

A Study on Government Documents and the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) in America

미국의 정부 문서와 연방정부 간행물 기탁 도서관제도(FDLP)에 대한 고찰

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<ABSTRACT>

Congress established the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) to ensure that the public has free access to the Government's information. Operated by the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), the mission of the FDLP is to disseminate information products from all three branches of the Government to over 1,250 Depository libraries in the FDLP program nationwide. Depository libraries safeguard the American public's right to information by making Government information in all formats freely available. This paper discusses the role of the GPO and FDLP, the GPO's organizational structure, the Depository library's obligations and responsibilities, services and collections, referrals and networking, and the Depository's future and challenges.

Keywords: Government Printing Office, GPO, Federal Depository Library Program, FDLP, federal depository

<초 록>

미국 국회는 일반인들에게 정부 문서를 무료로 자유롭게 접할 수 있도록 하기 위하여 연방정부 간행물 기탁 도서관제도(FDLP)를 설립했다. 미국 정부 문서 발행기관(GPO)에 의해서 운영되는 FDLP의 역할은 FDLP에 가입한 미국내 1,250이 넘는 도서관들에게 정부 세 기관(입법, 사법, 행정)으로부터 발행되는 모든 정보물을 배포하는 데 있다. 정부 문서 보관기관은 모든 타입의 정부 문서를 일반인에게 무료로 이용할 수 있게 함으로써 미국 일반인의 정보를 알 권리를 보호한다. 이 문서는 다음과 같은 사항을 기술하고 있다: GPO 와FDLP의 역할, GPO의 조직구조, 정부 문서 보관기관의 의무와 책임, 알리기 서비스와 문서 소장, 위탁과 연결, 그리고 정부 문서 보관기관의 미래와 도전.

주제어: 미국 정부 문서 발행기관, GPO, 연방정부 간행물 기탁 도서관제도, FDLP, 연방정부 문서 보관기관

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1. Introduction

In the United States, the Federal Government reports to its citizen what it is doing through publications from all three branches of the Government that are freely available to the general public. Anyone can visit Federal Depository libraries and access Government documents without charge. These documents are available in a variety of forms, such as books, serials, maps, pamphlets, loose-leaf binders, posters, microfiche, CDs, DVDs, and on-line/digital forms.

Government documents cover diverse subjects and offer information on education and grants, science and technology, environment and agriculture, health and nutrition, history and culture, money and taxes, voting and elections, public safety and law, legal and regulatory information, and numerous other subjects. The concept of free public access to Government information is founded on “the unwavering principles that the American public has the right of access to its Government’s information” (U.S. Government Printing Office 2009d, Value of FDL section). The Government also has an obligation to keep America informed, so the public can become an informed citizenry that participates fully in the democratic processes of the country and makes well-informed decisions.

This paper first will present a general overview of Government documents in America and the roles of the Government Printing Office (GPO) and the Federal Depositor Library Program (FDLP). In subsequent sections, the paper will discuss the GPO’s

organizational structure, the Depository’s legal obligations and responsibilities; the Depository’s services, including public awareness, collections, and referrals; the Depository’s upkeep through networking; and lastly the Depository’s future and challenges. A major part of the paper, except for the future challenges and conclusion section, will offer an explanatory perspective. In the conclusion section, however, the paper will discuss practical issues for a library to consider before it decides to be designated as a Depository, such as responsibilities, commitments, workloads, and costs that go with Federal Depository library status.

2. GPO and FDLP

Congress established the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) to ensure that the American public has access to Government information. The origins of the FDLP can be traced to 1813 “when Congress passed a joint resolution which directed copies of the House and Senate Journals, and other publications, be printed and distributed to certain libraries and institutions outside of the Federal Government” (Library Services & Content Management 2008, p.4). Since then, “the FDLP has now grown into a system of over 1,250 libraries of all sizes, a variety of types, and located in the 50 states and territories of the United States” (LSCM 2008, p.4). Operated by the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), “the FDLP disseminates information from all three branches of the

Government” to Depository libraries nationwide (GPO 2009c, [brochure]). These libraries are “responsible for assuring that the public has free access to the materials provided by the FDLP” (GPO 2009c, [brochure]).

The GPO “administers the FDLP on behalf of the participating libraries and the public” (GPO 2009c, [brochure]). It provides Federal Depository libraries with free access to official U.S. Government information in all formats. In return, “these libraries agree to provide free access to that information, as well as professional assistance in finding and using that information to any member of the public” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.2). In short, Depository libraries safeguard the public’s right to information by making Federal Government information in all media freely available (Ennis 2007; GPO 2009c; GPO 2009d; GPO 2009f; LSCM 2008; LSCM 2009a; LSCM 2009b). “Anyone can visit Federal Depository libraries, use the Depository collections, and access online Government information” (GPO 2009c, [brochure]). Both FDLP and GPO “have taken strides to provide the American public with free, unrestricted access to Federal Government information” (Ennis 2007, p.15).

Under the *United States Code*, Title 44, Chapter 19, Section 1905, there are several ways in which a library may become a Depository library. Members of Congress “may each designate up to two libraries to fill Depository vacancies in a Congressional district (Representatives) or state (Senators)” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.6). To find

a Depository library in one’s community or state, one should consult the Federal Depository Library Directory. The directory “identifies all Depository libraries in the program, provides contact information for each library, and describes the origin of each library’s designation status” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.5).

Under Title 44 of the *United States Code* (chapter 19, section 1901-1906), the Federal Depository Libraries “receive Government publications free of charge in exchange for providing access to the collection” (Ennis 2007, p.21). However, all materials distributed through the Depository library program “remain the property of the U.S. Government Printing Office” (LSCM 2008, p.4). Depository libraries are “custodians”, not the “owners” of the materials (Ennis 2007, p.21). Federal property is “entrusted to their care” (LSCM 2008, p.4); thus the Depositories “must pay for the personnel and the supplies for the upkeep of the Government collection” (Ennis 2007, p.21). Because all Government publications supplied to the Depository library under the FDLP “remain the property of the U.S. Government”, the libraries “cannot materially or financially benefit from the sale, transfer, disposal, or recycling of Depository holdings” (LSCM 2008, p.4; LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.6 & 5.15). If a Depository library wants to dispose of the materials, they should follow special instructions found in the *United States Code* Chapter 19.

3. GPO's Organizational Structure

The constitution of the United States divides the U. S. Government into three branches - legislative, executive, and judicial (A complete diagram and information about the branches of the U.S. Government can be found in *The U.S. Government Manual*). GPO is an agency that falls under the legislative branch. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., GPO presently has “approximately 2,500” total employees (Office of Federal Register 2008, p.5) at its headquarters and 15 GPO offices in cities across the country. It “receives appropriations and authorization for its revolving fund through the annual Legislative Branch Appropriations Act” (GPO 2009f, FAQ section).

According to *The U.S. Government Manual 2008-2009*, the Public Printer (the official head of the GPO) “serves as the head of GPO” and “is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate” (2008, p.51). The Public Printer, as chief executive officer of the GPO, is responsible for the whole administration of the GPO and is assisted by four main deputies: the Chief of Staff, Superintendent of Documents, Deputy Public Printer, and Chief Management Officer.

Under the Deputy Public Printer is the Library Services & Content Management (LSCM), which is “responsible for the current and future access to published U.S. Government information” (LSCM 2009b, p.1). The LSCM manages the FDLP, which is one of its main operations (LSCM

2009b). Therefore, all general interest questions related to the FDLP should go to the LSCM first, through its online help (www.fdlp.gov), and all the assistance needed regarding the FDLP will come from the LSCM. There also are other ways to contact the LSCM for help. General public or Depository libraries can contact the LSCM through phone, fax, regular mail, or by using a direct contact form on the FDLP desktop web site (LSCM's phone number, fax number, and postal address can be found in the FDLP handbook chapter 1.4).

4. Obligations and Requirements

There is a benefit to being the Federal Depository library (e.g., receiving Government publications free). However there are also obligations and requirements. The first obligation is that the Depository library shall “make Federal Government information products available for the free use of the general public” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.1). “Public access to the Government information remains the highest priority” of all Federal Depository libraries, and is a legal requirement (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.5). “Whether publicly or privately funded, all Depository libraries (except the highest State appellate court libraries) must allow the public free access to all Federal Depository information products, regardless of format” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.5). The “key concept of no-fee, readily available access to U.S. Government information has been

the guiding principle” of the FDLP (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.2). In today’s electronic library environment, “the Depository program is as much about access and expertise as it is about tangible publications” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.9). Therefore, the libraries should ensure free public access to all types of formats, both physical and electronic, and provide ensuing equipment to facilitate access to the resources (Ennis 2007; GPO 2009c; GPO 2009d; GPO 2009f; LSCM 2008; LSCM 2009a; LSCM 2009b). In addition, Depository libraries must “report the conditions of their library to the Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) every two years by completing the Biennial Survey” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 2.2). This mandatory Biennial Survey not only provides valuable information and “allows the library to compare its situation to other libraries”, but it also gives the library the opportunity to “detect any problems they were not aware of that should be corrected” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 7.3 - 7.4) (Recent Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries submissions are available on the FDLP desktop website).

Moreover, the Depository library should have “one staff member designated as the Depository coordinator” who will take over the responsibilities and operations within the library (LSCM 2009a, chapter 10.8). Although the number of staff will “depend on the size, scope, and collection of the library”, the staff should be “sufficiently trained to provide service in the use of Government resources in all types of format” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.2.c & 10.3). The staff member’s responsibilities

are described in more detail in the Staff Responsibilities section of the FDLP handbook (Online staff training tutorial is also available on the ALA/GODORT website).

5. Services

5.1 Public Awareness

The FDLP was established to provide the citizens of the United States with access to Federal Government information (Ennis 2007; GPO 2009c; GPO 2009d; LSCM 2008; LSCM 2009a; LSCM 2009b). Therefore, “free public access remains the highest priority of Depository libraries” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.5). Free public access “begins with public awareness” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.5.a). For the American public to benefit from the free, vast Government resources, they “need to be alerted to the valuable information” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.5). Depository libraries “should make every effort to ensure that the public is aware of the Depository collection and the services” they provide (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.5). Even though “the utility of Government information is well documented”, if the public is not aware of it, “the informational resources of many Federal Depositories will remain underutilized”, undervalued, and less cost-effective (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.5). Therefore, Depository libraries should promote themselves and ensure their visibility. For this purpose, FDLP requires Depository libraries to “post signage or the emblem

in a prominent location on or near all public entrances, preferably visible from the exterior of the library” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.5.b). The signage or the emblem indicates that “the library is a Federal Depository library” and that “Government resources are available there” for the public use and “without charge” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.2 & 4.5.b).

Depository collections and services can also be promoted on websites, flyers, brochures, and handouts. Depositories can receive many free folders, bookmarks, pamphlets, posters, decals, and classification charts from the GPO (to see the promotional materials, visit FDLP desktop Promotional Resources section). These materials can be ordered without charge through the FDLP website (for more detailed information about public services and promotional materials, consult FDLP handbook chapter 4).

5.2 Collection

While many libraries request Federal Depository status to benefit their primary users, “all Depository libraries (except the highest State appellate court libraries) have a legal commitment to provide Federal Government information to all people in their Congressional district or relevant region” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.2). Therefore, “the Federal Government information needs of the general public must influence the Depository library’s collection development” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.2).

There is a Basic Collection. Every Depository library should maintain the Basic Collection in

its selection profile. Depositories are required to have the titles in the Basic Collection list easily accessible to their users (to see the Basic Collection list, visit FDLP website Basic Collection section). There is also a Suggested Core Collections list consisting of “recommended titles in all subject areas for academic, public, and law libraries” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 5.7). Depository libraries select a certain percentage of items from the Suggested Core Collections list. FDLP handbook indicates that “Usually most large academic and public libraries select most of the items listed for their library type, but smaller libraries tend to be more selective” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 5.7). However, even though the Suggested Core Collection lists help librarians to select more pertinent and relevant items for their library types, “the lists are not mandatory” (LSCM 2009a, appendix A). Depository libraries do not need to select all the items on the Suggested Core Collection lists in order to remain in the Federal Depository library status. There is no minimum selection number as long as the Depository maintains the Basic Collection items (Regional Depositories are an exception; information about Regional Depositories can be found in FLLP handbook chapter 12). Depositories are not required to select a “rigid, predetermined percentage of item numbers in order to retain Depository status” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 3.8). The library can decide the selection rate, as little or as much as they need, based on the information needs of their users. The Depositories can collect “only the materials that meet the needs” of their

patrons (LSCM 2009a, chapter 5.7).

When the Depository decides on its local collection, the library should base its selection on its collection development plan, policy, mission statement, institutional purposes, and the needs of the community (for more information about collection, consult Handbook chapter 5 or FDLP desktop Collection Management section). Each Depository should also conduct an annual “comprehensive review of its selections”, comparing then against the required Basic Collection and Suggested Core Collection for its library type (LSCM 2009, chapter 5.1.d). This process will ensure that the needed materials are selected and that the materials which are no longer of use are deselected (for more advice on collection maintenance practice, visit Collection Development page at GPO Access or FDLP desktop Collection Management section).

Most Depositories are “designated to serve a particular U.S. Congressional District” (LSCM 2009, chapter 5.1.d). For this reason, Depository libraries “either solely or in conjunction with neighboring Depositories, should make demonstrable efforts to identify and meet the Government information needs of their Congressional district or local area” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 5.1.d). However, “no single Depository can meet all the potential community needs” (LSCM 2009, chapter 13.9). Therefore, for Depository libraries to be more efficient, they should engage in cooperative collection development with neighboring Depository libraries. By coordinating item selections with other Depositories in their area, each library can ensure

“adequate coverage” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 5.1.d).

Frequent communication among neighboring Depositories is also strongly encouraged in collection development efforts (GPO 2009d; LSCM 2008; LSCM 2009a). When selecting items, Depository libraries should work with neighboring Depositories. The collaboration will not only prevent unnecessary duplication of materials, but will also lead to more efficient use of each library’s resources (GPO 2009d; LSCM 2008; LSCM 2009a). The cooperation will help each library both in the collection development and in promotional activities.

Depositories can change their Item Profiles (selection profile) by selecting or de-selecting their item numbers through the Amendment of Item Selections procedure. Depositories can de-select (drop) items in the library’s profile at any time, but they can only select (add) items once a year during the Item Selection Update Cycle period, which usually occurs each June or July (Depository library’s Item Profile is available on FDLP desktop website).

5.3 Referrals

The FDLP is “a cooperative program that enables libraries and librarians to share access to and services in the use of Depository collections” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.3). If the Depository library cannot meet the user’s need because the needs are out of their selection scope, the library can always refer the patron to other Depositories for access

(GPO 2009d; LSCM 2008; LSCM 2009a). By locating Depository libraries that own the publication, the referring Depository can “easily facilitate access to tangible Government publications the Depository does not own” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.3.c). Therefore, frequent communication among neighboring Depositories is crucial. By connecting with other local Depositories and cooperative services, each Depository will “increase the value and usage of its library collection” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 11).

For the referring services to be feasible, the Depository libraries should be aware of the resources available at neighboring Depositories including the “strengths, weaknesses, and unique characteristics of their collection” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 5.15). This awareness about other Depositories will also help to “expand the availability of resources in nearby geographic areas” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 5.9). However, referring does not necessarily mean sending the user to a bigger Depository for access to the collections the Depository does not own; referring service is “reciprocal” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.3). No matter how small a Depository is, the library can “offer its own unique collections and resources to the users referred by other Depositories” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.1.d). To facilitate the reciprocity of the referrals, each Depository should make other nearby Depositories aware of their collection strength as well. This can be accomplished through “continuous, constant, and ongoing networking” among libraries (LSCM 2009a, chapter 5.15).

Networking opportunities such as local document group meetings or other neighboring Depository-related activities will help Depositories to exchange ideas, share expertise, and keep up-to-date with new practices of other libraries as well (Other Depositories in the same state, city, zip code, or area code can be found on the GPO's Federal Depository Library Directory page on FDLP desktop website).

6. Keeping Current with the FDLP

Networking with other Depository libraries does not end in cooperative collection development and referral services with nearby Depositories. For the Depository librarians to enhance more of their knowledge and to keep themselves more current, a wider level of networking is also necessary. Broader networking can be accomplished through “participating in and monitoring regional or national Government Documents groups or conferences, either in person or electronically via e-mail discussion groups” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.8).

National e-mail discussion lists such as GOVDOC-L, GPO-FDLP-L, FDLP-L Listserv, MAPS-L, and DocTech-L will not only provide invaluable access to other Government information specialists' expertise, but they will also give Depository librarians opportunities to receive important announcements and news about FDLP program (for more information about discussion lists,

visit FDLP desktop Communicating Within the FDLP section). In addition, FDLP handbook indicates that “Subscribing to the Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed from the FDLP desktop News and Updates will also keep the Depository librarians current on news and issues in the FDLP program” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.8). Moreover, there is an online help system called AskGPO. AskGPO is a customer relations management and online help system on the web. “To connect Depository libraries to high quality information, LSCM created a searchable online Knowledge Base” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 1.3). The Knowledge Base, as part of AskGPO, has a wealth of information on a variety of topics. There is a special category in the Knowledge Base that contains questions and answers about Federal Depository libraries. In case other Depository librarians have similar questions to ask, “many questions and answers may end up in the Knowledge Base in order to benefit the entire Depository community” (LSCM 2008, p 12). Therefore if a Depository library has any questions or comments, “the first point of contact” with the U.S. Government Printing Office should be through AskGPO on the FDLP desktop website (LSCM 2008, p.8).

FDLP desktop is the most important site every Depository librarian should visit daily. This is because through announcements on the FDLP desktop website, Depository librarians can “remain up-to-date about legal and program requirements” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 7.7). Depository librarians are also “responsible for periodically updating their

Depository information” through FDLP Directory page at FDLP desktop (LSCM 2009a, chapter 7.7). In addition, to stay current with FDLP rules and requirements, Depository librarians should “review the FDLP handbook regularly, check the FDLP-related sites frequently”, and read the electronic discussion lists daily (LSCM 2009a, chapter 7.7).

For Depository librarians to carry out their everyday duties, there are many other helpful websites they should know. Some of the vital sites are the following: GPO, GPO Access, FDsys, ALA/GODART, USA.gov, American FactFinder, Documents Data Miner 2, A-Z Resource List, and the Catalog of U.S. Government Publication (Web addresses of these sites are on the Reference list). Those sites will serve librarians not only for networking purposes, but also as top notch, up-to-date, and most reliable informational resources.

7. Future and Challenges

In today’s electronic environment, the Internet and Information Age affected changes in GPO, FDLP, and all other Depository libraries, making them “rethink their practices” (Ennis 2007, p.22). According to Griffin (2002), “Over the past few years, the U.S. Government has been moving information and services to the web, pushed by new laws and executive orders to take advantage of the cost-savings potential of the Internet” (p.32). In recent years, the technological developments and the Internet led the GPO and FDLP to begin

a “transition toward more electronic” resources in their collection (Ennis 2007, p.22).

According to Swartz, “Today records can take almost any form - from written text on paper to an electronic text message” (2008, p.22). This means, “Documents are no longer ‘produced, disseminated, controlled, and preserved’ in the same way they once were” (Ennis 2007, p.22), and that, “Information that once was obtainable only through the Depository library system is now available anywhere there is Internet access” (Griffin 2002, p.32).

For this reason, Swartz declares that, “A document containing Government business is no less a record because it was communicated via e-mail rather than interoffice mail” (2008, p.22). In Swartz’s article, the U.S. Court’s decision/definition about a record is also mentioned saying, “Courts have determined that what makes a record a record all depends on what’s in the message itself, not on what media it was created or how it was delivered” (2008, p.22). Swartz emphasizes that “A record containing Government business is still a public record whether it was created using a Government official’s private Hotmail account or a Government-owned Outlook account.” (2008, p.22).

With these electronic and going-digital movements, Depository libraries should also move their focus to access and service-based direction, rather than on physical collections alone (Ennis 2007; LSCM 2009b; Rogers 2005). Rogers states that “Our expertise isn’t bound by our local institutions” (2005, p.36). According to Ennis (2007), cataloging

electronic Government resources will “transform the library catalog into a gateway to Government information” (p.6).

In accordance with Ennis, Swartz, and Rogers, Griffin (2002) says, “along with this change comes the result of the rise of the e-citizen” (p.32). In Griffin’s article, it was mentioned that “According to a 2002 Pew study, 68 million American adults have used Government agency websites for reasons as varied as research for school to applying for a fishing license to checking on lottery numbers” (2002, p.32). In recent transitioning to the electronic movement, Depository librarians should “figure out how they are going to work together on a national service level” (Shuler, 2003, quoted in Rogers 2005, p.36) in order to make the vast electronic Government resources more accessible to the general public.

In the Information Age, where proliferation of electronic resources are available only a few clicks on the Web away, “GPO must now capture, organize, maintain, authenticate, distribute, and provide permanent public access to digital information” (Ennis 2007, p.20). The shift to a permanently electronic and online environment has meant that “the GPO and FDLP as well as other Depositories must adapt and evolve to keep pace with both technology and user expectation” (Ennis 2007, p.19).

Yet, with all the changes to and efforts of electronic dissemination of Government documents, “come conflict and uncertainty” (Ennis 2007, p.19). In addition, “many hurdles still remain, e.g., ensur-

ing that the documents are authentic, permanently maintained, and equally accessible to all individuals” (Oder 2001, p.15). According to LSCM’s FY2009 year review, “the increasing use of electronic documents poses special challenges in verifying authenticity because digital technology makes such documents easy to alter or copy, leading to multiple, non-identical versions that can be used in unauthorized or illegitimate ways” (2009b, p.2). The Review also reports that in order to help meet the challenge of the digital age, “GPO began implementing digital signatures to certain electronic documents on GPO Access that not only establish GPO as the trusted information disseminator, but also provide the reassurance that an electronic document has not been altered since GPO disseminated it” (2009b, p.2).

With the digital age movement, however, people should not forget that electronic, online materials never lessen the importance of tangible, physical resources (Ennis 2007; LSCM 2009a, LSCM 2009b). According to Ennis, “The core mission of the GPO has remained the same over time: to keep America informed by producing, procuring, and disseminating Government documents” (2007, p.20). The FDLP strives to “provide the public with free access to Federal Government information of public interest or educational value, regardless of format or medium” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.2). It also makes every effort to “ensure the continued availability of information in the future” (LSCM 2009a, chapter 4.2). Sometimes the number of Government documents seems in-

timidating, and its unfamiliarity and “disorganization are enough to scare away many potential users” (Griffin 2002, p.32). However, with a little more accessibility, the wealth of Government information will be freely available to us all.

8. Conclusion

Thus far, this paper has discussed GPO, FDLP, GPO’s organizational structure, the Depository’s obligations and requirements, public services and collections, referral services and networking, and lastly the Depository’s future and challenges. But general knowledge of Government documents in America and the role of the GPO and FDLP is only one side of the story. If a library wants to be a Depository, it should consider the more practical side, too. In this paper, however, due to the vastness of the subject, the issue will be discussed only briefly in this conclusion.

With its wealth of physical and non-physical Government documents, a library’s participation in the FDLP will entail a substantial investment on the library’s part - in financial, physical, and personnel areas. If a library wants to be a Depository library, it must answer two basic questions: first, “Can the library handle the responsibilities and challenges that come with Depository status?” and second, “Is the library ready and well equipped for the changes?” This is because a Depository library, if it is to operate properly, must allocate considerable resources in staff, space, and budget

to the Government Documents operation.

The library not only must provide proper housing for new materials, but also prepare quality space, comfortable surroundings, and sufficient seating and study areas for the public to come and do research. Other physical facilities will be necessary as well, such as additional parking spaces, automatic door facilities, and ramps or an elevator to make the space accessible to the physically-handicapped general public. Moreover, in order to provide more convenient access to Government publications in a variety of formats, the library needs proper equipment such as a microfiche reader and cabinets, appropriate map storage cases, CD-ROM and DVD players, a copier, a printer, etc. There also must be enough public-accessible computer workstations with Internet access, because many Government documents today are available only online in digital form.

Moreover, physical facilities are only a start. Among many issues to resolve are: How is the library going to provide reference services and bibliographic instructions to the general public? What will the characteristics of the Depository's collection be, and how much is the library going to select? How will the library catalog the materials and coordinate them with current library services? Will the library administration set aside money in the budget for professional and support staff to attend meetings and continuing education activities related to the FDLP?

Therefore, before a library requests Depository designation, it must consider the advantages, disadvantages, benefits, workload, and costs. After carefully reviewing and considering all of the obligations and responsibilities, if the library thinks it truly is ready to abide by the laws and regulations and can adequately meet all the requirements that go with the Federal Depository library status, the next - and probably the most important - question will be whether the library's administration is fully committed.

For a library to maintain an effective Depository operation, the library's administration must fully understand and appreciate the responsibilities and costs of being a Depository. If a library sees Depository status only as an opportunity to obtain free resources, or if a library finds itself forced to be a Depository in order to compensate for its lack of collection, then it will demonstrate only marginal or mediocre results. But if a library truly is interested in being designated as a Federal Depository, the most important checklist will be the library's readiness and willingness to take the responsibility seriously and make a strong and full commitment to providing superior public service to all members of the community. This is because the FDLP's original intent and guiding principle has been to provide the American public with free access to all sorts of Government documents. Therefore, all the Depositories should remain truly committed to that principle.

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