, better marketing, and potential involvement from the US Government Publishing Office (GPO) in direct public engagement.

Underserved groups identified include LGBTQ+ communities, Native Americans, international students, immigrant populations, digitally underserved populations, including those without access to computers or cell phones, and the homeless.

Training

The Training team coordinated two virtual focus group sessions to gather qualitative feedback about the challenges, needs, and preferences of Government information librarians working in underserved communities or with affinity groups. The aim was to understand librarians' training needs in order to tailor training programs to their specific requirements.

Participants frequently referenced the value of existing GPO training resources, such as FDLP Academy webinars and Library Resource Guides,⁴ in addressing their day-to-day training needs. During both Training focus group sessions, these were cited as providing critical support.

Discoveries and Thoughts to Share

- Librarians expressed strong confidence in using online government information but noted that even experienced professionals struggle with keeping up as agency websites evolve.
- Participants want support identifying “high-value” government publications—materials that are especially accessible and useful to general audiences or undergraduates (e.g., former Y 3.Y4 ‘pro/con’ booklets).
- The lack of visibility and centralized access to tools like MetaLib, CGP, and data portals like science.gov or data.gov was a recurring theme. A centralized “one-stop” training portal was a widely supported idea.
- There is a deep need for training on cultural competence, especially for working with international students, LGBTQ+ communities, and individuals experiencing homelessness.

Challenges encountered

- Digital Divide: Both internet access and digital literacy gaps hinder patron access in rural and lower-income areas.

⁴ Formerly known as LibGuides.

- Lack of Awareness: Many patrons, and even library staff, are unaware of the breadth of government information or how to access it.
- Structural Limitations: Some libraries are siloed or under-resourced, making collaboration, outreach, or staff-wide training difficult.
- Political Pressures: Participants in politically conservative states shared that DEI-related terminology in training and outreach can trigger backlash, limiting their ability to openly promote resources.
- Keeping Current: Many participants reported difficulty keeping up with changing interfaces, agency reorganizations, and discontinued print collections.
- Political climates in some states restrict language used in training and outreach (e.g., avoiding terms like “diversity,” “government,” or “gender”), which directly affects librarians’ ability to promote services and training effectively.

Discussion of Findings

UCUP learned that underserved populations and affinity groups are diverse and experience a range of barriers to using libraries in general as well as Government information. Consequently, a variety of approaches are necessary to improve access for underserved users. Some of the focus group findings may also be generalizable to all users, not just those from underserved populations. In addition, the issues identified by focus groups reflect challenges in libraries that go beyond the FDLP collection and services.

Respondents in several focus groups indicated that they wear many hats and Government information is not their primary focus. As a result, they lack expertise with Government information, and the lack of printed documents contributes to this unfamiliarity. Another effect of reduced staffing is that librarians must focus their efforts on the core constituency and there is less time to be concerned with the needs of non-affiliated users. In terms of underserved populations, staffing challenges and budget cuts may reduce the personnel resources available to respond to the needs of patrons who lack access to technology. In addition, librarians lack time to participate in training on Government information.

Mistrust of government was another theme that reached across focus groups. Some patrons expressed mistrust of Government information when it is not in a printed format. Furthermore, patrons who have had negative interactions with Government or who are primed to mistrust government in general may be reluctant to use FDLs or to access Government information.

To meet these varied challenges, depository librarians need support from GPO in the form of easily digestible training materials, toolkits, and off-the-shelf promotional materials. Beyond the FDLF, creating partnerships is another approach that some libraries have successfully used to address some of the challenges UCUP identified.

Avenues for Further Research

UCUP has reviewed relevant literature and analyzed results both from Biennial Surveys and from focus groups, but these methods of gathering information about underserved populations and FDLs have not included the users themselves. Having input from underserved users would enhance UCUP's understanding of their needs and barriers to serving them in FDLs and these users would likely be able to suggest additional solutions to the challenges outlined by UCUP.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Council recognizes that many users of Government information continue to experience challenges related to the digital divide. It recommends that GPO consider developing print-on-demand services for FDLs, enabling them to provide Government information to users who cannot access digital documents or reside far from a Federal depository library. The Council further recommends that the GPO consider ways to support interlibrary loan services to ensure the availability of printed documents to underserved populations.

Recommendation 2

In a digital-first environment, Government information is accessed both within and outside of FDLs. To better accommodate underserved populations who may not visit FDLs, the Council recommends the GPO develop a toolkit for Government information in all formats that FDLs and the general public can utilize. The toolkit should include promotional content suitable for social media and online use, as well as the tangible materials currently available.

Recommendation 3

To increase the visibility and accessibility of all training materials available on the FDLF website, the Council recommends that GPO establish a training portal to provide a single entry point for all of its training resources, including FDLF Academy presentations, conference proceedings, and Library Resource Guides.

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions

Budget & Administration

The focus of the Budget & Administration topic is to explore how libraries are meeting the challenges related to reduction and cuts in budget, administration, and staffing, particularly as it relates to depository library resources and services.

1. Has your library experienced any budget cuts and/or staff reductions? If so, please describe.
2. What have been the cumulative effects of these reductions?
3. How have community services and materials been affected by these budget cuts/staff reductions?
4. What might happen if the current trend (in cuts) continues?
5. How has your depository staff been affected by budget /staff reductions?
6. How might the shift to a digital-first FDLP impact your library's budget or staffing?

Digital Divide

The aim of this focus group is to understand how the digital divide impacts library services for Federal depository patrons and the methods libraries have developed to overcome these challenges.

1. Rank the following barriers related to the digital divide in your library and community.
 - Access to technology
 - Skills and digital literacy
 - Civic literacy
 - Infrastructure
 - Economic disparities
 - Educational disparities
 - Geographic disparities
2. How does your library actively engage with the community to understand and address digital inclusion needs?
3. What successful partnerships have you established, and how have they contributed to addressing the digital divide?
4. Are there any notable success stories or positive impacts you can share regarding how your library has made a difference in bridging the digital divide?
5. What future plans or strategies does your library have for improving digital access and literacy?

6. Are there specific demographic groups or community segments that you find particularly challenging to reach with digital inclusion efforts?
7. Have you developed ways to provide access to electronic depository materials for patrons who have difficulty accessing online content?

Language Barriers

This focus group seeks to obtain a more detailed understanding of how language impacts the ability to access the library's Government Information Resources, and how libraries are addressing these challenges.

1. How do different customs and cultural challenges, such as understanding humor or other social cues, affect the ability of your non-native and non-English speaking library users to access services, especially government information?
2. How do the communication challenges and other issues of speaking a language other than English affect a user's ability to access Government Information in your library?
3. What is the main obstacle for non-English speakers learning English in your community or library?
4. What government resources and in what languages are non-English speakers looking for in your library?
5. What challenges does your library have in providing government documents in other languages that non-English speakers can use?
6. How does mistrust of government play a role for those who speak other languages and their ability to access and use government information?

Mistrust of Government

This subgroup will examine how a mistrust of Government affects the use of depository library collections (and Government information generally). Further, it seeks to learn to what extent this issue is a challenge and how librarians are addressing it to help their patrons with their Government information needs.

1. How trustful of the Government is your staff? Your library users?
2. How do you determine if your library users trust government publications as reliable information resources?
3. Describe any indications that your library users trust printed publications over digital content, or digital content over printed publications.
4. What government information do your library users seek but cannot find? What key government information isn't getting to underserved communities?

Outreach

The outcome of this focus group is to understand and gain information on the difficulties of serving infrequent or underserved library users, and the library's services or programs designed to overcome those challenges.

1. Currently, which populations are considered underserved in your library community?
2. Have these populations been underserved for a long time or relatively recently?
3. What are some internal or external challenges to have in-person outreach programs?
4. What long-term or short-term solutions work for in-person outreach programs?
5. What are some internal or external challenges to having virtual outreach programs?
6. What long-term or short-term solutions work for virtual outreach programs?

Training

This focus group seeks to gather information about the challenges, needs, and preferences of Government information librarians working in underserved communities or with affinity groups, thereby helping GPO understand librarians' training needs and tailor training programs to their specific requirements.

1. What are the most common barriers or challenges you face when providing government information services in underserved communities or with affinity groups?
2. In your experience, what types of government information are most in demand by your user groups, and how can training programs better address those specific information needs?
3. How confident do you feel in navigating and utilizing online government resources, and what additional training or support would enhance your skills in this area?
4. Are there specific legal or policy-related aspects of government information that you feel would benefit from additional training, especially in the context of underserved communities or affinity groups?
5. How important do you think cultural competence and sensitivity are in providing government information services to diverse communities, and how can training programs enhance these aspects?
6. How do you currently gather feedback from patrons, and how do you use that feedback to improve your services?

Appendix II: Biennial Survey Reviews

Background

The Unique Challenges, Underserved Populations, and Federal Depository Libraries Subcommittee (UCUP) reviewed and compared the [2023 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries](#) (Biennial Survey) responses with those of the same libraries that made up the affinity groups that UCUP previously studied and included in its [first report](#) issued in March 2023⁵:

- Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians;
- Community Colleges;
- Hispanic-Serving Institutions;
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities;
- Rural Libraries;
- Small Public Libraries;
- Tribal College; and
- Urban Libraries.

Questions Reviewed and Compared

Questions about depository library challenges and plans were reviewed and compared. Libraries were asked to identify challenges or significant events they faced since the previous Biennial Survey. Similarly, libraries were asked to identify any major plans they have for the next two years. Additionally, a new question included on the 2023 Biennial Survey was reviewed. The Government Publishing Office accommodated UCUP's request that a question be asked about services provided for those who are not native English speakers. The text of these questions is below.

Findings

Challenges

Overall, with budget cuts, the FDLF can expect to see many more libraries reduce the size of their print collections, either as they transition to digital-only depository status or focus on weeding their tangible collections due to space constraints. A number of libraries identified space constraints as a challenge. In addition, many respondents indicated that they are challenged by budget reductions and staff reductions and turnover, leaving libraries with fewer people to do more. Experience with using government information and knowledge of the collection has been lost. In general, it appears that libraries are de-emphasizing government information in favor of other priorities. This trend suggests that the future FDLF will consist of a smaller number of libraries that have significant

⁵ The March 2023 UCUP report was partially based on data from the 2017, 2019, and 2021 Biennial Surveys.

collections and/or deep expertise in government information. As a result, the FDLP will have to increase marketing of its collections and the services of FDLs to non-FDLP libraries in unique communities serving underserved populations.

UCUP libraries are those in the FDLP in the categories of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (TCU/ANNH), rural libraries, urban libraries, and small public libraries. In-depth information about these categories and the methodologies used to identify these categories can be found in UCUP's 2023 report.

The 2023 report found that budget cuts, space constraints, and staffing reductions were the biggest challenges (Question 5 below) for FDLP UCUP libraries. The 2023 biennial survey confirmed these multi-year trends. For HBCUs, budget cuts were the most common area of concern, with 47.8% of the libraries reporting them, followed by space concerns (34.8%), and staffing changes (34.8%). For HSIs, staffing changes were the biggest concern (43.8%), followed by space constraints (23.9%), and budget cuts (22.7%). For TCU/ANNH libraries, staffing changes (41.6%) and budget cuts (33.3%) were the biggest areas of concern. For rural libraries, staffing changes (36.4%) were the biggest area of concern followed by space constraints (23.9%), and budget cuts (22.7%). Urban libraries identified staffing changes (38.5%) and space constraints (21.8%) as their biggest challenges, but 30% also noted that Question 5 was not applicable to them. Small public libraries reported that staffing changes (36.8%) and space constraints (15.8%) were the biggest areas of concern.

Major Plans

The 2023 report found that FDLP major plans for the program were weeding and training staff. Given the changes announced in 2023, the 2023 biennial survey also found a number of libraries planning to transition to a digital-only FDLP status. These three categories, plus “no plans” were the most common between the groups with nearly half of the libraries planning to weed their tangible government documents collection. For HBCUs, weeding the tangible collection (65.2%) and training staff in the use of U.S. government information (43.5%) were their major plans for 2023-2025. For HSIs, weeding (53.4%) and transitioning to a digital-only depository (28.8%) were their major plans. For TCU/ANNH libraries, training (33.3%) and weeding (25%) were their major plans although another 25% reported no major plans. For rural libraries, weeding (44.3%) and transitioning to a digital-only depository library (27.3%) were their major plans. Urban libraries identified weeding (52.9%), transitioning to a digital-only depository (27.6%), and training (23%) as their most frequent plans for the biennium. Another 23% reported that they didn't have major plans for their government documents collection or program. Small

public libraries reported that weeding (52.6%), training (28.9%), and transitioning to a digital-only depository (27.7%) were their major plans.

Language Services

The HBCUs reported very few language access accommodations with only 17.4% reporting that they provide finding aids or web pages in languages other than English. Notes include “the library has not had any non-English speaking users” and that there are no language accommodations “due to lack of staffing.”

Hispanic Serving Institutions in the FDLP noted more accommodations including 51.5% who hire people who speak multiple languages and 11.9% who translate finding aides and research guides. One library noted that “Most of the staff is bilingual. The ones who are not will ask a supervisor or colleague for assistance.” But others state that “no specific services for non-native English speakers are provided.” Many others replied none, N/A, or not at this time.

For urban libraries, the overwhelming response was in the “language access other” category with multiple answers of NA, None, “we do not provide...”, or “we need to work on this.” 31% of the urban FDLP libraries reporting providing finding aids/research guides in different languages. One library noted that “We do not currently offer services for non-English speakers, but we would be interested in receiving brochures or documents through GPO in Spanish.”

14.8% of rural libraries hire bilingual staff, the highest category of language accommodation, but the highest response rate was 73.9% to Language Access Other with the majority stating that they do not provide language accommodations.

On a brighter note, Small public libraries in the FDLP report a much higher level of language access projects with hiring people who speak multiple languages (42.1%) being the largest accessibility plan. The comments for the “language access other” category show a wide variety of language accommodations including interpreting services.

Text of Biennial Survey Questions

Challenges

What challenges or significant events have affected your FDLP operation in the last two years? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Budget cuts
- ☐ Cataloging project
- ☐ Collection move
- ☐ Facility issues (For example: burst pipes, mold growth, etc.)
- ☐ Facility renovation

- ☐ Natural disaster
- ☐ New patron services
- ☐ New training initiatives
- ☐ Preservation project
- ☐ Space constraints
- ☐ Staffing changes (please describe) Click or tap here to enter text.
- ☐ System migration
- ☐ Other:
- ☐ N/A

Major Plans

What are your library's major plans for the depository operation in the next two years?

Select all that apply.

- ☐ Conduct a preservation project
- ☐ Digitize U.S. Government publications
- ☐ Enter into a new Selective or Shared Housing Agreement to house regional copies at an alternate location
- ☐ Inventory tangible collections
- ☐ Move FDLP material to a new location
- ☐ Plan strategic community outreach
- ☐ Renovate facilities
- ☐ Retrospectively catalog U.S. Government publications
- ☐ Train library staff in the use of U.S. Government information
- ☐ Transition to a digital-only depository and discontinue receipt of future tangible depository material
- ☐ Weed tangible collections
- ☐ Do not have any plans
- ☐ Other. Please specify:

Language Services:

What services do you provide for those who are not native English speakers? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Finding aids/research guides in different languages
- ☐ Web pages in different languages
- ☐ Translating services for instruction sessions
- ☐ Document translating services
- ☐ Hire people who speak multiple languages
- ☐ Other. Please specify: