Regional Depository Libraries in the 21st Century: A Preliminary Assessment

FINAL REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON PRINTING

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INTRODUCTION

The Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) operates under the authority and mandates of 44 *United States Code* §§1901-1916. The existing structure of selective and regional depository libraries dates back to the Depository Library Act of 1962, which established regional depository libraries.

In September 2007, the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) sent a request to the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) for approval of a proposed shared regional designation between the University of Kansas and the University of Nebraska. While the JCP did not approve the request, there was concern that the Kansas/Nebraska proposal "may signal that growing challenges confront regional depository libraries in maintaining and supporting effective public access through the FDLP".

The JCP directed GPO, "in consultation with all concerned elements of the library community, to undertake a thorough examination of the current state of regional depository libraries nationwide. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the extent to which public access via the FDLP may be impaired by current and projected organizational, financial, technological, or other conditions affecting these institutions." A report was transmitted to the JCP by June 1, 2008. Per their request, GPO identified the report as "draft" and it was posted on the FDLP Desktop for public comment at <http://www.fdlp.gov/regionals/study.html>. All comments were reviewed and revisions were incorporated into this final report of the findings and GPO's resulting recommendations to the JCP.

METHODOLOGY

The timing of this study allowed GPO to benefit from two major depository events, the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries and the Spring Meeting of the Depository Library Council (DLC).

The DLC meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, in March 2008, offered an opportunity to share information about the study and the approach GPO planned to take. A meeting with regional depository librarians consisted of a qualitative structured interview that helped determine a strategy for collecting additional data. The feedback obtained was critical in solidifying the framework for the report.

The major source for data about regional depository libraries was the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries, which was conducted in October 2007. All depository libraries are required to complete this survey to fulfill their statutory mandate to report the conditions of their library every two years to the Superintendent of Documents (44 USC §1909). Approximately 1,200 of the 1,257 Federal depositories submitted the survey in accordance with the deadline for responses; two regionals did not submit the survey. Data from this survey were compared to results from the 2003 and 2005 surveys to determine trends.

In April 2008, GPO sent a letter to regional depository library directors that informed them of the study and requested their assistance in providing additional data that would help determine the direction and future trends of regional depositories. This included a request for strategic plans, library task force reports, or other planning documentation. A brief survey also was included with the letter. Fifty-one surveys were submitted to GPO, a response rate of one-hundred per cent. Additionally, a similar letter was sent to selective depository library directors in April 2008 that informed them of the study and encouraged them to submit comments to GPO. To reach the entire Federal depository library community, GPO posted a message on the FDLP-L listserv announcing this study, the methodology, and soliciting comments. FDLP-L is the official notification service for the FDLP and has nearly 2,000 subscribers.

Additional data sources used to prepare this report included the annual surveys from the Institute of Museum and Library Services: *State Library Agencies* and *Public Libraries in the United States* as well as the biennial survey from the National Center for Education Statistics: *Academic Libraries.* Finally, other reports used as reference sources included *The State of America's Libraries: A Report from the American Library Association,* (April

2008), *OCLC Environmental Scan: Pattern Recognition* (2003), and the Office of Management and Budget's *FY 2007 Report to Congress on Implementation of the E-Government Act of 2002* (March 2008).

Throughout this process, GPO worked to ensure transparency with the Federal depository library community and interested observers. A Web page was established on the FDLP Desktop and draft sections of the report were made available as soon as they were completed. To gather additional feedback GPO provided a Web form for comments, which were taken into consideration in preparing the report.

A report was transmitted to the JCP. Per their request, GPO identified the report as "draft" and posted it on the FDLP Desktop for comment. All comments were reviewed and appropriate revisions were incorporated into this final report.

All the comments and data were taken together and analyzed, and the findings provided in this report are fully supported by the data gathered by GPO, both qualitatively and quantitatively.
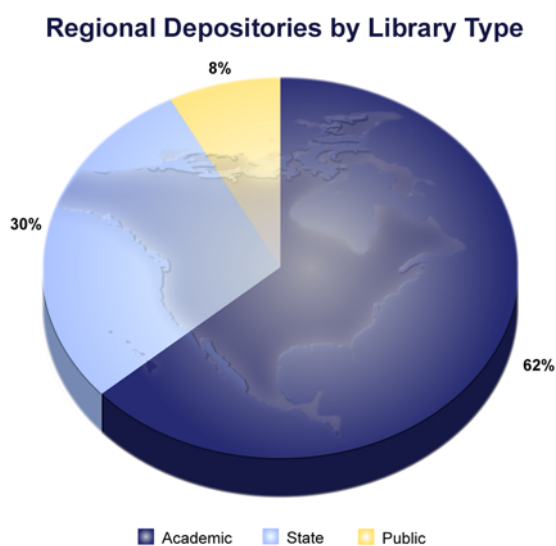
BACKGROUND

Regional depository libraries are located in different types of libraries. Of the fifty-one regionals, four are in public libraries, fourteen are in state library agencies, and the remaining thirty-three are part of academic libraries. This diverse composition is a strength of the FDLP. It also means the libraries have different missions, different sources of funding, operate under different reporting structures, have different primary clientele they serve, and staff may have varying responsibilities.

Regional depository libraries are required to provide no-fee public access to Government information dissemination products, retain all publications permanently in either paper or microfacsimile, and support and assist the selectives in the region they serve with interlibrary loan, reference services, and the disposal of unwanted Government publications.

Over the years, and in accordance with guidelines developed by the depository community, regionals expanded their services to selectives to include activities such as training, site visits, consultation, microfiche reproduction, and other services.

Regional Depositories by Library Type

8%
30%
62%

■ Academic ■ State ■ Public

Today there are fifty-one regional depository libraries in forty-three states. Fourteen are maintained by State libraries. Four public libraries serve as regional depositories and the balance of thirty-three regionals are located in academic libraries. Selective depositories in six states are served by regionals in other adjoining states; selectives in the District of Columbia and the territories are served by regionals in states. Currently, selectives in one state are not served by any regional depository library.

Within the statutory framework, different arrangements for sharing resources and responsibilities between and among depository libraries have been implemented successfully, with GPO approval. In 1966 the University of Maine became the regional depository library for selectives in New Hampshire and Vermont, which had no regionals of their own. The first intrastate shared regionals at the University of North Dakota and North Dakota State University were designated by their Senators in 1968.

Variations of these two models exist today. They include intrastate sharing between regional and selective libraries and the sharing of some services between regional depository libraries in one state and selective depository libraries in an adjoining or near-by state where no regional library exists. There is no interstate model for shared regionals in existence today, and there never has been one.

CURRENT CONDITIONS IN REGIONAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARIES

In addition to the comments GPO received, the results of the 2003, 2005, and 2007 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries were used to determine the current conditions of regional depository libraries.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONDITIONS. Library administrators are rethinking the way their libraries provide service and how the building's square footage is used. Depository operations are competing for limited funds that are also needed for users, staff, computers, and other collections. Multiple service desks within a library are disappearing in favor of one centralized service point and more space devoted to information commons or knowledge centers.

The 2007 Biennial Survey revealed that 47 regional respondents saw a decrease or static number of librarians in depository operations over the last five years. Depository staff in over 75% of regionals are training staff throughout the libraries about reference sources and services for Government information. This is critical as depositories are also reorganizing; a majority (over 55%) of regionals has integrated their service desk with that of the library's main reference area and most depository librarians are no longer responsible for only depository operations. Cross-training activities enhance public service to users. Yet the regional librarians, in the joint perspective they submitted to GPO, reported that this leads to a "generalist" approach to service and in-depth expertise diminishes over time with retirements and downsizing.

Since 2005, over 45% of regional depositories experienced construction, renovation, or relocation. The percentage of regional depositories that maintain materials in remote storage (over 55%) remained consistent from 2005 to 2007; no remote storage data were collected in 2003. Through selective housing agreements, depository materials are often located at another site in order to better meet individual patron needs. The 2007 survey results indicate that almost 35% of regional depositories are placing materials in one or more selective housing sites.

Regardless of the construction and renovation activities in regionals, there are some regionals operating with very little space in the library and with full remote storage facilities as well. Others report the potential availability of remote storage for tangible collections of depository materials. This raises an additional dilemma, however. Before materials are placed in remote storage libraries are cataloging the materials; they are ensuring there is a record in their online catalog that indicates the library holds a particular title and where it is located. This is a costly (estimated at $5 per record) and multi-year process. GPO and thirty-five regionals are cataloging 2.2 million pre-1976 depository publications. In the meantime the lack of records in library online catalogs for these publications is an obstacle to public access to the large historical collections maintained by regional depository libraries and a barrier to possible space solutions.

FINANCIAL CONDITIONS. Not all regional depository libraries are experiencing budgetary constraints, though they are the minority. One director stated, "A static budget would be a welcome one. Instead our budget is declining." Some states are facing cuts up to 15% over each of the next two years.

A State Librarian attributes the uneven quantity and quality of regional depository services, in part, to funding inequalities. The uneven numbers of selectives served and geographical areas covered also play a role. For example, California has one regional depository library and ninety selective depositories to serve an area of almost 156,000 square miles and an estimated 2006 population of 36,457,550, however in accordance with Section 1912 of Title 44 of the U.S. Code, two depository libraries per state may be designated as regionals. South Carolina has two shared regionals and nineteen selectives to serve an area of almost 30,110 square miles and an estimated 2006 population of 4,321,250. Many regional depository librarians reported that they cannot afford to visit their selectives or provide support services to them.

Thirty-seven regionals, almost 75%, disagree or strongly disagree that financial support to cover the costs of depository operations continues to increase. Fiscal issues coupled with interconnected networks and innovations in the delivery of services compel libraries to rethink the services they provide and how they provide them. Additionally, they are reexamining how the library is used.

TECHNOLOGICAL CONDITIONS. Over 90% of regional depositories agree or strongly agree that the library has an adequate number of computers for use by the public and about 85% meet GPO's minimum technical requirements for public access workstations. Internet filtering software is employed by over 25% of regionals, with most being able to turn off the filter if requested to do so by researchers, and over 50% require no user authentication to log in. All regionals provide records in their online catalogs for current depository receipts and 100% also include hyperlinks in records to online information dissemination products that direct users to the full-text. The users are following the links. GPO tracks, for the depository libraries, how many users they refer to online publications from their online catalog records through GPO's persistent uniform resource locator (PURL) server. For those regionals that have participated in the tracking from 2001-2006, there was a 483% increase in PURL referrals.

Regional depository librarians are cooperating with selective depository librarians to deliver Web-based training in the use of government information. Government Information in the 21st Century (Gi21), an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funded project, is a continuing education program that delivers training in the use of electronic government information for those who provide reference services. Government information professionals from Federal depository libraries in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming are available as trainers.

In 2005, over 70% of regionals indicated an interest in participating in a national collaborative virtual reference service. After a successful pilot project, Government Information Online: Ask a Librarian (GIO) was launched in February 2008. At present there over twenty depository libraries that contribute to the GIO/GPO service partnership to provide chat and e-mail reference service and delivery of digitized or born-digital content.

While the migration to electronic deliverables and online databases saves on shelf space for collections and provides access to data that can be manipulated, there is a trade-off. Instead of purchasing microfiche reader/printers and cabinets, libraries must acquire and maintain "robust" computer workstations, laser printers, software upgrades, storage cabinets for CD-ROMs and diskettes, Internet connections, etc. Staff training is necessarily more complicated as is the need to assist patrons with electronic access services. Historic information may only be available in optical disk storage or floppy disks whose time has come and gone.

EFFECT ON SELECTIVE DEPOSITORY LIBRARIES. Many of the comments GPO received for this study from selective depositories were very supportive and complimentary of their regional. They are grateful for their regional providing training and meeting opportunities, facilitating communication within the region, and responding to queries in a timely manner. There was, however, an overwhelming number of comments complaining about the disposition of materials process, which is managed by regionals per 44 USC §1912. The turn around time for regionals to grant their approval to withdraw depository materials is exceedingly long. The results suggest that selectives are withdrawing tangible materials and replacing them with access to online versions to meet the needs of their users. Regionals are having difficulties processing the increasing number of requests.

According to comments GPO received, not all regionals are meeting the needs of their selective depository libraries. It was reported that some regionals never, or very rarely, communicate with their selectives and they are unresponsive to requests for assistance. This is often attributed to the regional depository librarian being too far extended with other responsibilities. GPO recognizes this as an issue that needs further investigation, discussion, and collaboration with the Federal depository library community for resolution.

Several selectives also expressed concern for how impending reorganizations might affect them. Some indicated a fear that existing problems, such as the disposition process, will only be compounded.

PROJECTED CONDITIONS IN REGIONAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARIES

To project the conditions in regional depository libraries the directors/deans were asked to complete a five-level Likert items survey. The response rate to this survey was 100%. Additionally, strategic planning documents[1] of libraries and their parent institutions were examined to determine future directions. Of the fifty-one libraries that are regional depositories, over 70%, have some form of strategic planning document. Of those, only fifteen specifically addressed the depository operations in their documentation. Almost 70% of parent institutions have planning documents.

The strategic planning documents revealed several common trends, regardless of library type. Libraries are:

   ◆ Improving and increasing access to both physical and virtual information resources;
   ◆ Blending tangible and electronic information access as well as emphasizing physical and virtual service in the use of those resources;
   ◆ Highlighting specialized collections and services unique to their library;
   ◆ Assessing, identifying, and responding to end-user information needs;
   ◆ Integrating the library into the environment where end-users live, work, study, and research – providing point of need services;
   ◆ Participating in collaborative relationships such as partnerships to share resources (physical and virtual), including space and staff; and
   ◆ Addressing the change in knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for library employees by training existing staff or hiring additional staff with appropriate skills.

Results of the survey of regional library directors/deans that GPO conducted in April 2008 depict a future that maximizes the use of information and service delivery networks and collaborative solutions. The results also reveal a commitment to the ideal of public access to Government information and a desire to make the content of their tangible collection accessible.

Almost 20% of libraries agree or strongly agree that they are considering relinquishing their regional designation and becoming a selective depository. However, more than 25% would consider serving as a regional for selective depositories in a neighboring state. As noted above, seven already serve in such a capacity. Another nine regionals are neutral on this issue.

60% agree or strongly agree there is enough professional staff and almost 65% agree or strongly agree there is enough support staff to support the regional depository operation. Approximately 50% agree or strongly agree there is enough staff to support their regional responsibilities to their selectives.

Survey results indicate that slightly more than half of the regionals have growth space for depository materials over the next five years; almost 65% have room for print materials and almost 70% have room for microfiche. This is due in part to fewer tangible materials being shipped to depositories coupled with the use of remote storage facilities by over 55% of regional depository libraries. While there is room for growth, space in libraries is a precious commodity sought after for, among other things, new and innovative services to meet users' changing needs.

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[1] For the purpose of this study, strategic planning documents were defined as any written publication that provided information regarding the future direction of the organization. This broad definition accommodated the variation in terminology used by organizations in naming strategic publications.

While almost 55% of regionals agree or strongly agree that they would like to be as "virtual" as possible were it an option, comments indicate that in some instances this would not be to replace the tangible collection but rather to provide another means of access to the content. Almost 50% of the regional depository libraries are digitizing, or are developing plans to digitize, depository materials locally or through partnerships and over 50% are willing to receive FDLP access derivative digital files on deposit. Additionally, over 80% agree or strongly agree that a primarily online FDLP has expanded service opportunities and almost 90% agree or strongly agree that participation in statewide and regional consortia allows increased services to the people of the region.

FINDINGS

The legislative history of the Depository Library Act of 1962 reveals "most states can be adequately served by a single regional depository, which should preferably be the State Library … some states, such as California, which cover large geographical areas, could well justify the need for two regional depositories."[2] Regional depository libraries, and the selective depositories they serve, are located in different types and sizes of libraries; they are geographically dispersed; service areas vary greatly in size and population; and in addition to meeting the mandates of the FDLP, they must also work within the influences of their unique local environment. While there are regionals in one state supporting selectives in other states, there are no interstate models for shared regionals under current law.

Analysis of the results of the *Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries,* and the *Regional Depository Library Survey, April 2008*, and review of comments from the library community reveal that current and projected conditions of regional depositories differ from library to library. Key findings about regional depository libraries include:

ORGANIZATIONAL

- Almost 20% reported they agree or strongly agree they are considering relinquishing their regional designation and becoming a selective depository. Since the survey was administered, one regional has given up its regional designation and remained in the FDLP as a selective depository;

- Over 55% of libraries have integrated services for depository users with the library's main reference desk. 60% agree or strongly agree there is enough professional staff and almost 65% agree or strongly agree there is enough support staff to support the regional depository operation. Approximately 50% agree or strongly agree there is enough staff to support their regional responsibilities to the selectives they serve;

- Almost 65% agree or strongly agree that over the next five years they have sufficient space to house print publications and over 55% house depository materials in remote storage facilities;

- Selective depository libraries must be able to obtain needed official and authentic depository resources from regionals, other selectives, or GPO (including any of its content partners) in a timely manner. Similarly, regional depository libraries must be able to obtain needed official and authentic depository resources from other regionals, selectives, or GPO (including any of its content partners) in a timely manner; and

- GPO recognizes that the disposition of materials process is challenging for both regional and selective depository libraries. This needs further investigation, discussion, and collaboration with the Federal depository library community.

FINANCIAL

- Almost 80% of regional depository respondents disagree or strongly disagree that a budget increase in the next three to five years is expected.

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[2] Act of Aug. 9, 1962 – Revising laws governing the Depository Library Program § 76 Stat. 352 § H.R. 8141, 87th Congress, 2nd Session (1962)

- ◆ Depository operations are competing for limited funds that are also needed for users, staff, computers, and other collections;

- ◆ The condition of publications within the tangible collections housed in regional depository libraries prohibits access. The deterioration of materials over time from acidic paper, degrading microfiche, lack of preservation-level climate controls in libraries, and decades of normal use has resulted in some materials being too fragile for use;

- ◆ 35 libraries and GPO are cataloging 2.2 million pre-1976 depository publications. This, however, is a costly (estimated at $5 per record) and multi-year process. The lack of records in library online catalogs for these publications is an obstacle to public access to the large historical collections maintained by regional depository libraries;

- ◆ Collaboration is needed to meet the challenges of cataloging, storing, preserving, and digitizing the tangible collection of depository materials; and

- ◆ The return on investment for regional libraries to store, maintain, and preserve their tangible collections has diminished as some libraries report institutional costs of more than $1,000,000 a year to support their regional depository operation.

TECHNOLOGICAL

- ◆ 100% provide records in their online catalogs for current depository receipts and 100% also include hyperlinks in records to online information dissemination products that direct users to the full-text;

- ◆ Over 90% agree or strongly agree that the library has an adequate number of computers for use by the public, 85% meet the minimum technical requirements for public access workstations, over 25% employ filtering software, and over 50% require no user authentication to log in;

- ◆ Over 80% agree or strongly agree that a primarily online FDLP has expanded service opportunities and almost 90% agree or strongly agree that participation in statewide and regional consortia allows increased services to the people of the region;

- ◆ Almost 50% currently are digitizing, or developing plans to digitize, depository materials locally or through partnerships and over 50% are willing to receive FDLP access derivative files on deposit; and

- ◆ Almost 55% of regionals agree or strongly agree that they would like to be as "virtual" as possible were it an option, comments indicate that in some instances this would not be to replace the tangible collection but rather to provide another means of access to the content.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A network of diverse libraries with varying needs, like the designated regionals in the FDLP, requires flexibility and collaboration.

In addition to meeting the mandates of the FDLP, they must also work within the influences of their unique local environment. Libraries are improving and increasing access to tangible and virtual information resources by digitizing collections; providing point of need services; and participating in collaborative relationships to share personnel, space, and services. To move forward in the 21st century, regional libraries also must be able to apply these options to their depository collections.

To ensure regional depository libraries are able to provide unimpaired access to Government information dissemination products for future generations, GPO recommends to the JCP:

1. Support continued appropriations for GPO's initiative to create machine-readable bibliographic records for the tangible collection of pre-1976 depository publications to ensure its completion in a timelier manner;

2. Undertake a more in-depth look at the organizational, financial, and technological issues affecting the FDLP in its entirety, regionals and selectives alike, and analyze the results to develop recommendations for

policy and/or statutory revision that will provide for effective operation of the FDLP in the 21st century; and

3. Continue to support GPO's initiatives to authenticate the Government's digital information dissemination products.