

GODORT Statements in response to COL FDLP task force survey – 2014

Below are 7 statements on broad topics of concern to the government documents community. These statements are meant to be official submissions to the ALA Committee on Legislation's FDLP Task Force survey. As such they have been voted on by GODORT Steering Committee and approved as official GODORT statements.

The 7 statements are:

1. BORN-DIGITAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS: THE ELEPHANT IN THE LIBRARY
2. DIGITIZATION AND PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC US GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS
3. FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM: SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
4. FEDERAL LIBRARIES AND THEIR ROLE WITHIN THE FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM
5. LIBRARIES – THE LAST BEST PLACE FOR PRESERVING PAPER & DIGITAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS
6. THE NEXT GENERATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION LIBRARIANS: A PROPOSAL FOR THEIR EDUCATION
7. TOOLS TO SIMPLIFY AND EXPAND ACCESS TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

BORN-DIGITAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS: THE ELEPHANT IN THE LIBRARY

The Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) has been in existence for over 200 years, supporting and maintaining democracy's core value of distributed, free and unencumbered access to information produced by the US Federal government. Long-term preservation is one of the key outcomes to this long-standing collaborative effort by FDLP libraries.

Historic, paper-based government publications are by and large well-preserved and accessible to citizens in libraries around the United States – and are increasingly being made accessible online through various digitization projects. But today, because at least 95% of government information is “born-digital,” the social contract between libraries and the public is breaking down, and with it the core democratic value of free access to government information. And one need only look back to the Federal government shutdown of October, 2013 for evidence that reliance on the government alone to keep born-digital content freely available, unaltered, and accessible fails too often, and there continues to be a need for the FDLP community to collect, describe, preserve and give access to both historic paper-based AND born-digital information.

The expected lifespan of a physical government document is 50 years. (Lawrence, Connaway, and Brigham 2001) However, the Web is extremely ephemeral. According to the Internet Archive, the world's preeminent Web preservation archive and digital library, the estimated lifespan of a URL is 44 -75 days.(Guy 2009) While .gov Web sites are slightly more stable than some Web sites, “link rot,” the process by which Internet hyperlinks disappear, is a real concern. According to data collected by the Chesapeake Digital Preservation Group, which has been studying link rot of the .gov domain since 2008, the link rot rate of born-digital government information is fully 36.7% since they began their studies.(Chesapeake Digital Preservation Group 2014) There are efforts at preservation of born-digital government information underway – The Library of Congress, Internet Archive, Web harvesting by FDLP libraries, the LOCKSS-USDOCS project, and more recently the GPO. But these projects need to be greatly expanded and coordinated and demand greater financial support from the Federal government, libraries and the public if they are to be successful and sustainable over time.

The preservation of born-digital government information is a large, complex and growing problem. Link rot and other issues of digital preservation are large problems that no one agency or library can deal with on its own. The digital FDLP can be attained, but it will take a collaborative effort between libraries and government agencies to assure free and unencumbered access to born-digital government information for citizens far into the future.

Prepared by the American Library Association (ALA) Government Documents Round Table (GODORT) Legislation Committee: Bernadine Abbott Hoduski (Chair), Kay Cassell, Brett Cloyd, James Jacobs, Kevin McClure, Wilhelmina Randtke, Kevin Reynolds, Melanie Sims, Antoinette W. Satterfield ~ February 2014

Chesapeake Digital Preservation Group. 2014. “‘Link Rot’ and Legal Resources on the Web: A 2013 Analysis by the Chesapeake Digital Preservation Group.” <http://tinyurl.com/ptxkxl>.

Guy, Marieke. 2009. “What’s the Average Lifespan of a Web Page?” *JISC PoWR: Preservation of Web Resources*. <http://jiscpowr.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2009/08/12/whats-the-average-lifespan-of-a-web-page/>.

Lawrence, Stephen R., Lynn Silipigni Connaway, and Keith H. Brigham. 2001. “Life Cycle Costs of Library Collections: Creation of Effective Performance and Cost Metrics for Library Resources.” *College & Research Libraries* 62 (6): 541–53. <http://cr.l.acrl.org/content/62/6/541>.

DIGITIZATION AND PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC US GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

Libraries, federal agencies, and private entities have put great effort, time and expense toward the digitization of historic public domain federal government publications within the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). There are both large and small efforts toward this end (e.g., the Google Books Project, Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) Google government documents project, GPO/Library of Congress Congressional Record project and the 100+ completed and ongoing digitization projects listed on the FDLP Digitization Projects Registry). The FDLP community must now take collaborative, concerted steps to assure that these disconnected efforts lead to a national plan for the digitization *and* preservation of historic US government publications.

Standards:

In order for digitization of historic federal publications to be done properly, technical-, usability-, and metadata standards must be utilized. Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative (FADGI)¹ – formed in 2000 under the auspices of the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIP) and run collaboratively by GPO, NARA, Library of Congress etc. – was organized to “define common guidelines, methods, and practices to digitize historical content in a sustainable manner.” FADGI has done a good job in setting technical standards for digitization for a variety of purposes and uses. But to apply those standards we also need a standard for usability. Jacobs and Jacobs have proposed the *Digital Surrogate Seal of Approval (DSSOA)*, a user-oriented “vocabulary for describing the quality of a digital object” to assure that digital reproductions are complete, legible, and accurate in order to “replace analog originals with digital surrogates for purposes of preservation or collection management.”²

Access:

While there are already several public discovery and access points for historic digital government publications (GPO’s Federal Digital System (FDsys), the Internet Archive and HathiTrust among them), such access and discovery can be enhanced in three ways: 1) Expand collaborative cataloging efforts (CIC, ASERL’s Collaborative FDLP project, HathiTrust’s registry of US federal government publications etc.); 2) Allow and encourage the FDLP community to upload their digitized publications and metadata to FDsys; 3) Encourage and enable bulk access to FDsys data and metadata for non-commercial use and reuse, and for collection-building and preservation (e.g., LOCKSS-USDOCS program). Since digitizations differ in their completeness, accuracy, accessibility (e.g., HathiTrust currently only allows single page downloads to non-members), and usability, the community needs metadata that records such differences to enable the building of complete, accurate, freely accessible digital collections.

Preservation:

Digitization is only one step in the digital curation process and does not necessarily equal preservation.³ In fact, some digitization projects – including Google Books Project

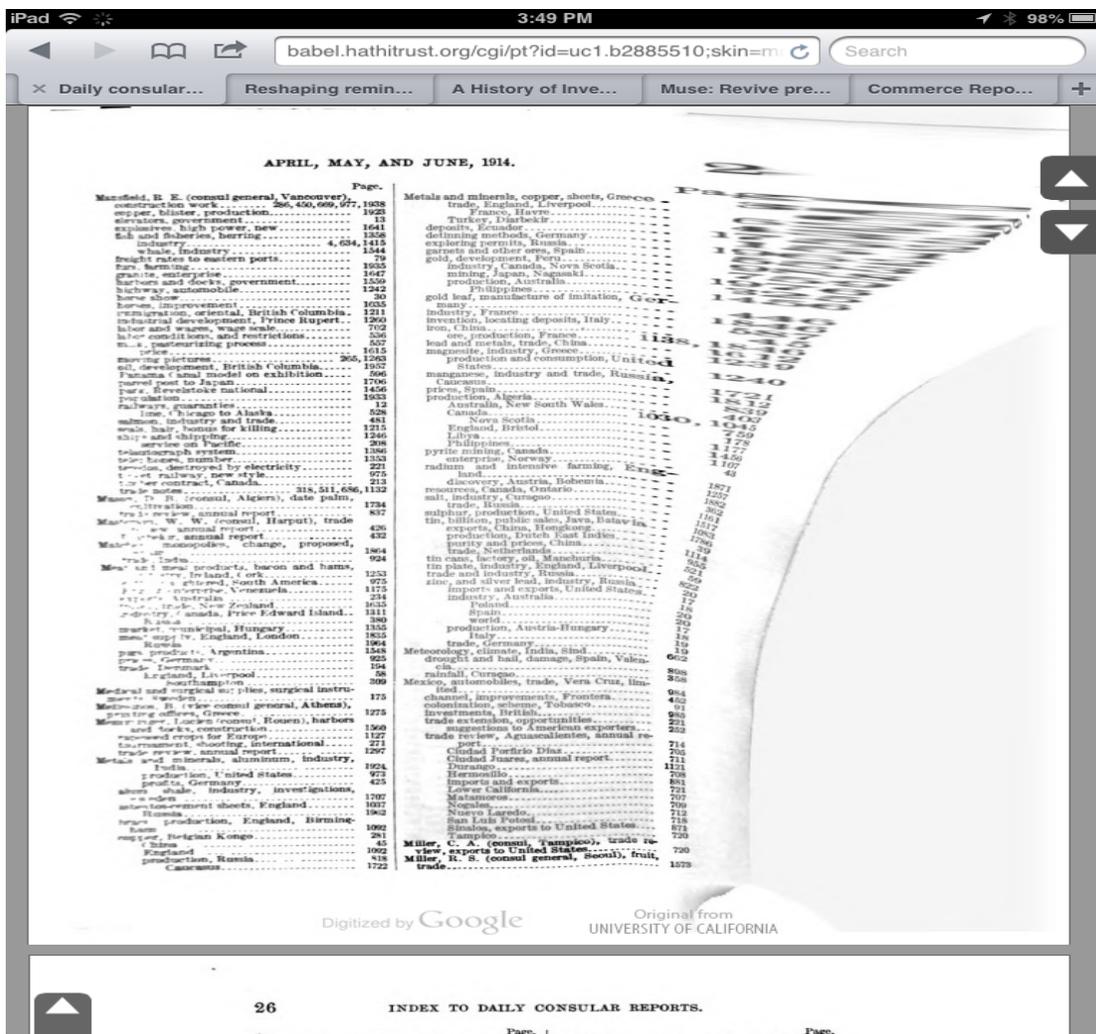
¹ <http://www.digitizationguidelines.gov>

² Jacobs, James A. and James R. Jacobs. "The Digital-Surrogate Seal of Approval: a Consumer-oriented Standard." D-Lib Magazine, March/April 2013, Volume 19, Number 3/4. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1045/march2013-jacobs>

³ “Wait! Don’t Digitize and Discard! A White Paper on ALA COL Discussion Issue #1a.” James A. Jacobs and James R. Jacobs. June 2013. <http://freegovinfo.info/node/3961>.

– actually disbind and destroy materials in the process of digitization and have no quality standards in place to assure OCR accuracy or image/text legibility. The FDLP community should therefore not make the fatal mistake of relying on digitizations of uneven preservation quality (see image below) to manage, weed, and destroy their local physical collections before a national plan is in place that takes into account both digitized and born-digital government information. Digitization needs to be seen holistically as an integral part of a collaborative, integrated national plan for the geographically distributed preservation of born-digital, digitized- and physical historic FDLP collections.

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⁴ Daily Consular and Trade Report 1914:2. Originally scanned by Google and hosted in the HathiTrust digital archive. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b2885510>. See the many other beautifully odd and questionable scans at The Art of Google Books tumblr: <http://theartofgooglebooks.tumblr.com>

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 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 support and funding for the Government Printing Office (GPO) to administer the FDLP and in a more informed public.

While the networked world has provided increased access to government information, it has also increased the challenges of identifying, collecting, and preserving it. 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 Despite the increase in the number of publications available digitally, access and preservation is made more difficult when information is only available in databases, which are subject to information removal, shutdowns and political whim, and by agencies wanting to provide only the latest information. Libraries are still selecting publications in paper, microform, and audio-visual formats in order to ensure that the public has access to the information in formats that best suit their needs.

Libraries, particularly those that agreed to be regional depositories, are struggling with the cost of preserving the past and dealing with the current mix of formats. Libraries in states without a regional depository 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 depository collections. There is no consensus as to how many tangible collections are necessary to protect the interests of the public 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 being committed to permanent public access. Librarians need to work with user communities to plan for the future. Financial support is critical in order to preserve government publications provided to depository libraries and create a sustainable 21st century FDLP.

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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>

FEDERAL LIBRARIES AND THEIR ROLE WITHIN THE FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM

The Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), and the libraries and trained professionals that see to the free access of government information for the people of the United States, are essential for continued democracy and citizen participation in the governance of the United States. When the United States Congress established the FDLP in 1813, they also gave the Library of Congress (LC) the responsibility of providing legislative publications to the public to insure that citizens would have the information needed to participate in the democratic process. This move designated the LC as the first federal library in the FDLP. Some 52 libraries have since joined LC in providing their communities access to information published by the federal government.

The 1813 resolution laid the groundwork for the current FDLP. It directed that “the documents published under the orders of the Senate and of the House of Representatives” would not only be printed and distributed to the Library of the United States (Library of Congress) and members of Congress, but they would also go to the executives and legislatures within each branch of every state and territory, each college and university, and to the Historical Society incorporated in each state. [3 Stat 140 (1814)] According to the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, there are over 1000 federal libraries worldwide,¹ and they continue to play an important role in providing access to this information for their state, surrounding communities, and employees.

Even though the Legal Requirement and Program Regulations of the FDLP (2011) states “Federal agency libraries that have heightened security measures and libraries with limited public access must still provide depository access and services to the general public” (page 7 no.42), not all do.²

Just as in 1813, many people do not live close enough to a federal library to get the assistance they need. If they have access to the Internet they may find the desired information, but just a “click” on the Internet does not replace collections and the expertise of professional librarians in federal libraries who can assist them in more intensive research. Federal libraries and librarians are crucial in providing assistance to the public via long distance support (phone, email, and other technological support). This support is needed in order to fulfill the intent of Congress that all of the public has access to government information and are able to participate in the governance of the United States.

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¹ <http://www.loc.gov/flicc/FLD/Federal-Library-Directory.pdf>

² <http://www.fdlp.gov/requirements-guidance/legal-requirements>

LIBRARIES – THE LAST BEST PLACE FOR PRESERVING PAPER & DIGITAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

The US Congress agreed with librarians that libraries are the best place to preserve “government publications” in all formats for permanent free public access. That is why Congress created the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). The public still expects to find government publications in all formats in their libraries. Librarians and library users recognize that paper and digital serve different needs and are both needed for good research. What government publications librarians have to figure out is how to persuade policy makers and funders to provide enough money to continue to provide a variety of formats to library users.

As long as Governments publish, libraries must recognize the public need for those publications to be preserved in libraries. Electronic access increases the visibility and usage of government publications, but publications in digital format are not always the easiest to navigate. For example, publications produced in a large format with high text density, color plates, maps and other foldouts are more useable in paper. Thousand page documents with tabular data are difficult to read on small-screen, colorless, e-book devices. Many users do not have access to electronic devices that allow them to read all types of publications. Others find it easier to access complicated documents on paper, especially when there are many tables, maps, or multiple volumes that need comparison. Many users cannot afford to buy the paper and ink needed to print out large publications and need to read those publications at the library.

Preserving paper collections helps assure that government publications are authentic, complete and will last for hundreds of years. Technologies and software are changing rapidly, which makes it uncertain whether the information available now in digital format will be accessible in ten or more years. Due to budget issues and the impermanent nature of commercial sources, libraries cannot be solely dependent upon commercial versions of government information.

Librarians need to develop a national plan to preserve both paper and digital government publications. Librarians need to enlist policy makers, members of Congress, publishers, professional associations, advocacy groups and foundations to raise the money needed for libraries to preserve government publications in multiple formats for the public. Democracy depends upon our citizenry having easy access to the information produced by our government. Libraries are still the last best place to make that happen.

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THE NEXT GENERATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION LIBRARIANS: A PROPOSAL FOR THEIR EDUCATION

The public depends on librarians to assist them in gaining free and unencumbered access to government information now and in the future. Therefore it is critical that librarians be educated about the value and uses of government information. Instruction and training in Library and Information Science (LIS) programs must serve the needs of students and librarians who plan to specialize in government information, as well as those who will work with government information as just one of their many duties.

Working Government Information librarians must inform library schools that courses in government documents/information are essential to the ability of librarians to help the public. Instruction must be cross-departmental, because government information is a part of so many facets of library operations: reference, cataloging, collection development, archiving, community outreach, technology, and more. Instruction must also highlight the multi-disciplinarity of government information, because there is scarcely any field of study that doesn't have a government information component.

The next generation of librarians needs to hear from working documents librarians about the importance of government information by talking to library school classes, inviting students to visit their libraries, and giving them free first year membership in documents librarian groups. Training the next generation of librarians in government information requires conveying our enthusiasm for its value to LIS students. Working to make the government information course the best course at every ALA-accredited LIS program is the best way to get students excited about developing government information skills. Documents librarians and government documents groups within state library associations should cooperate to establish a working group of government information instructors to share best practices, brainstorm innovations, and serve as mentors to new instructors to assure that government information instruction stands out in every US LIS program. Student-directed efforts like the University of Wisconsin-Madison Government Information Student Interest Group need to be nurtured and replicated.

Practicing librarians need ongoing education so they can keep up with the changing world of government information. Online training opportunities exist but need to be expanded. Several good programs, including the Government Printing Office's Community Training Program and the North Carolina Library Association's Accidental Government Information Librarian series, are available. In-person training is also needed. Local and regional training sessions would provide more personalized, hands-on learning for staff who wish to develop new skills, and opportunities for FDLP libraries to spread the word on the importance of government information. The Government Information in the 21st Century program, which provided 75 training events in five states and presented 149 subject modules to over 900 librarians and library workers over a two-year period, is a good model for doing this on a regional scale, but more local partnerships between FDLP and non-FDLP libraries deserve greater focus too.

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TOOLS TO SIMPLIFY AND EXPAND ACCESS TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

For two centuries the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) has been an important part of American democracy. Its efforts have assured and strengthened citizens' access to government information, encouraged collaboration among libraries, and preserved documents needed for a functioning democracy. Many members of the American public depend upon libraries for access to primary research materials in electronic format.

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 for the use of the public. In spite of librarians' efforts to catalog this material, much information in print and microform – not to mention born-digital – is not included in library catalogs. Some government information is accessible only from commercial databases and many libraries can't afford to license access for the use of the general public – and those that *can* find it increasingly burdensome to maintain access to expensive subscriptions.

Librarians need tools to 1) search digital repositories to export and reuse metadata, which would allow librarians to add links in their catalogs to digital surrogates of items in their physical collections and 2) to harvest and catalog born-digital documents.

Government publications issued prior to 1976 are difficult to find, even though many federal depository libraries have them in their collections. Libraries need tools that will highlight older publications. Librarians are collaborating in cataloging these publications and need better tools to bring existing cataloging records into library catalogs. Knowing which libraries hold which publications will make it possible for libraries to cooperate in building and preserving subject-specific collections.

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