Pilot for PACER Access at Federal Depository Libraries

At its September 2007 session, the Judicial Conference endorsed a joint pilot between the Government Printing Office (GPO) and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts that was not to exceed two years in length. The GPO sought volunteers to participate in the pilot from among its 1265 depository libraries. Forty-nine depository libraries responded to the call for volunteers. In consultation with the GPO, the Administrative Office selected seventeen depository libraries to participate in the pilot.

The pilot commenced in October 2007 and was suspended after 11 months for an evaluation. The data collected during that time suggests that the target population, a segment of the public that would be unlikely to go to the court house or establish a PACER account, was not reached as anticipated. In October 2009, the GPO and the Administrative Office will be holding a "Lessons Learned" focus group session with the librarians who participated in the pilot to pin point what worked and what could be improved.

Although the pilot was initially well publicized, the level of ongoing public outreach about the pilot did not reach the desired level. More fundamentally, PACER is a tool, not a program. Therefore, the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) has been contacted to discuss ways the pilot could be reinvented to make PACER part of a legal research and training program for librarians and the users. The AALL strongly supports the GPO and the FDL program, and is willing to assist with developing a proposal to move forward. Once a proposal is developed, it will be submitted to the Judiciary's advisory groups and the Judicial Conference Committee on Court Administration and Case Management for consideration.