

SUPERINTENDENT OF DOCUMENTS
PUBLIC POLICY STATEMENT
9-2026

EFFECTIVE: XX/XX/2026

Supersedes

SOD 312

Effective: 01/28/2008

SUBJECT: Firsthand Investigations of Federal Depository Libraries

PURPOSE

To provide a framework to implement flexible and streamlined firsthand investigations of Federal depository libraries, as required by statute.

BACKGROUND

A provision of 44 U.S.C. § 1909 requires the Superintendent of Documents to make firsthand investigations of the conditions in Federal depository libraries for which need is indicated. The legal mandate for investigations is silent on what an investigation program requires, or what specific conditions indicate the need for an investigation.

Since 1895 when investigations were first required, they have been conducted in various ways – from the use of checklists that allowed a GPO inspector to visit multiple libraries in a day, to day-long visits at a library, to self-studies and public access assessments, and GPO inspection visits in conjunction with conferences and depository library events. Under the more recent investigation models, it often took a decade or more to evaluate all depositories because of the large number libraries in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP).

Today's depository libraries are diverse, providing access to a mix of print and digital content or access to only online content. Their collections may not be in the library, or they may have shared collection arrangements with one or more libraries. Most depository library coordinators have responsibilities beyond Government documents.

The FDLP requires firsthand investigations, but they must be flexible and streamlined. This policy will meet the firsthand investigation statutory requirement and also will be beneficial to and support modern Federal depository libraries.

POLICY

A “firsthand investigation” is an in-person or teleconference assessment of a library’s conditions and ability to meet the legal requirements of the FDLP using a rubric or checklist and data collected from or about the library.

Firsthand investigations take two different forms based on indicated need, as enumerated in LSCM standard operating procedures. They will be conducted as assessments or as more in-depth investigations. Assessments are spot-checks based on a sample of libraries. In-depth investigations are conducted when serious non-compliance issues are discovered.

The need for an investigation is evaluated using a list of criteria. Criteria include but are not limited to a library request for an assessment, complaints about a library’s service or management of the depository, or concerns about public access to a library’s depository collection or services.

Consulting with depository library staff to improve conditions and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of depository operations is part of firsthand investigations. In this effort, GPO staff work collaboratively with depository library coordinators to ensure their library meets the requirements of the FDLP Rules and Instructions.

If a depository library is unwilling or unable to meet the requirements of the FDLP, it will be removed from the list of depositories as described in 44 U.S.C. Sec. 1909. If a firsthand investigation uncovers serious program mismanagement or illegal treatment of federal property, a referral to the GPO Inspector General will be made.

APPLICATION

The Superintendent of Documents, through the Director of Library Services and Content Management, is responsible for ensuring depository libraries are compliant with the statutory provisions of the Federal Depository Library Program. Any exceptions to this policy must be authorized by the Superintendent of Documents.

APPROVED:

SCOTT MATHESON
Superintendent of Documents

Date