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Outreach to Selective Libraries

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The first thing that I did when I began preparing for this presentation was to define outreach. I decided that, at least for this paper, I would begin by discussing outreach as more or less regular and systematic communication initiated by Regionals to selective depository libraries.

In a broader sense, outreach also includes communication from selectives to Regionals and from selectives to each other, both within the entire Region and at the substate level. One of the major roles of a Regional Federal Depository is to facilitate this communication and to promote a real network of depository libraries.

I will be talking about some of the methods of outreach used by the New York State Library and other Regionals. I'm sure that many of you provide these and similar services. I am going to close with some discussions of future possibilities for improving outreach.

Why Outreach?

Why do Regionals provide outreach services to their selective depositories? Probably the most important reason is that it is one of our responsibilities. The **Instructions to Depository Libraries** make clear that consulting is a major role of a Regional Depository Library. Outreach is a systematic method of consultation.

Outreach enables Regionals to help selectives with their work. It also encourages other kinds of networking. Especially in large states, a systematic outreach program provides a vehicle by which libraries can be linked across regional lines. In New York State, for example, we can tell New York City what is going on in Buffalo, and vice versa. This cross-pollination is very useful in planning programs, preparing publicity, and developing skills for using information supplied through the Depository Library Program.

Factors Influencing Outreach

One of the major factors influencing the need for outreach is the number of depository libraries in a Region. New York State has 93 selectives, more than any other

state except California. There is also only one Regional Depository in New York State. With these

numbers, it is hard to have personal contacts with all selectives. Staff turnover also makes it difficult to know everyone.

Geography is another consideration. In a large state like New York, it is hard to visit all of the depositories. Outreach is a way of keeping up connections even if there are long intervals between personal visits.

Inspections

One of the major mechanisms for outreach is the inspection process. At the minimum, we make contact with the selectives before and after their inspections.

When the Government Printing Office notifies us that a library is scheduled for an inspection, we call to offer our help. Sometimes there are new librarians who are anxious about the prospect. We offer to provide copies of their last inspection report if they can't locate it. We can also send the depository decals which they may want to replace if their old ones are worn or missing.

Since we know the work of the inspectors, we can assure the librarians that the inspectors are capable and fair. Occasionally someone will mention that his or her library has serious deficiencies and wants to know how we think the inspector will react.

We tell them that we can't speak for GPO, but that is best to be candid and positive about problems. The inspectors are very experienced and are not likely to miss a major deficiency. A long standing problem cannot be corrected in the six weeks between notification and inspection. We also advise them to regard the inspection process as a diagnostic tool to help solve problems. Sometimes a comment from GPO will convince a library director of a need far more effectively than internal communications can.

Whenever possible, we try to accompany inspectors on the day of the visit. Recent travel restrictions in New York State have made that more difficult, but we try to be there for at least a couple of inspections each year. Our role in the inspections is mainly one of observation although we do respond to questions and encourage depositories to use our disposal assistance.

After we receive copies of the inspection reports, we make another contact, usually in writing. If the inspection results are good, we congratulate the library and reiterate our offer to help with disposal and other projects.

If a library has been put on probation or has other significant problems, we also offer to help. Sometimes a library will attempt to correct a problem and will ask if we think GPO will accept this solution. Again, we can't speak for GPO but we can tell if we are aware of other successful examples.

Other Visits

Inspections are not the only occasions for visits to selective depositories. If I am in a town for a conference or other reason, I usually call the depository librarian and ask if I may stop by to say hello. My goal is to visit all 93 selective depositories in New York State; since taking on Regional Librarian responsibilities I have visited about a third so far.

These non-inspection visits are a relaxed opportunity to meet the librarian, see the library, and establish a personal contact. It also gives the depository a chance to ask questions. One thing that I have learned is that it is important to stress that this is an informal visit. One librarian was afraid that it was another inspection, and became very anxious until I explained my intentions.

Statewide Conferences

Another major outreach activity is the Statewide Conference of Federal Document Depository Librarians which we have been sponsoring for the last six years. The initial schedule was somewhat sporadic, but lately we have settled into conferences on Federal and New York State documents in alternate Septembers. These meetings offer a valuable opportunity to gather many of our documents librarians together, especially those from different parts of the state who may not otherwise have a chance to interact.

The meetings are held in Albany and begin at 1:00 p.m. Thursday with an evening banquet and a Friday morning session. The Friday noon adjournment gives people an opportunity to get on the road before the traffic gets too heavy.

In New York State we are fortunate to be able to call on a pool of excellent speakers. Many of our depository librarians are experts in their field, and are generous in sharing their expertise with us.

We also appreciate the support we have received from GPO. Wayne Kelley, the Superintendent of Documents, was the keynote speaker at last fall's conference. Joe McClane (Depository Services) and Jan Erickson (formerly of Marketing) also spoke at an earlier conference.

In September of 1991 we expanded the meeting into Northern Regional Conference, and invited librarians from the surrounding states of Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. We had about 100 people representing five states. The focus was on coping with electronic media, with sessions on general products, Extract software, TIGER, other automated tools, and electronic communication/ management possibilities.

These conferences have been successful but there are some concerns:

- 1) Travel money has been scarce and not all depository librarians can afford to attend. We do charge a modest registration fee to defray expenses since we don't have separate funding for the conferences. We have always broken even but sometimes we get right down to the wire before we know. Last year our Director wrote to the other depository library directors and asked them to encourage their librarians to attend. This turned out to be an effective strategy which we will remember for the future.
- 2) Because of the size of New York State, we have to schedule the conference to begin after lunch in order to give people enough time to get to Albany. This overnight stay adds to the cost for many participants.
- 3) We haven't been able to be as effective with followup as we would like. At last year's conference we prepared a mentor list for electronic information, and asked people to sign up to be resource persons for the various electronic depository products. So far, we haven't had much success in getting volunteers. I don't know if they are too modest or there is some other inhibiting reason for lack of participation.

One feature of the conferences, both Federal and New York State, is presentation of the New York Library Association/Government Documents Roundtable (NYLA/ GODORT) Notable Documents Awards for New York State documents. Even at a Federal document conference, we feel this is an opportunity to make the point that access to government information is important and that outstanding effort should be recognized.

In 1991, NYLA/GODORT invited the agencies to the Thursday evening banquet and asked

representatives from New York State legislative offices to present the award certificates. NYLA/GODORT also issues a press release, and forwards the names of the winning documents for consideration to the American Library Association/ Government Documents Round Table Notable Documents Project. The agencies appreciate the recognition and have the opportunity to see their products as part of a larger universe of government information.

Other Conferences

Some regionals sponsor "road shows", or onsite demonstrations at key locations in their states. One of the advantages of this system is that the local libraries generally make the arrangements and the Regional can concentrate on giving the program.

Annual conferences of statewide library associations offer another opportunity for outreach. The New York Library Association Government Documents Roundtable sponsors several programs, some of them on Federal government information, at the NYLA Annual Conference. These meetings take place in various cities throughout the state, and make it possible for area depositories to participate even if they are unable to come to Albany for the State Library conferences.

Regional/Local Documents Interest Groups

New York State has a system of nine regional library councils. There are government documents interest groups in eight of the nine areas. These groups, with membership representing all levels of government document activity, conduct regular meetings and sponsor special projects.

The New York State Library participates in these groups' activities as we can. We attend the meetings of the Capital District Documents Interest Group, and try to get to other groups' meetings occasionally. We have also collected and distributed information about all of the groups so that there is statewide awareness of projects and activities.

Documents interest groups throughout New York State cooperated in a major celebration of Freedom of Information Day (March 16) in 1990. Although most of the emphasis was on the first anniversary of the redesigned New York State Document Depository Program, there were also programs and exhibits stressing the availability of Federal information. In the Capital District, Freedom of Information Day was the formal occasion for the recognition of the 25th anniversary of Skidmore College's designation as a Federal depository, marked by a visit and a certificate presented by then Superintendent of Documents Don Fossedal.

Advisory Councils

Statewide advisory councils of Federal depository librarians can be useful conduits for outreach. These councils have representatives from different types of depository libraries in geographic locations around the state. In addition to advising the Regional on their needs, the members also act as channels for communications to their local areas.

Written Communications

The New York State Library uses a series of written communications devices for outreach to selective depositories:

Memoranda and Ad Hoc Mailings

These are done on an "as needed" basis and include notices of conferences, discard procedure reminders, and special announcements. You may remember the trouble that was averted several years ago with a potentially lethal computer virus in a depository shipment. After notification by GPO, we made some quick telephone calls to contact libraries in each of the nine library systems. They in turn informed others in their area. We followed through with a written memorandum.

Government Documents Information Memorandum

The New York State Library is instituting a more formal written communication mechanism called the Government Documents Information Memorandum Series. The major audience for the series will be Federal and New York State document depository librarians, although it will also be available to other interested persons. Some libraries are depositories for both Federal and New York State document materials, but even those not holding dual designation will find it useful to learn about developments in the other system. This is also an opportunity to strengthen the idea of a unified government information network.

The Series will be issued irregularly and will stress information of more or less permanent value. Issues will be dated and numbered, and prepunched for filing by recipients.

Newsletters

The New York State Library contributes items for **Documents to the People of New York State**, the quarterly newsletter of the New York Library Association/Government Documents Roundtable. Some of this information deals with Federal depository matters. Items on U.S. government documents are also sometimes picked up in the newsletters published by the nine regional library systems in New York State.

Other Publications

In cooperation with the New York State Library Advisory Council on Federal Depository Library Service, we published a **Directory of U.S. Federal Depository Collections in New York State** in 1986. Council members coordinated survey preparation and followup, and the State Library did data entry and production.

The directory contains an entry for each Federal depository library, with information on contact persons, collection scope, organization, service policies, and special equipment. There is also an appendix of holdings of major collections. The directory is a useful reference tool for all depository members.

Another outreach tool, although one intended more for the general public, is a brochure on the Depository Library Program. The folder includes a brief description of the program, plus a list of depositories in New York State. We have made copies available for depositories to distribute to their clients.

Electronic Outreach

The availability of electronic communication tools has opened up many more options for outreach. As more libraries have access to E-mail, we can communicate more efficiently. We are keeping a log of E-mail addresses for depositories in New York State, and can target them for notices and other communications. We are also keeping in mind that not all libraries have direct E-mail access, and are exploring ways to help them participate.

Like other Regionals, we are exploring the possibility of an electronic bulletin board for depositories. Paul Pattwell of the Newark (New Jersey) Public Library has been a leader in this area. He has been working for two years with the Documents Association of New Jersey. Their bulletin board enables them to post disposal lists, send messages back and forth, share meeting notices, and be a conduit for downloading and uploading information from the BITNET E-mail system. You may want to ask Paul for more details or watch for his article in a forthcoming issue of **Government Publications Review**.

Special Outreach: Discards

I would now like to tell you something about a New York State Library initiative which is very dear to my heart. Although you may not think of the discard process as component of outreach, we are approaching it that way.

For a number of years, we have been very concerned about the procedures which selectives must go through in asking our permission to dispose of depository materials kept for more than five years. We all recognize the importance of maintaining the integrity of collections but the procedures are cumbersome, especially for libraries without electronic records for Federal documents.

Selectives are spending a lot of time producing long typed or word processed discard lists. We received requests for authorization to dispose of almost 28,000 items during the last fiscal year. The requests came on 121 lists from 39 libraries.

Despite the magnitude of these figures, many libraries are not weeding. They are understandably daunted by the task of preparing lists. As a result, their collections are not as useful and responsive as they could be. This fact has been noted by GPO inspectors.

Beginning with documents published in 1985, the New York State Library has been loading GPO cataloging records for monographs and maps into its online catalog. We now have more than five years of cataloging records (90,311 documents) in our system, and can generate a list of titles for any item number for a particular year.

With GPO's permission, we are embarking on a pilot project to simplify the disposal procedures. At the end of the five year retention period, a library can ask us to generate a list of titles in a particular item number. Since the retention period begins with the actual receipt of the document, this means that in 1992 we can generate lists from 1985 and 1986. The lists contain the item number, retention date(s) as specified by the requestor, a count of the records generated on the list, and a one-line entry consisting of abbreviated Superintendent of Documents number (25 characters) and title (42 characters). We send the list to the requesting library via BITNET.

The production of the list is not a blanket permission to discard. In fact, we call them five-year retention lists rather than discard lists. The selective library must still review the list and decide which titles it wishes to discard. The library may print out and mark the list or respond electronically by indicating what it wants to do.

The rest of the discard procedures remain the same. We indicate if there are any titles that the New York State Library needs for its collection. If not, the depository informs other libraries of the availability of the material. If there are no other interested libraries, the material may be discarded.

The pilot project is strictly electronically based. We do not generate paper or disk lists. For libraries without access to E-mail, we encourage them to work with other area libraries (perhaps an

academic library can "adopt" a public library) or to set up deposit accounts at local computer centers. Some day we may be able to work out a schedule for statewide electronic posting on a regular basis.

We announced the project at the Fall 1991 depository conference. So far we haven't been overwhelmed by requests, but we have successfully handled the ones we have received. The requesting libraries seem to be pleased also. We are sending out a general written announcement to all selectives so we expect more traffic soon.

The tapes are for newer materials only, so we have to use the older methods for pre-1985 weeding projects. Our experience has been that most weeding requests are for "newer" materials, i.e., five to ten years old. As time goes on, the database will grow. We have also added serials records to our online catalog effective January 1, 1991 so there will be more extensive coverage.

Conclusion: The Network

One component of outreach that I haven't mentioned before is our work with New York State agency libraries. These are specialized information sources supported by departments of New York State government like Health, Law, and Labor. They are not Federal depository libraries but are collectors and sources of government information. We include them in our communications about Federal depository matters because of their interest in government information.

I mention this to illustrate that in its broadest sense, outreach is much more than one-way communication from Regionals to selectives. A complete outreach program encompasses inter-depository connections, as well as participation by other government information providers. As Regionals, we have a pivotal role to play in the establishment and functioning of an integrated network of access to government information for all citizens.