Substituting Online for Tangible Versions of Depository Publications by Selectives

In 1993, Congress passed the GPO Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act, P.L. 103-40, whereby it expressed its intent for GPO to use electronic technology to make Government information more accessible. This objective is stated in the 1996 ***Study to Identify Measures Necessary for a Successful Transition to a More Electronic Federal Depository Library Program***.
Library Programs Service (now Library Service & Content Management) first issued guidance on the retention of tangible publications that are also available in the FDLP Electronic Collection at the request of the spring 1998 Depository Library Council.

The original guidelines had an associated list of GPO Access applications that met the criteria for substitution. Over the years this list became the cause of confusion as some depository coordinators viewed the list as examples of what could be substituted, while others were of the opinion that the list identified only those titles that could be substituted. With the ever-increasing number of online Government information dissemination products that GPO is harvesting, cataloging, and archiving, it was never GPO's intent to maintain a list of all the titles that could be substituted. A revision of the guidelines was undertaken in the fall of 2008 to eliminate the list and incorporate examples into the guidance. GPO, with the assistance of regional depository librarians, refined the guidelines dated 09/24/2008. Definitions were added as well as guidance on how to determine if publications meet the substitution criteria. This is the refined and third version of the substitution guidelines.

Substitution Criteria

A selective depository is permitted to replace tangible versions with online equivalents of depository materials provided the library has held the publication for at least one year, your regional depository has approved the disposal of the tangibles, and the online version is:

* Official;
* Complete; and
* Free of charge to the user.

No library is required to substitute online versions for paper, microfiche, CD-ROM, etc.

Guidance For Implementing Substitution Procedures

Working With Your Regional

Maintaining a viable copy of depository titles in tangible format within a state or region that can be provided on interlibrary loan is still a part of a regional depository's mission. For this reason selectives must work with and seek approval from their regional to substitute. Regional depository coordinators may handle substitutions differently. Options include, but are not limited to:

* Substitution guidelines may be incorporated into the State Plan
* A Memorandum of Understanding between the Regional and another depository is a

mechanism to ensure that a tangible copy is available in perpetuity
* A regional's disposal guidelines should include cooperation among depositories to ensure that one or more libraries in a state or region retain a tangible version

Determining If A Publication Meets The Substitution Criteria

* **How do you know if the online version of a publication is official?**
  A publication is official when its content is published by the Federal Government, at Government expense, or as required by law. GPO only catalogs official Government publications, so a quick check of the ***Catalog of U.S. Government Publications*** will help you determine "officialness". If it is not in the CGP, look at the information that would be included in the statement of responsibility of its cataloging record to determine the publication's origin.
* **How do you know if the online version of a publication is complete?**
  There is no definitive way to determine if an online version is complete without comparing it to the tangible publication. As GPO does not have a tangible collection to consult, this determination must be made by you. How a publication appears on the authoring agency's Web site should be reviewed; looking at descriptive text may often indicate completeness or lack thereof. If, for example, you are substituting a periodical make sure the newest issue does not override the previous issue. Another example is the use of multiple files on an agency's Web site. That is, chapters or sections of a publication may be physically in separate files, but together the content is complete.

Depository coordinators should use their professional judgment in determining titles that can be substituted. Titles appearing below are not the only titles that can be substituted; they are merely examples of the types of titles that may be substituted.

* Any title that appears as content on GPO Access/FDsys; examples are the ***Federal Register***, the ***U. S. Government Manual***, ***Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents***, ***Code of Federal Regulations***. Note that some titles on GPO Access do not have comprehensive coverage, e.g., hearings. Wholesale substitution therefore is discouraged;
* Any title for digitized material from content partnerships; examples are titles from the Cybercemetery, the Homeland Security Digital Library, Department of State Foreign Affairs Network (DOSFAN), etc.;

Issues And Best Practices To Consider Before Substituting

Depository coordinators should give careful thought to substituting online versions for tangible materials. The decision to substitute should not be made quickly as there are many factors that come into play and ought to be considered:

* Patron characteristics, community needs, usage patterns, and research requirements.
  *
  Is the title better suited in another format?
  * What are its scope, purpose, and intended audience?
  * Is the title authoritative?
  * What is the date range or coverage?
  * Is the information time sensitive?
  * Is the title's online version the legal controlling authority?

Library's collection development policy.

* Is the use of online resources in line with your library's collection development policy? If not, is the policy going to be revised?
* Are your substitution decisions documented in the collection development policy?
* Did you deselect the title's tangible item number from your library's profile? This practice is encouraged if you no longer need the tangible format to best serve your community.

* Online-only information may require more staff time to identify, learn to use, train staff, and assist patrons. Do you have adequate staffing levels to do this?
* Online-only information may limit the number of patrons who can use all parts of the collection at one time. Is your library committed to funding for future upgrades of computer hardware, printers, and software to ensure adequate numbers of computer workstations for public access to online Government information?
* The library should properly reference the substitution so it may be easily located and accessible to users.
  * Do your users know when to go to your shelves and when to go to a computer?
  * Does your library catalog online titles?
  * Are there active hyperlinks in your OPAC?
  * Are there notes in your shelf list?
  * Do you include Government publications in Web guides? Are they kept current with new titles/Web sites added regularly?

  * Each depository library's policies for online formats and Internet use must be within the guidelines established by the FDLP.

What To Do With Your Tangible Publications

* Retention of substituted materials must follow discard procedures for the given depository. For example, a selective depository may substitute materials if held more than one year and less than 5 years, but first must offer the tangible products to the regional, and must receive the Regional's permission to dispose of the tangible material
* If permission to substitute is not granted, the selective must keep the tangible material but may apply at a later date for approval to dispose of the tangible products
* If permission to substitute is granted, the tangible materials must be offered to the regional and other selectives through disposal lists, Needs and Offers, etc., as is the practice for materials older than 5 years

Definitions

Official Content
Content published by the Federal Government, at Government expense, or as required by law.
Controlling Official Version

The version of a title that has precedence when there is a discrepancy between the tangible and online version

NOTE: This situation arises most often with legal materials such as administrative and court decisions and codes that are put online for informational purposes only. There is generally a notice to this affect in the publication. The tangible versions should be used in legal citations. Titles that fall into this category include, but are not limited to, *Agriculture Decisions, U.S. Reports, and United States Code*.

Statement of Responsibility

A statement transcribed from or attributed to the material being described, relating to persons responsible for the intellectual or creative content, or to corporate bodies (q.v.) from which the content emanates.

Application of the Guidelines

Guidelines for Depository Libraries: Substituting Online for Tangible Versions of Depository Publications by Selectives is to be applied to Federal depository materials held by a selective depository for at least one year and are not otherwise covered by the superseded guidelines. Tangible products appearing in the Superseded List or eligible for supersession in accordance with the Superseded Guidelines may be superseded in the normal fashion.

Related Resources

* **Depository Library Public Service Guidelines for Government Information in Electronic Formats**
* **FDLP Internet Use Policy Guidelines**
* **Superseded List and Guidelines**

Supersedes:
Guidelines: Substituting Electronic for Tangible Versions of Depository Publications
Dated: 9/24/2008