

# **Depository Libraries in a Time of Stay-at-Home Orders**

*Report of Depository Library Council's Open Forum  
April 22, 2020*

Depository Library Council  
Digital Only Depository Libraries Working Group

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## Digital Only Depository Libraries Working Group

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The recording, chat transcripts, and the slides from the Open Forum are available at:

<https://www.fdlp.gov/spring-2020-depository-library-council-virtual-meeting>

## INTRODUCTION

As the 2020 Spring Meeting of the Depository Library Council (DLC) neared, we found ourselves in the midst of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic. Many states had issued stay-at-home orders, and libraries of all types faced what is likely one of the biggest operational changes they have ever experienced. It was determined to scale back the DLC meeting to only address Council business, and to have an open forum. The other planned programs would become webinars delivered to the community through the spring and summer months.

The DLC wanted to hear from the depository library community and to provide an opportunity for them to share their stories of how they were working, facing challenges, and coping during this anything but normal time. One hour, or 25%, of the meeting was devoted to the open forum: *Depository Libraries in a Time of Stay-at-Home Orders*. The community willingly spoke up to address the five questions that were posed to them.

Superintendent of Documents Laurie Hall asked that the Digital Only Depository Libraries Working Group convene to review the Open Forum recording and chat transcripts and provide a summary and report of the findings from the Open Forum. This report stems from that request.

## SETTING THE STAGE

Nearly 500 people logged in to the DLC meeting, with 67% of attendees staying for the entire four hour meeting. The average login time was 190 minutes or a little over three hours. There were just over 400 people in attendance at the start of the Open Forum. This was the first meeting of this size for which attendees were not totally reliant upon using chat to communicate. While several attendees took the opportunity to speak, the chat box activity was a constant stream of comments.

During the Open Forum there was a mix of polls and discussion questions to which attendees could respond. To obtain a very general overview of libraries' situations, the Open Forum began with this poll:

My library is ...

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open as usual                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Open only for staff to work             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open with reduced hours                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Closed, but providing services remotely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open, but serving only primary clientele | <input type="checkbox"/> Closed                                  |

There were 406 attendees at the time the poll was launched. Responses were received from 54% or 218 people. Nobody indicated their library was open as usual, and five indicated their libraries were closed. Of those who participated, the scenario with the most responses, 88% or 192, was "Closed, but providing services remotely." There was a significant drop to the next most received response, "Open only for staff to work" with 14 or 6% of responses. This was followed by "Open

with reduced hours" with 4 or 2% of responses, and "Open, but serving only primary clientele" with 3 or 1% of responses.

Five questions were asked during the Open Forum. Three of the questions had associated polls. This allowed approximately 9 minutes of discussion per question. Each question had a facilitator who spurred the discussion and followed comments in the chat box. The questions and facilitators were:

1. What are some of the new and creative ways that you and your library have been able to offer services and access in this new remote environment?  
Facilitator: Alicia Kubas, University of Minnesota (DLC)
2. Due to the limitations imposed by workplace access restrictions and teleworking, how have your non-public service workflows been impacted?  
Facilitator: Will Stringfellow, Vanderbilt University (DLC)
3. How has the coronavirus affected the way you communicate with the people you serve, supervise, coworkers, supervisors, etc.?  
Facilitator, Celina McDonald, University of Maryland (DLC)
4. How are you and your colleagues maintaining calm and coping with social isolation?  
Facilitator: Jane Canfield, Pontificia Universidad Católica, PR (DLC)
5. As you continue to provide access to and services for government information under unprecedented circumstances, what else can GPO do to support you and your work?  
Facilitator: Cynthia Etkin, Government Publishing Office (GPO)

## QUESTION BY QUESTION FINDINGS

### 1. PUBLIC SERVICES

To slow the spread of the pandemic, libraries of all types have closed their doors to the public. These closures impacted what services and access libraries could offer, but it also inspired many libraries to creatively think about how they can still serve their patrons from afar. To find out more about the services being offered by libraries in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), attendees were asked:

***What are some of the new and creative ways that you and your library have been able to offer services and access in this new remote environment?***

A review of the Open Forum recording and the chat transcript yielded 66 responses to this first question. Attendees shared what their libraries are doing, and what they are doing specifically related to their depository services and collections. Many responses applied to both of these orientations. These approaches to viewing the responses are used to categorize their innovative services: 1) Public Services Specific to the FDLP, 2) Public Services Offered by the Library, and 3) Overlapping Services. The public services offered by the library relate primarily to access and education.

### **Public Services Specific to the FDLP**

- Created online digital collection to share Government documents maps with classes.
- Creating more LibGuides.
- Updating library websites, including more links to government documents, including Census, Federal Trade Commission, and more.
- Created a home video utilizing Kids Census activity book.
- Providing assistance to students.
- Embedded librarians in online courses.
- Searching and data entry to help with Needs & Offers for FDLP Exchange (remote work).
- Providing one-on-one appointment via Hangouts for Patent & Trademark Resource Center, Small Business, Non-Profit and student customers.
- Cataloging and holdings cleanup projects.
- Ordered free posters from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on hand-washing.

### **Public Services Offered by the Library**

- Ordering and shipping materials directly to faculty members.
- Providing more resources online, blog posts, and children's story time.
- Providing online children's story time; some conducted in multiple languages. Chinese was specifically mentioned.
- Partnering with Vital Sources and other agencies to provide access to textbooks.
- Expanded online access to databases ordinarily available for "library use only" and received over 1700 applications for library accounts.
- Giving and renewing library cards via telephone.
- New media sent to residences instead of library and digitizing that material to stream over the course management system.
- Checking out laptops to students until the Fall Quarter.
- Making face shields for first responders using robot (3D printers).
- Library's radio station remains on the air.
- Access to the library's TV studio provided the setting for the city Mayor to record daily updates.
- Offering more virtual programming with authors, local organizations, and museums.
- Increasing use of social media with Live Reader's Advisory, at-home craft sessions.
- Created videos on how to look up mock ballots for elections and voting information.
- Providing online tutoring for K- 12 students.
- Library personnel reassigned to assist other agencies:
  - Health Department Covid-19 tracing
  - Staffing local government call centers and answering Covid-19 hotlines to help people get tested
  - Distributing and collecting application for services like unemployment and SNAP
  - Distributing food to local schools and seniors

### **Overlapping Services**

- Providing online and email reference assistance
- Using HathiTrust for temporary access to e-books, government documents, etc.
- Providing social media chats, blogs, tutorials , etc. for reference
- Using social media for creating My Plate discussions, cooking demos, food activities at home, and cookbook recipe challenges.
- Offering virtual programming with authors, local organizations and museums.
- Created a mask making program using the library's laser cutter to make kits, and including CDC instructions in each pack.
- Providing curbside pick-up and check-out for faculty and students.
- Teaching library courses online.
- Zoom references, research appointments, and Practicing Kindness weekly sessions including cooking and making pop-up books
- Offering home delivery of materials.

## 2. TECHNICAL SERVICES

During this unprecedented time many libraries have responded by limiting access to library buildings to certain staff or in many cases no staff. Due to this, many library staff are now teleworking and libraries in general have shifted the focus to providing access and services remotely. While library services are one aspect, depository libraries have a significant amount of work outside of providing services to patrons. This second question sought to learn if and how technical services operations have changed:

***Due to the limitations imposed by workplace access restrictions and teleworking, how have your non-public service workflows been impacted?***

This discussion question yielded 114 responses. Upon review of the Open Forum recording and the discussion chat transcript, the following trends were noticed:

- Many libraries have implemented a hold on print orders, and moved to purchasing only eBooks or plan to do so in the near future. Not being able to access the print collection, the practice of collection review has been impacted. This has led to realization and/or appreciation of how important digitization is now more than ever. Some have taken this opportunity to promote the FDLP's online materials.
- Teleworking has changed one's work capabilities. Librarians are finding themselves tackling projects that perhaps had been put on the backburner. On the other hand, not being able to access the library's physical space, some projects were forced to be halted, allowing time for other activities. Examples of backburner projects that have been picked up:
  - Clearing out backlog of prisoner reference requests
  - Retrospective cataloging
  - Database maintenance

- Catalog cleanup, perhaps the most commented
  - Updating work manuals
  - Staff who have remained working in the library have been able to devote time to weeding/inventory/shelf-reading
  - More time to analyze the library's selection profile
  - Checking/adding links to catalog records and websites
- An added "benefit" to changed work capabilities has been more time available for professional development, such as participating in webinars. Others mentioned devoting time to research projects, such as one library's project on the suffrage movement.
  - Quite a few comments concerned librarians who do not have adequate internet service/connectivity at home. This has impacted mainly those in technical services and has led to some libraries not being able to process or catalog.

This discussion concluded with a poll to determine if work is accounted for when teleworking:

Are you recording or quantifying telework?

- A. Yes
- B. No

While 388 attendees were online to respond to the poll, only 229 or 59% opted to participate. Of those 229, 72% or 165 indicated they do quantify their telework in some manner.

### 3. COMMUNICATION

Even under the best circumstances, communicating with others can be challenging. With library closures, people are now having to turn to technology and other means to relay information. Leading into this discussion was a poll to get a feel for which communication mechanisms are being used:

What tools are people using to communicate while people are self-isolating during the COVID-19 crisis?

- A. Telephone
- B. Video conferencing
- C. Social Media
- D. Email
- E. Chat
- F. Postal mail
- G. Other

There were 387 attendees at the time this poll was launched; 228 or 59% responded. Email, video conferencing, and chat received the greatest number of responses with 99 (43%), 79 (35%), and 36 (16%) respectively. An additional 8 (4%) responses were for social media, 5 (2%) for telephone, and 1 (0%) other, while nobody indicated use of the postal mail services.

This poll was intended to be a "check all that apply" for responses. A glitch in the program prevented this option and attendees were asked to check the communication mechanism they used most. Fifty-two people also chatted answers, indicating multiple mechanisms in

use, some indicating specific products, and others indicating certain mechanisms were used for certain patron groups. Of those 52, 8 conveyed that they used all of the communication tools listed in the poll, or all but postal mail (though it was said that their colleagues may have used mail services). There is no way to determine if the chat box responses are unique or, if they in part, duplicate the 228 responses to the poll. The following tallies are from chat box responses to the poll:

- |                            |                    |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| A. Telephone (32)          | D. Email (37)      |
| B. Video conferencing (29) | E. Chat (27)       |
| C. Social Media (20)       | F. Postal mail (8) |

Respondents also conveyed that some communications tools were used specifically for certain patrons. There were four who mentioned using video chat/conferencing with colleagues, two mentioned using chat and email for patrons, and one mentioned primarily texting with the boss. A couple of very different responses conveyed challenges: "We're not using telephones with public patrons at all, because unfortunately there's no way to disguise our personal phone numbers" and "I'm at a public library and we've had issues with inappropriate Zoom screens."

***How has the coronavirus affected the way you communicate with the people you serve, supervise, coworkers, supervisors, etc.?***

The discussion generated 167 chat responses. A review of the Open Forum recording and the chat transcript, produced the following trends with patrons and coworkers:

- Patrons
  - Online Chat, "chat reference has exploded"
  - Video chatting is used for longer reference inquiries
  - Email is used most often with patrons
- Coworkers
  - Zoom
  - Video Chat
  - Weekly video staff meetings
  - Microsoft Team meetings
  - Email
  - Texting

With coworkers, many are finding they are sharing more of their personal lives than they normally would. Many prefer video chatting as it gives participants a sense of connection and normalcy.

While many recognize the necessity of having these types of meetings, they also are feeling a bit of "Zoom/virtual meeting overload." The virtual meeting tends to last longer than the



normal face-to-face meeting, and some commented that they were having more meetings virtually than they ever had in person.

One attendee noted that working in this environment has “made us rethink meeting culture at our institution. We have delegated “fun/catchup” time in meetings, but have also learned what actually needs a meeting versus what could be an email.”

Chat participants are missing the personal connection they had within the office space. They miss the ability to simply drop by the coworker’s office for a quick chat. “I miss just dropping in on a colleague for an informal conversation.” They miss chatting with coworkers at lunch, etc. To cope, many have started virtual happy hours or coffee breaks. They will text pictures, especially pictures of their pets, to their colleagues or have a “pet show-and-tell” during a Zoom meeting. One library’s dean is sending daily emails to encourage staff. Another has started a “Feel Good Friday” email. Another has started dance party breaks using random YouTube videos.

As this discussion turned to communications being used to connect on a personal level, or for coping, this was the perfect segue to the next poll and question.

#### 4. WELLBEING AND EQUILIBRIUM

A final poll was used to introduce the Wellbeing and Equilibrium discussion topic in order to get a sense of institutional support that is offered to library employees:

My institution provides resources for coping with work at home or social isolation through the following:

- A. Information on COVID-19 and appropriate social practices and health measures
- B. Information on psychological coping skills and maintenance of wellbeing techniques
- C. Virtual access to counselors, psychologists or psychiatrists
- D. I don’t know what my institution provides
- E. My institution does not provide such resources

There were 375 attendees remaining in the Open Forum when this poll was launched; only 180 or 48% replied. Of those who replied, 105 or 58% indicated that their institution provides information on COVID-19 and appropriate social practices and health measures. The next highest response given, with 31 or 17%, was their institution provides information on psychological coping skills and maintenance of wellbeing techniques. This is followed by 22 or 12% of respondents indicating their institution offers virtual access to counselors, psychologists or psychiatrists. While 10 or 6% of respondents conveyed they didn’t know what resources for coping their institution provides, and 12 or 7% reported that their institution does not provide resources to help cope with working at home or social isolation.

This poll was intended to be a "check all that apply" for responses. Once again the glitch in the program prevented this option, and attendees were asked to check one resource and provide any additional information in the chat box. Twenty-eight attendees chatted with multiple responses. There is no way to determine if these responses are unique or, if they in part, duplicate the 105 responses to the poll. Of the 28 chat respondents, 20 or 71% reported that their institution provides the poll options A, B, and C. While 5 or 18% respondents indicated their institution provides both A and B, another 2 or 7% responded A-D. The final response, 4%, indicated A and C are provided by their institution.

This discussion question focuses on individuals, rather than institutions, and aims to determine what they are doing to cope with social isolation:

***How are you and your colleagues maintaining calm and coping with social isolation?***

The 146 discussion chats provided a wide range of responses to this question. Replies were grouped into three categories: 1) Personal Wellness, or individual activities not related to employer or colleagues, 2) Institutional Support, and 3) Departmental and Colleague Support. Two key themes emerged from the discussion:

- Specific services, resources, or activities provided by their institution; and
- Freedom and flexibility provided by their institution and colleagues that allow staff to pursue personal wellness activities.

**Personal Wellness (individual activities not related to employer or colleagues)**

- Daily walks and exercise.
- Volunteering.
- Yoga and Meditation.
- Writing (both work related & recreational).
- Gardening.
- Food related (cooking & eating).
- Limiting social media & news consumption.
- Keeping in touch with friends & family.
- Keeping regular work hours.
- Establishing a designated work space at home.

**Institutional Support**

- Staff and/or union events.
- Virtual access to counseling programs.
- Virtual access to mental health & self-care resources.
- Maintaining library guides to highlight available resources.

**Departmental and Colleague Support**

- Hosting virtual lunches, coffee breaks, and social gatherings.

- Staying connected through emails, slack, and video meetings.
- Scheduling activities (e.g., telework scavenger hunt).
- Sharing non-work related interests (music, funny images, or poems).
- Creating discussion groups on topics not relating to work.
- Frequent check-ins and opportunities to connect.
- Staying connected through Library Facebook groups.
- Freedom to pace themselves.
- Freedom to not check in constantly.

## 5. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

Work continues at GPO, with most employees teleworking and trying to maintain some semblance of normalcy for depository libraries and their staff. GPO recognized that depository library staff were also making similar adjustments as work continued during a state of emergency. To help, GPO provided access-related guidance to depository libraries and provided COVID-19/coronavirus informational resources on FDLP.gov. GPO also was proactive in suspending depository shipments and claims until further notice, extending review time periods in FDLP eXchange and creating LibGuides that include official Government information resources about the coronavirus and other topics of interest. And during this Depository Library Council meeting a new service was announced — GPO cataloging records for COVID-19/ coronavirus related resources are being made available on GitHub. To GPO these were fairly obvious steps to take. To learn more about the needs of depository libraries, attendees were asked:

***As you continue to provide access to and services for government information under unprecedented circumstances, what else can GPO do to support you and your work?***

Attendees participated with 114 chat responses during this discussion. Three themes emerged from the session recording and the chat transcript: 1) Support for depository libraries during the pandemic, 2) Support for particular constituent groups, and 3) Support for depository libraries as we transition to post-pandemic.

### **Support for libraries during pandemic**

- Keep public access resources going: *Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* (CGP), FDLP.gov, **govinfo**, LibGuides, PURLs.
- Provide coding for embedded search boxes for LibGuides and the CGP.
- Keep GPO social media going (including more on Census).
- Schedule regular short meetings through the FDLP Academy.
- Allow new documents librarians to apply for the New Coordinators' Certificate Program right now.
- Offer more Government Book Talks.

- Create podcasts from GPO Director, the Superintendent of Documents, and other staff, maybe similar to Library of Congress staff podcasts.
- Provide guidance to regional depository coordinators to help with selective depository libraries that may be struggling or considering relinquishing their designation.

### **Support for specific constituent groups**

- Census-related information and support (including Spanish language).
- Education-related resources to help parents with schooling at home.
- **govinfo** is great, but more feature articles are needed to keep American informed during uncertain times.
- Grant opportunities and information.
- Small business support.
- Spanish language resources generally—can GPO tell agencies they're needed?
- Offer webinars related to COVID-19; webinars for the public related to benefits, government (especially relief) programs, resources, information.

### **Support for libraries as we transition to post-pandemic**

- Help set a time table for how to come back.
- Provide programming for what to do as restrictions are lifted.
- Clarify how shipments will start back up—a trickle or a truckload? Libraries will likely be phasing their re-openings; can GPO phase shipments to parallel?
- Share when FDLP eXchange review dates will return to normal.
- Make a greater supply of GPO promotional materials available, especially pocket Constitutions.
- Create a Constitution app.
- Announce when the Certificate Programs will be offered again.

While depository libraries are doing their best to provide access and services remotely during the COVID-19 disruption, it's clear that staff are already looking ahead and are anxious to have a plan for what returning to on-site operations might look like.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In the midst of the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic, with many states under stay-at-home orders, libraries are facing incredible challenges. We learned from the 400+ attendees that most of their libraries are closed, or open only to staff. And yet they are continuing to find ways to provide services to their users. Federal depository libraries are still *Keeping America Informed* during this unprecedented time.

For the most part, depository library personnel do not have access to their physical collections, and of course neither do their users. Staff are providing reference services through email, chat,

and numerous other means; and they are reliant on serving users with digital content. They are using the *Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* (CGP), **govinfo**, LibGuides, and other tools and services to which the library subscribes or has access to through memberships.

Depository libraries continue to provide a wide variety of services. Some are new, like mask making programs, ordering materials for the library with direct delivery to residents and faculty, and creating home videos, e.g., using the 2020 Census Story and Activity Book. Other services, like Live Reader's Advisory and children's story time have transitioned to a virtual environment.

Libraries are more involved with their community. They are working with local authors, museums, and organizations to provide more virtual programming. They are making shields for first responders. Many public librarians, who are city employees, are working with other city government agencies while their library is closed. They have taken on responsibilities such as distributing and collecting applications for unemployment and SNAP services, conducting COVID-19 tracing, and staffing call centers and answering hotlines to help people get tested.

Though unable to conduct collection maintenance or otherwise work with their depository resources, depository staff have taken on tasks they seldom have time for during a "regular" day. They are, among other things, doing retrospective cataloging, adding links to digital content in the library's catalog records, conducting data cleanup in their catalog and holdings records, and creating and updating guides to online content. These efforts will result in improved search precision, increased discoverability, and greater access to Government information.

The responses to the question about how GPO can further support depository library staff and their work provided some suggestions that should be explored. For instance, providing code to be used for embedding search boxes for LibGuides and the CGP, providing more Spanish language materials, delivering podcasts from GPO staff, and providing guidance as libraries (and GPO) move into the reopening and post-pandemic phases. Communicating this guidance is of the utmost importance.

There was much praise for what GPO is already doing, and comments advocated for doing more of the same: continue to maintain the CGP, **govinfo**, FDLP eXchange, and PURLs; offer more webinars – on topics such as educational materials for home schooling, benefit programs, and grant opportunities; and offer certificate programs this summer. It was pointed out that this is an opportune time for depository library staff to engage in professional development and educational activities.

#### POTENTIAL LONG TERM EFFECTS

The COVID-19 pandemic situation could potentially lead to a lot of libraries reevaluating aspects of their print collection. It provides opportunities for FDLs to promote the FDLP's online resources,

and it may lead some FDLs to begin for the first time thinking of moving to a digital-only or mostly digital depository library.

As libraries reopen with social distancing mandates, physical changes including the arrangement of reading tables and public use computers are being considered and addressed. If social distancing is part of the new normal, this could become a driving force for defining service areas. Adapting current buildings may or may not be in the best interest of users, staff, or library security.

Suddenly having to work in an almost exclusively online environment brings to the forefront the importance of the availability of digital content and the need to digitize historical materials from the FDLP. During this time some libraries have digitized content to make it available to support classes. Could collaborative mass digitization efforts be on the horizon?