

Public Access Assessments: Focus on Access, Collections, and Service



Background

Public Access Assessments of individual Federal depository libraries emphasize how the libraries serve general public Federal Government information needs by reviewing how they provide access to and services for their Federal Government information products. The Public Access Assessment program complies with 44USC§1909 and conforms to the Federal Depository Library Program legal requirements. Systematic implementation of scheduled assessments for individual depository libraries is planned for late 2008 or 2009; however, Library Services and Content Management (LSCM) may conduct individual library assessments at any time upon request or as need is determined.

Public Access Assessments have a different focus from the library operations review conducted through inspections and self-studies in the past. Public Access Assessments, designed to be a more concise review, are focused on FDLP legal requirements and have a special emphasis on 44USC§1911, which states that “depository libraries shall make Government publications available for the free use of the general public”.

This document outlines the focus and organizational scheme of the Public Access Assessment and describes the major categories of Access, Collections, and Service. Communication between the general public, selective and regional depository library administrators and personnel, and Library Services and Content Management personnel at GPO is an important element which falls into all three categories. A category of overarching responsibilities spanning all other categories is also included. Various outcomes-based measures will be developed for each category, after review of this document by the depository community.

The official body of regulations governing the FDLP remains in place. These regulations, which focus on operational activities and FDLP requirements, were described in the Instructions to Depository Libraries, the Federal Depository Library Manual, and the Guidelines for the Federal Depository Library Program and have been incorporated into the new Federal Depository Library Handbook. LSCM plans to develop a self-assessment resource based on the elements described in this document as well as those in the official regulations. This resource, which may be considered to be an update of the Self-Study of a Federal Depository Library (Federal Depository Library Manual Supplement 3), will be available primarily for individual library strategic planning and educational purposes and will not be required in a Public Access Assessment.

LSCM is very interested in receiving comments on this draft document. Please send any comments to Kathy Brazee in the Office of Education and Outreach by the close of business on November 30, 2007.

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PUBLIC ACCESS ASSESSMENT CATEGORIES DESCRIBED

Federal depository libraries provide access.

Access is defined as providing free public access to Federal Government information products regardless of format. It involves making Federal Government information products available and usable for all users, including those with disabilities. It also involves but is not necessarily limited to bibliographic, physical building, tangible collection, Internet, and onsite computer access. It is the degree to which the public is able to retrieve or obtain the information products, either through the FDLP or directly through a digital information service established and maintained by a Government agency or its authorized agent or other delivery channels, in a useful format or medium, and in a time frame whereby the information has utility.

This is evidenced by:

- Any member of the general public may use Federal Government information products in all formats at a Federal depository library free of charge without impediments.
- Access to Federal Government information products is equal to or exceeds that provided for other collections in the library.
- The general public gains access to use resources in the collection through direct browsing on open shelves, through timely access to resources retrievable from closed stacks or remote storage, or through public access computer workstations.
- The general public gains access to use online resources onsite or remotely.
- Libraries respond to and address general public access complaints or concerns made directly to the library or through GPO in a timely manner.
- Libraries select appropriate secondary resources which support use of the Federal Government information products to gain bibliographic access to the collection.

- The general public may gain accommodated access to libraries in buildings with limited general public access (e.g., Federal libraries) through such services as resource sharing and remote reference when timely access to the resources is an issue. The libraries continue to provide public access to the depository general public when visiting the library is the only option to gain access to needed resources and expertise.
- Libraries designated as Federal depository libraries through the highest state appellate court library designation are exempted by statute from the free public access requirement.

Federal depository libraries select and manage collections.

Collections are defined as the Federal Government information products in all formats maintained so they are accessible and meet the Federal Government information needs of the general public.

This is evidenced by:

- Libraries maintain their collections by technical processing of new receipts for access in an appropriate time period and properly storing and caring for all the resources acquired through the FDLP.
- The general public has ready access to all parts of the collection. If the resources are in closed stacks or housed remotely or must be installed on a public access computer workstation, they are retrieved for use or installed in a reasonable period of time.
- Libraries identify and select resources that best meet the Federal Government information needs of the congressional district or local area, in cooperation with neighboring depository libraries.
- Selective depository libraries served by a regional depository may withdraw tangible publications retained for the statutory minimum period of five years from receipt after securing permission from the regional library for disposal. Unneeded materials must be made available to other depositories per disposition guidelines. (Those libraries designated as Federal libraries and the highest appellate court libraries are not subject to this requirement.)
- Regional depositories, representing a state or region, retain permanently at least one copy of all tangible Government publications received on deposit, unless they are superseded or the discards are authorized by the Superintendent of Documents.
- Regional and selective depositories communicate and cooperate regarding publication disposition.

- Libraries respond to FDLP communications regarding disposition of Federal Government information products. The products remain Federal Government property and must be withdrawn from public access, destroyed, or returned to GPO upon its request.
- All libraries maintain a library collection, other than the Federal Government information products received through the FDLP, of at least 10,000 books.

Federal depository libraries provide services.

Service is defined as activities and professional expertise oriented to the Federal Government information needs of the local community and surrounding areas and provided to support the visibility and use of the Federal Government information products of the depository library.

This is evidenced by:

- Libraries provide reference assistance to the general public.
- Library personnel have and maintain expertise in reference services which support research of Federal Government information products in all formats.
- Libraries promote the Federal Government information products to their primary constituency and the general public, to ensure that the depository resources are utilized and to help ensure that the Federal Government information needs of the community are met.
- Regional depositories work with selective depositories in their region, with GPO, and with depository libraries from other regions to assure that all depositories in their region have free access--either through online access or through interlibrary loan and additional reference assistance.

Federal depository libraries share overarching responsibilities

This is evidenced by:

- Libraries provide comparable access to and services for the Federal Government information products for the general public in a manner comparable to access to and services for primary patron use of other library collections.
- Libraries communicate and cooperate with GPO, their regional or other regional depositories, other depositories, and Federal government information patrons, in order to ensure the effective functioning of the FDLP.
- All libraries receive and respond, as appropriate, to FDLP communications from GPO regarding the functioning of the Program.

- Regional depositories communicate regularly with selective depositories to facilitate reference assistance, interlibrary loan, and selective depository publication disposal processing.
- All libraries report the conditions of the depository library to the Superintendent of Documents every two years and respond to all other required communication completely and promptly.

Document terminology

Access: Providing free public access to Federal Government information products regardless of format. It involves making Federal Government information products available and usable for all users, including those with disabilities. It also involves but is not necessarily limited to bibliographic, physical building, tangible collection, Internet, and onsite computer access. It is the degree to which the public is able to retrieve or obtain the information products, either through the FDLP or directly through a digital information service established and maintained by a Government agency or its authorized agent or other delivery channels, in a useful format or medium, and in a time frame whereby the information has utility.

Collections: Federal Government information products in all formats maintained so they are accessible and meet the Federal Government information needs of the general public.

Federal depository library: A library designated under the provisions of 44 U.S.C. §19 which maintains a depository collection for use and local access by the general public and which offers professional assistance in locating and using Federal Government information products and services.

Federal Government information products: Discrete units of Federal Government information in all formats.

Free public access: Perpetual, no fee, and ready access to Federal Government information products without impediments is available to the general public.

Public access assessment: Review by GPO of individual Federal depository library conditions focusing on public access to Federal Government information products.

Service: Activities and professional expertise oriented to the Federal Government information needs of the local community and surrounding areas and provided to support the visibility and use of the Federal Government information products of the depository library.