

TECHNOLOGY TOOLS TO SIMPLIFY AND EXPAND ACCESS TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

Many people believe that everything worth knowing is available electronically, easily, and at no cost. They may not know that there are a variety of tools that libraries use to collect, manage, and share government information. In spite of librarians' efforts to catalog this material, a lot of information in print or in microfiche – not to mention born-digital – is not included in library catalogs. Much of what is available electronically may be accessed only by way of expensive commercial databases.

The American Library Association's Government Documents Round Table (GODORT) has recommended that, "GPO should continue to offer a variety of tools for the community and to partner with agencies as appropriate in developing tools for libraries." This would include tools that search digital repositories to export and reuse metadata and add links to digital surrogates of libraries' physical collections, by adding links to library catalog records, as well as tools for digital collection development and harvesting of fugitive born-digital documents.

Notably, in the public and private sectors there has been an embrace of social media tools. GPO and Federal Depository Libraries are part of the effort to share best practices. Libraries need to use existing tools and develop new applications. When government information is provided via social media, GPO should provide guidance on maintaining this information for the long-term to assist future researchers.

Government publications issued prior to 1976 are difficult to find, even though many regionals have them in their collections. Libraries need tools that will highlight these older publications. Only recently has there been a concrete effort to provide cataloging for these older publications. Providing libraries with tools to bring existing cataloging records into library catalogs would help. Knowing which libraries hold these items would assist with collection development and efforts to build subject-specific collections.

For two centuries the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) has been an important part of American democracy. Its efforts have strengthened citizens' access to government information, encouraged collaboration among libraries, and preserved many vital documents that facilitate a functioning democracy. Librarians must now train their sights on making sure that electronic information will be available for long-term use. Because many citizens are kept from vital primary research materials due to lack of electronic access and/or expertise, librarians should be encouraged to provide the tools that connect citizens to these resources.

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