ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Future Directions for the Federal Depository Library Program

Summary

Studies and reports since the early 1990's acknowledge the pressing need for change to the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). New digital technologies and services, user information needs and library practice dictate reconfiguration of the Program to realize the benefits of networked-based technologies and to provide effective access to government information. There is a need and opportunity to identify a sustainable framework that will provide access to and preservation of government information in the years ahead. A new framework will address financial sustainability as well as the essential components of infrastructure for collaboration among federal depository libraries and with other stakeholders. Working with consultants, ARL will identify and explore such a framework that permits flexibility in the future while ensuring enduring access and providing for the efficient management of the legacy collections to insure the broadest public access to government information. Such access has been the hallmark of the FDLP. The framework approach is proposed as an opportunity to specify one or more models for configuring collection resources, access infrastructure, and expertise that would optimally support the interests of an informed public and the capacity of our Nation's libraries.

Background

There are many programs and laws that support open government and promote public access to the information and services of the Government. The E-Government Act of 2002, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), and the Depository Library Act of 1962 each provide important components that support transparency of Government. Congress has updated these laws or enacted new ones to ensure that Government programs and services remain meaningful as technology and practice evolve. For example, FOIA, enacted in 1966, was amended in 1996, 2002, and 2007. The E- Government Act of 2002 recognizes that digital technologies can improve the management and efficiency of government services. The last major revision to the law governing the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) was in 1962. Participatory democracy, transparency and accountability of Government are important facets of President-elect Obama's agenda and are the focus of much of the transition work. There is a unique opportunity to reconfigure the FDLP to promote "good government" and ensure that the public has effective access to government information.

The FDLP, established in 1813, is a partnership between the Federal Government and libraries throughout the Unites States. The Government provides government information and related access tools such as cataloging information to participating libraries and in return, the libraries provide no-fee access to the government information to the public. There are currently 1,250

depositories in research, academic, state, public and law libraries throughout the United States. There are 52 regional Federal Depository Libraries (FDLs) that collect and maintain in perpetuity, all tangible resources associated with the Program. Regional FDLs are housed in research, academic, state and public libraries. The remaining libraries select those government resources of most interest to their user community.

Library and information services have changed dramatically since enactment of the Depository Library Act of 1962. The introduction of digital technologies, the World Wide Web, and the Internet have transformed all sectors of society, including libraries. Libraries routinely engage in collaborative initiatives to share services and resources, enabled by standards for digital content and ubiquitous infrastructure. As a result, some elements and structure of the FDLP which are predicated on geographic and physical collection models, are no longer applicable nor effective due to innovations in technology, service and practice.

Unfortunately, the failure to update the Depository Library Act of 1962 thus the FDLP, has resulted in increasing fiscal and space pressures on participating libraries, particularly regional federal depository libraries (FDLs). As detailed in the recent Government Printing Office report on the state of regional FDLs, the high cost of maintaining the tangible legacy collection and the increasing cost of staffing to service the collection, has led a growing – and not insignificant - number of regional depository libraries to reconsider their status in the Program.

The digital networked environment presents the opportunity to rethink the existing structure and operation of the FDLP as has happened in other library operations and services. Importantly, because user expectations have changed -- users expect and prefer digital information and services – it is imperative that participating FDLs be allowed to reconfigure services to meet the information needs of their users.

Future Directions

The future of the FDLP and in particular, the role of regionals FDLs, has been discussed extensively within the ARL community for many years. The ARL directors have concluded that following up on the draft GPO report on *"Regional Depository Libraries in the 21st Century: A Time for Change,"* there is a need and opportunity to identify a sustainable framework that will provide access to and preservation of government information in the years ahead. A new framework would address financial sustainability as well as the essential components of infrastructure for collaboration among federal depository libraries. Working with consultants, ARL will identify and explore such a framework that permits flexibility in the future while ensuring such enduring access and providing for the efficient management of the legacy collections to insure the broadest public access to government information. Such access has been the hallmark of the FDLP. The framework approach is proposed as an opportunity to specify one or more models for configuring collection resources,

access infrastructure, and expertise that would optimally support the interests of an informed public and the capacity of our Nation's libraries.

Some, but by no means all, issues and key components of the framework have been identified and require greater definition and consideration by the consultants. Overall, the consultants need to explore the value and constraints of the current system and propose a new sustainable framework for access to government information that harnesses the distributed resources of the library community while also exploiting technologies to advance new strategies for collective action. This process entails exploring and identifying the benefits that will occur from a new model, particularly regarding improved service to users, the efficacy of the model, and the costs associated with moving to a new model and the potential savings over time. Potential models will require an economic framework as well with co-investment by multiple stakeholders.

The assessment of future models will need to balance the risks associated with new strategies for managing government resources as well as the benefits in improving the overall system of information infrastructure available to individual citizens. Assumptions that guide this process include the following:

1) The new framework will be comprised of a small number of physical regional legacy collections (print and microforms).
- What is the optimal number of regional legacy collections?
- What is/are the path(s) to a smaller number of legacy collections?
- Does this new framework require changes to title 44 or are these changes possible within the current legal structure?
- What role can digital surrogates play in optimizing access and ensuring enduring access to legacy collections?

2) There is a need to develop protocols (i.e, standards and best practices) for managing, preserving, and sharing legacy collections and digital resources.
- Are there existing protocols that could be applied?
- What protocols need to be developed and for what purposes?
- Are there lessons/experiences from other projects that provide useful insights?
- What areas require collective action to advance required protocols?

3) To be successful, the new framework requires a coherent means to access the legacy collections and digital depository resources. In some respects, accessing legacy collections still remains difficult due to separate classification systems, cataloging issues and oftentimes, lack of integration with library expertise and other resources.
- Will the GPO Federal Digital System address some, most, or all of these concerns? If not, what issues remain? What role can GPO play in advancing coherent and robust access to legacy collections?
- Are there other relevant initiatives underway including E-Government initiatives?
- What access tools and services are needed and how can they be developed and by whom?

• Can existing models of library access be exploited to develop an overall framework for access (e.g., leveraging library investments in cataloging while also leveraging the physical assets held in multiple locations)?

4) There is no clear sense of how many federal documents pre-1976 require cataloging records. Until an overarching schema for access is developed, holdings for these resources cannot be easily identified nor made available for digitization nor coordinated storage. GPO is digitizing its shelf list which is a helpful step but not sufficient. In addition, there is a need to better understand what role institutions with records or OCLC can also play in this effort. Several steps are required including:
   • Need to better understand the universe of records requiring processing.
   • Develop a master plan for access which assesses cooperative action for cataloging as well as machine-based mechanisms for providing access. Sustainability of access will require an economic model that distributes the burden/costs of such cataloging and/or systems development.
   • Propose mechanisms to provide financial assistance to institutions that maintain and provide access to and preservation of legacy collections.

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