

**Toward a Vision of the Government Information Environment of the 21st Century:  
A Draft Outline**  
Prepared by the  
Depository Library Council  
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The Federal Depository Library Program operates in an environment that has changed drastically over the past decade. The federal government has increasingly migrated its information resources to the Web and the Web is increasingly becoming the preferred avenue of access for many if not most information users. Federal Depository Libraries are no longer exclusive locations for access to government information. The current information context raises questions in four key areas: developing new roles for libraries in the non-exclusive government information environment; managing collections and delivering content; adding value; and deploying expertise. Discussion prompted by these questions will help shape the community's vision of the government information environment.

Depository Library Council members are using the following questions to guide us as we draft papers on each of these important challenges. These papers will be posted in early September for wide comment and discussion. It is our hope that these papers will help us focus the discussion as we envision our future as providers of government information at the Fall Depository Library Conference. You can post comments at <http://dlcvisionoutline.blogspot.com>.

While we welcome comments on the outline at this time, we encourage your more deliberative attention to the papers to be posted in September.

#### 1. Library Roles in the Non-Exclusive Environment

Pivotal to any discussion of government information provision is the ubiquitous internet. No longer do citizens, students, tax payers have to come to the depository library for government information. Despite the "digital divide," the government is more and more often providing its information exclusively via the internet. Where does that leave Federal Depository Libraries?

- In what ways, if any, might FDLs be necessary in the non-exclusive environment?
- What is the role of libraries generally and FDLs in particular?
- To what extent are all libraries in some way government information access centers?
- There is a new diversity among FDLs, ranging from service centers to power collections - how do these mix?
- Only libraries? How might we collaborate with potential partners like the Memory Hole or Way Back Machine?
- How does the FDLP position itself where users are (Google; point-of-use; regional information; other?)?

## 2. Managing Collections & Delivering Content

Managing gets at everything related to the libraries' role in the information lifecycle, from selection to preservation. The focus here is on how collection management needs to be rethought in light of a.) the fact of remote collections, b.) the continued (as yet undefined) need for local collections, and c) the fact that we will manage information in various formats.

- What will libraries continue to select/collect?
- Will this vary library to library?
- How does this differ from / mix with the Government Printing Office's FDSys collection?
- What will libraries acquire and hold?
- How does this differ from GPO's National Collection(s) of U.S. Government Publications?
- What new institutional roles will libraries adopt with respect to preservation (light and dark archives, LOCKSS, etc.).
- How do these roles differ from and complement GPO's digital preservation initiatives?
- Do we maintain a few centralized archives or collaborative networks of distributed collections?
- What kinds of collection-based partnerships with GPO will they form?
- How will existing library organizations accommodate/fund these new roles?
- Assuming at least some geographic consolidation of tangible collections, how do we meet citizen demand in a timely manner?
- What is the relationship between new collection models and existing institutional delivery mechanisms, such as consortia delivery services?
- When the most appropriate medium for a user is print, how do we accommodate that need in a timely manner? Should Print on Demand (POD) be focused on libraries in economically depressed areas?
- What is the relationship of these new roles to Title 44?

## 3. Adding Value

Delivery of government information to a diverse user population is the core principle of the program. Easy to use access tools are necessary to optimize this, as is organizing and positioning collections and tools in such a way that users will encounter them in their general search efforts. How will librarians organize collections and deploy access tools to maximize search and retrieval, and to integrate government information into information resources generally?

- What kinds of value-added collections will libraries create, such as integration of government documents with other publications? How will libraries share these value added resources?

- What kinds of delivery mechanisms will libraries make available to remote users?
- What sort of access tools will libraries develop both within and without the FDLP? Searchable full-text collections of fugitive documents? Harvested FDSys metadata linking to specialized local collections?
- To what extent are libraries able to create instruction regarding all aspects of government information discovery and use and share that instruction with anyone and any institution that needs it?

#### 4. Deploying Expertise

The focus here is not so much the old (pre-Internet) library-based reference model, nor even its more up-to-date email and chat reference variations, but on getting (delivering?) expertise to users where they are – in virtual space in their homes and offices. How do we go beyond the sophisticated, but library-bound vision of reference services proposed in John W. Fritch and Scott B. Mandernack's "The Emerging Reference Paradigm: A Vision of Reference Services in a Complex Information Environment" (Library Trends 50(2001): 286-305)?

- How can we bring some of the sophisticated reference structure of the library and the expertise of government information librarians to the network itself?
- How do we deliver reference services to those places on the web where citizens (virtually) congregate online?
- How do we organize our operations to provide reference where it is needed?
- What new technologies can help us expand our reach?
- How do we identify and deploy specific kinds of expertise, such as in a particular kind of documentation or government process?
- How can FDLs raise awareness of government information among public, school, and other types of librarians and libraries?
- How do we train other professionals and interested groups with whom people needing government information interact? For example, local school teachers? PTAs? League of women voters? Other civic groups?
- What has been learned from the national collaborative effort to provide references services to all customers, whether affiliated with a particular library or not?