

FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM: SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The United States Congress passed a resolution in 1813 laying the groundwork for the current Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). Congress wanted to share “the documents published under the orders of the Senate and of the House of Representatives” with state officials and the public. At that time, most federal documents were printed and distributed through Congress. The resolution directed that the Library of Congress, state executives and legislatures, colleges, universities, and historical societies receive the federal documents [3 Stat 140 (1814)]. Over the years, the program was expanded to authorize Members of Congress to name up to two libraries in each Congressional district as depositories, and lifted the obligation of every library having to retain every document permanently. The personal connections between Members of Congress and depository libraries have been invaluable, as it has resulted in continued funding for GPO to administer the FDLP and a more informed public.

The ideals of the FDLP remain today. But, while the networked world has provided increased access, it has also exacerbated issues for which FDLP libraries have historically struggled. When speaking to Members of Congress about the FDLP, Public Printer Davita Vance-Cooks said, “Once limited to the distribution of printed and microfiche products, the FDLP today is primarily digital, supported by FDsys and other digital resources.”¹ In spite of the increase in the number of publications available digitally, libraries are still receiving publications in paper, microform, and audio-visual formats, and librarians are faced with the task of not only providing access to all formats but of preserving those formats as well. The task is made more difficult when information is often only available in databases which are subject to information removal, shutdowns and political whim, and by agencies only wanting to serve the latest information.

Libraries, particularly those that agreed to be regionals and receive and keep everything, are struggling with the cost of preserving the past and dealing with the current mix of formats. Libraries in some states have asked libraries in other states to serve as their regionals. Some states have created shared housing agreements to fulfill their regional responsibilities. Other libraries, like those who are members of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL), have developed co-operative programs across state lines. Currently, there is no comprehensive inventory of regional collections. There is no consensus as to how many collections of paper are necessary to protect the interests of researchers and where those collections should be located. In order to plan for the future, research about preservation of and access to historic, digitized- and born-digital collections is needed.

Ensuring that depository libraries remain geographically located and staffed with professionals who can assist users to identify, locate, and use government information in multiple formats remains absolutely critical. Ensuring that born-digital government information is preserved depends upon libraries, GPO and government agencies committed to permanent public access. Librarians need to work with user communities to plan for the future. Financial support is critical to preserving government publications provided to depository libraries and creating a sustainable 21st century FDLP.

ALA GODORT Legislation Committee: Bernadine Abbott Hoduski (Chair), Kay Cassell, Brett Cloyd, James Jacobs, Kevin McClure, Wilhelmina Randtke, Kevin Reynolds, Melanie Sims, Antoinette W. Satterfield ~ January 2014

¹ Prepared Statement before the Committee on House Administration, Hearing on GPO in 2023: Keeping America Informed in a Post-Print World, Wednesday, December 4, 2013. Available: <http://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=101544> .