

## **Libraries, Partnership, and Access to Government Information: GPO's Electronic Collection Model**

George Barnum - Expert Consultant/ Electronic Transition Specialist - Library Programs Service - U.S.  
Government Printing Office Washington, D.C. 20401

for

OSTI Inforum '98 Oak Ridge, Tennessee

May 6, 1998

The goal of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) is to assure current and permanent public access to the universe of Federal Government information products, regardless of medium or format, which are of public interest or educational value, excepting those which are strictly for administrative or operational purposes, classified for reasons of national security, or the use of which is constrained by privacy considerations. This free public access was codified in the Printing Act of 1895, but had been an operational reality since the beginning of the Federal Government. The provisions of the 1895 act - geographically dispersed collections conforming to basic standards and access facilitated by indexing were enhanced by the addition of permanence of availability and access through the Depository Library Act of 1962, which set a standard of two depositories per Congressional district and added one library per state as a "Regional Depository" to receive all publications and retain them permanently. In addition certain court, federal agency, and law school libraries became eligible for designation as depositories. The mechanics of this system of dissemination and access are based, rather brilliantly, on being an adjunct to the information technology of the day: printing, specifically, centralized printing of all government publications (in later years centralized procurement of printing services for government from the private sector). Insofar as agencies conform to the requirement of 44 USC ch. 19 that all information fitting the above definitions be obtained through GPO, the system of "riding" or adding sufficient quantities to printing orders to cover copies for depository distribution delivers tremendous value for Congress' appropriated dollar. Electronic information, however, presents a profound challenge for this system of freely available public information. The established paradigm is displaced in that agencies see no need for a provider like GPO to make information products which fit the 44 USC ch. 19 definition of "Government information" available over computer networks. This is, on one hand, good news in that there is the possibility for a far greater amount of information to be made available to the public. At the same time, established expectations on the part of users for are not only continued but exponentially expanded by the continually advancing opportunities of the networked environment. Libraries generally are faced with the challenge of defining new roles for themselves as an increasing amount of information is made available easily accessible to user desktops via electronic means. GPO's activity to date was catalyzed by the 1996 Study to Identify Measures Necessary for a Successful Transition to a More Electronic Federal Depository Library Program. The study was undertaken by the Library Programs Service (LPS) of GPO in response to a directive in report language accompanying Legislative Branch appropriations for fiscal year 1996. An initial draft of the study called for the majority of the FDLP to be electronic within a short 2-5 year timeframe. It outlined seven major goals which, despite various modifications and reinterpretations, remain in place:

- Ensure equitable, no-fee public access to government information

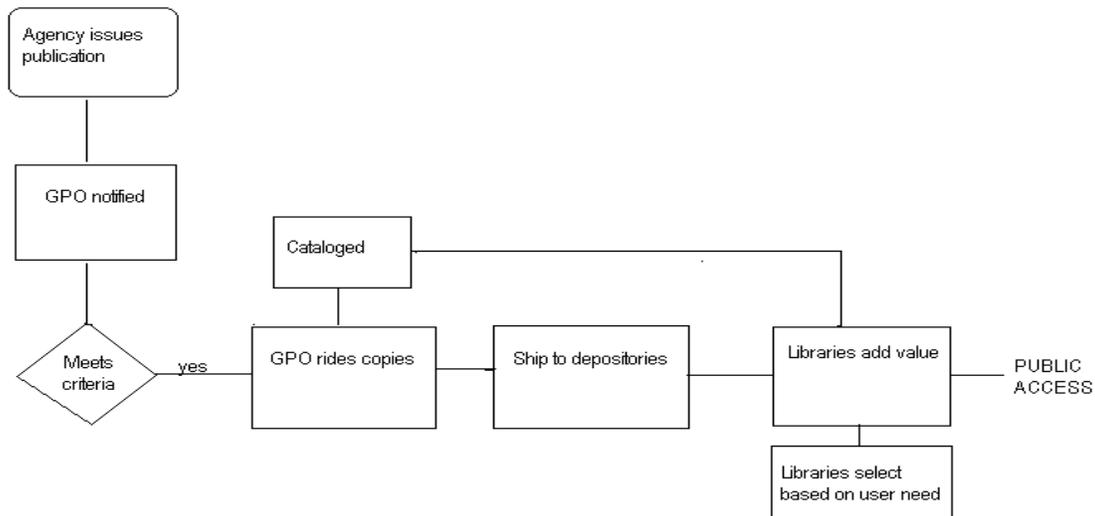
- Use new technology to improve public access
- Provide information in formats appropriate to intended users and use
- Enable the public to locate information
- Ensure timely, current, and permanent public access
- Facilitate preservation of information
- Ensure cost effectiveness

In the intervening time, GPO has begun to define concepts that will meet these goals and transform the successful aspects of the FDLP for the era of electronic dissemination. Currently, and for the foreseeable future, GPO will disseminate information in a variety of forms and formats: paper, microfiche, tangible electronic products such as CD-ROM, and over networked sites. The mix of media will necessarily be flexible and will be adjusted continuously to meet the demands of user need and advancing technology. Indeed, the transition might be far less complex if the rapid and complete shift envisioned in the early drafts had been feasible. At present we are in a period of parallel processing, with the old system of tangible copy distribution concurrent with the development, testing, and debugging of the new. The Government information environment in libraries is yet another example of new technology augmenting the old rather than eliminating it.

### **New Modes, New Models**

As electronic dissemination has moved into the forefront, and librarians have struggled to keep pace with the advance of technology, the end product has not changed: librarians still work to bring users and information together. As agencies increasingly employ the Internet as a prominent, if not primary, tool for public information, the models for GPO are shifting radically.

### ***The Historic Model***



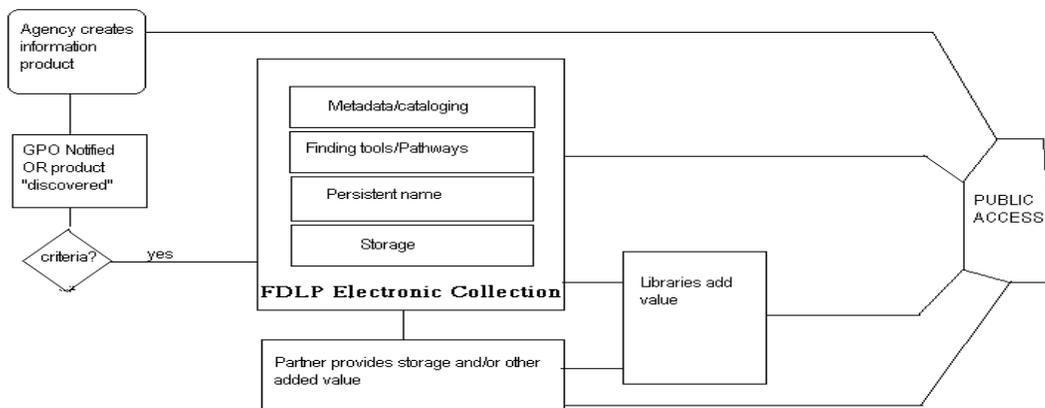
In the era of ink on paper, copies of publications sufficient for shipment to depository libraries were simply added to the print run of publications. Since GPO was created as the sole source for agency and Congressional printing, the theory held that all printing orders could be examined for their applicability to the standards for inclusion in the Depository Program, and copies added for depositories, to be paid for at Congressional expense. As GPO has increasingly become a central procurement source for printing services, the formula has become somewhat more complex, but has held. Although agencies have in many cases sidestepped GPO as source, creating a problem of so-called "fugitive" documents, the system has delivered a respectable percentage of government publications over the years. The provision of copies for depositories is, in this model, a largely passive act for agencies if the printing takes place in the GPO plant, and requires minimal effort for orders contracted out through GPO.

In this model, GPO added significant value for end users by creating various finder and locator services to make using government information more expedient. Beginning at the turn of the century with a classification system which provides a uniform identifier and a system for arrangement of tangible documents on shelves, GPO has over the years provided complete, detailed library cataloging information and other aids such as subject-oriented bibliographies. These tools have been employed as the basis for local tools by librarians as well as being used by end users for locating information.

***The Emerging Model***

GPO's first entry into electronic information caused barely a ripple in the established system. CD-ROM, while greatly increasing the amount of data in a given shipment, is still a tangible product, tallied and shipped just as books and microfiche. However, close on the heels of CD-ROM was the Internet, which fundamentally alters the relationship between agencies, GPO, and users.

In the shift to electronic dissemination, GPO's intervention at the point of the printing order is eliminated. Agencies have no need of a centralized (or even outside) source for publishing information on the Internet. Thus the pivotal point of collection of products as they pass through the printing/procurement process is lost. And yet, GPO's role as intermediary remains. Congress has continued to recognize GPO as central in the provision of access to Government information. The law creating the GPO Access system in 1993 and subsequent actions have affirmed GPO's role in informing the nation. The challenge is to create a new model that satisfies users continuing and expanding expectations. The shift is a fundamental reinvention of GPO from primarily a printer and distributor to a multi-type information broker/intermediary.



The new paradigm that is evolving looks to the successes of the Federal Depository Library Program and its depository libraries, and attempts to apply best practices and principles to a new FDLP.

What is key in this new era is that in order to make information available for libraries and their users, GPO must be able to offer services that contribute meaningfully to agencies information dissemination activities. Agencies may be tempted to believe that by putting information on a Web site any obligation to disseminate information to the public is fulfilled. Yet, many public information officials understand that a level of promotion and interpretation above simply making the information available is required to make it accessible. GPO with its cataloging and indexing services, and libraries with local reference assistance have long provided these services for agencies.

### **The Collection Concept**

Since his appointment late last year as Superintendent of Documents, the GPO official responsible for dissemination of public information, Francis Buckley has been promoting three elements: the Sales Program, the Depository Library Program, and GPO Access as integrated and mutually complementary parts of the information dissemination mission of the Superintendent of Documents. In part this involves the recognition that the information products that GPO disseminates must be managed as collections. In general, we manage three top level collections: the Documents Sales Collection, the FDLP Print Collection, and the FDLP Electronic Collection. This approach is based on the concept that the electronic products can and should be managed as a library-like collection, throughout the life cycle of those products. It is seen by Mr. Buckley as vital to the evolution of the FDLP to maximize the potential of digital technology in providing the American public with no-fee access to information by and about their government.

The FDLP Electronic Collection (Collection) consists of four elements: (1) core legislative and regulatory GPO Access products which will reside permanently on Government Printing Office (GPO) servers; (2) other remotely accessible products either maintained by GPO or other institutions with which GPO has established formal agreements; (3) the tangible electronic Government information products distributed to Federal depository libraries; and (4) remotely accessible electronic Government information products which GPO identifies, describes, and links to but which remain under the control of the originating agencies. Products included in the Collection must meet the criteria of 44 U.S.C. 1901-1902 and be of value and importance to depository libraries and the general public.

There are undoubtedly numerous electronic Government information products which are not included in one of the four components of the FDLP Electronic Collection because GPO has not yet brought them under bibliographic control. This "first-level" collection management activity is dependant upon knowledge that the products exist.

In this new model, GPO will create a selective, fully described and indexed, and permanently available collection of electronic government information products, much as the distributed network of depository libraries and GPO have created a national collection of paper and microfiche documents. The useful tool of the "rider" for printing orders must be replaced in order to bring products into this collection. GPO must in some way "discover" online resources, either by notification by agencies or by "mining" by GPO staff.

Even though GPO is engaged in information discovery on the Internet in order to bring more products into the Collection, this activity is by itself insufficient. In order to include the broadest range of products into the FDLP, and thereby ensure permanent access, GPO will employ a range of strategies. These

include reliance on notification from and outreach to other agencies, and notification from the depository library community. Electronic products available via the Internet will be identified and recommended by LPS or other stakeholders. After evaluation of the product, contact will be established with the producing agency, a selection decision made, bibliographic control established, steps taken to include the product in the Collection; and, with ongoing agency contact, measures put in place to ensure permanent access.

Items added in these new modes will be described (cataloged) and indexed using a variety of standards-based systems such as MARC cataloging (the standard for library catalogs), global information locator service (GILS) records, and emerging metadata schemes, such as the Dublin Core. In addition, navigation and locator tools are being created that allow for a variety of approaches to finding government information. GPO Access, the GPO WWW site provides WAIS searching of a growing number of agency and Congressional databases. The Pathway suite of services provides browsable tools arranged by broad topic, by agency, and by title.

In the ink-on-paper era, collections were accumulated by a geographically dispersed network of libraries. One depository per state was designated a "regional" which collected all items in the program and retained them permanently. "Selective" depositories chose based on local demand and retained for a specified minimum period of time. This system provides wide accessibility to government information, and assures that that access is permanent.

"Permanent access" in the context of the life cycle of public information, includes not only long-term archival preservation on electronic files, but provision of useful, meaningful accessibility to files for users. In order to assure this permanent access, the burden of high volume storage and access for agency resources will necessarily be shared by multiple participants.

In creating a "permanent online collection" GPO has assumed or redistributed responsibilities for life cycle management of Government information products. GPO directly manages the portion of the collection that resides on GPO servers, which includes core legislative and regulatory information. FDLDP partners, including individual depository libraries, universities, consortia, and service providers, will provide storage capacity and other resources to provide permanent access to the parts of the collection they manage, GPO will coordinate the network of partners and in particular ensure fail-safe mechanisms in the event that partners are unable to continue to participate in the program.

GPO is building a variety of partnership arrangements in an attempt to gain information and experience in forming new models. The first partnership brought together the Department of State and the University of Illinois Chicago to assure permanent access to State's web-based information. GPO is currently working under an interagency agreement with OSTI to make the Information Bridge product freely available through depository libraries, replacing the huge distribution of microfiche previously made to disseminate DOE contractor RD reports. We hope that one of the outcomes of this project is that more libraries find the reports useful through their availability over the Internet.

The overall strategy for the management of the Permanent Online Collection is being outlined in a document similar in form and concept to a standard library collection development document, which outlines a framework through which a library's collection is developed and maintained. Typically, such a plan defines the mission and goals, identifies and analyzes the primary user community, and provides guidance for formulating specific collection procedures.

## Reinventing Services

The FDLP currently provides indexing, cataloging, classification, periodic inspection of program libraries in support of minimum standards for service, and an assurance of permanent access to documents via the distributed system of regional and selective libraries. All of these activities are relevant to the Electronic Collection. Indexing and cataloging will expand to include the creation of metadata and the assignment of persistent name technology that will safeguard the availability of electronic documents. Periodic inspection will include support for expanding and revising services to users and minimum technical requirements for technology platforms.

The assurance of permanent access will evolve into partnerships between GPO, agency producers of information, and institutions or organizations willing to share storage capacity and expertise.

Hand in hand with finding tools and metadata creation as well as persistent naming is a system of authentication providing assurance to users that documents obtained electronically are authentic, official representations from the agency of issue. Although no specific plans have been outlined, there is no question that in tandem with metadata and indexing, as well as permanent access provisions, GPO will create a package of services that will attract agency cooperation as a benefit to both producers and consumers of information.

## Conclusion

The overall vision for the FDLP remains intact from its conceptual beginnings at the dawn of the Republic, and its codification in the Printing Act of 1895: expanded and enhanced access for everyone to Government information regardless of form or format. The program will remain one of mixed formats and media with products and services responsive to user needs and expectations. The commitment to improved accessibility includes a commitment to high quality finding tools and metadata, and to improved methods of communication with librarian intermediaries and end users.

GPO will work for a long period in the mode of parallel processing - separate but equal tracks for traditional and digital resources - but the journey, already begun with various single steps, is now well under way.