

## In the Midst of Mega Misinformation: Government Information Is Still Reliable - Transcript

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Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the FDL GPO Academy. We have another webinar for you today. As I said earlier, not my name is Joe Paskoski. I am with my colleague , Ashley Dahlen for tech support. Our webinar today is, in the midst of mega misinformation, government information is still reliable. We have with us our longtime webinar presenter, Jane Canfield who has done many and will do many more in the future, which we appreciate. Let me read you a little about Jane, the coordinator of the federal information at pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico. She has experience in the library field and started her career as a public librarian, moved into school libraries, talked for 6 years in the Interamerican University of grad school and nation sciences, worked as the director of the library in post secondary vocational school and arrived at her current position in 2007. She fell in love with the documents and had a special task of promoting documents produced in other languages, especially Spanish, 100% of her users are native Spanish speakers. With that, I will turn the virtual microphone over to Jane who will take it from here.

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Okay, good afternoon, everyone and welcome. Thank you for being here. When I started making an office presentation, because of the quantity of misinformation, misconceptions, conspiracy theories that we are all aware of and dealing with, I said, do I really want to do this? And then I said, yes, because if we don't do this, if we don't work with our users in helping them to realize that there is reliable information and that government information is still reliable, then we are not helping the problem and maybe we are making it worse. In the library world, I think we always note that misinformation has existed. I think all of us would say we are in a very accelerated period of dealing with misinformation for a variety of reasons. There is so much information on the topic of misinformation that what I am going to present today is really just a small sliver of what is there. I will try to highlight some interesting and unusual things that I found, as well as some still timely reliable sources of government information. I hope you will leave with some new knowledge and I hope you will also leave with questioning , how do we deal with this? How are we going to help our users and friends and family members and sometimes even colleagues cope with the quantity of misinformation that currently exists? So, with that , let's get started. How concerned are we? This, actually when I came across it, surprised me. This was reported by voice of America. It was a poll conducted by the Associated Press in September, so it is recent, asking about Americans' perception of misinformation. As you will see highlighted here in red, 95% of Americans in this poll identified misinformation as a problem when they are trying to access important information. About half of those people put the blame on the United States government. I think that gives us a huge job and how do we combat people who believe that the United States government and its information are part of the problem? Three quarters of the people polled think that social media users and the tech companies are a problem, yet, only 2 in 10 of us, 20%, are worried that we have helped spread that misinformation. That is amazing. We are aware of it as a problem, yet most of us are not willing to admit that there is any possibility that we are part of that problem, yet I am sure that each and every one of you, just like I have, have received misinformation, whether it is on your social media in your email and your response has not been, okay, I am either going to say this is wrong, it is misinformation. Sometimes, this is a absolutely crazy, here's one that went around Puerto Rico, if I drink lemon juice every night, with ROM, which might be from fun, I am not going to get COVID. I admit I am guilty of sending it off to friends and family going, look at what crazy thing I just found on Facebook. That actually means I was part of the problem in helping spread misinformation. Even though I was

saying it was misinformation, that it was crazy, I still thought it was silly enough or funny enough to pass it on to somebody. So, I thought this was a really interesting poll in that sense that only 20% of us are worried we are spreading misinformation, yet 95% of us feel misinformation is a big problem. As we go through the rest of this, keep that in mind. One of the places I found that has excellent information on what misinformation is is CISA, the cyber security and infrastructure security agency. This belongs to Homeland security. They call it MDM, which MDM was a new acronym for me. MDM is misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. That makes of what is defined as information activity misinformation is the information that is false, but it was not deliberately created to cause harm. It is just something that we read, that we believe, that we pick up on. It is in the category of people who believe that COVID-19 vaccines are dangerous. Most of them did not create that information and they are not deliberately trying to cause harm, it is simply something they believe because of someone else's disinformation. This information is the information that is deliberately created to mislead someone to harm someone, to manipulate someone or to manipulate a group or an organization or a country. That intent to cause harm is very different from someone who merely provides information that is accurate, but is not intended to harm. They are doing it because they actually believe what they are reading. Malinformation is the information that was based on fact, but taken out of context in order to mislead, harm or manipulate someone. It is, I think it affects a version of this information, but it is dangerous because it is based in fact, but it is taken out of context and intended to mislead, harm or manipulate. I think one example of this is, that there had been adverse side effects to any vaccine ever produced in the history of the world. Taking those adverse events out of the context, they were secondary events, very rare for the most part with COVID vaccines, for instance and using them to go, oh my goodness, you may have a heart attack when you get your COVID vaccine, or your child, one of the classmates, and it tended to be turned out to be a false study, mumps and diseases cause autism. Other examples of what malinformation is, taking something that does exist out of its context and using it for harm or to manipulate someone. Both foreign and domestic, what the cyber infrastructure agency calls MDM, use it to cause division. I don't think any of us would dispute, we actually have a number of different issues of misinformation and disinformation as chaos, confusion and division. The resource is provided by CISA, which helped to combat that. I will go on to a couple of them. There agency has produced, and I did not know these existed until I started to do this webinar, resilience series graphic novels. These are graphic novels designed to appeal to the 18 to 25, 26-year-old age group, which present information in an interesting way and have fiction stories about this information that threatens our country, our way of life and the infrastructure on which it functions, whether that infrastructure is technological, or in some instances, physical. The first novel in the series is called real fake and talks about the dangers and risks associated with disinformation and misinformation. There is a second novel in the series called bug bytes talks about how social media and other communication platforms spread inaccurate information for the purpose of planting doubt in the minds of targeted audiences. As we know now with the hearings currently going on in the United States Congress, this is really a major issue with social platforms. The cyber security and infrastructure agency encourages all of us to take care when we consume information and to practice media literacy, which includes verifying sources, seeking alternative viewpoints, finding trusted sources of information. Those are all things that we, who work in libraries, are used to teaching and providing to our users. This is another report that I would like to highlight. This is the Congressional research service report. In January, so it is recent, providing to Congress called social media misinformation and content moderation issues for Congress. This report was a very interesting read, and I think that is sometimes hard to say about a Congressional research service survey report. It talks about the role that social media has in spreading misinformation, but it also covers the concept that social media can be used to spread beneficial information. The report focuses in on using inaccurate COVID information as this example of how misinformation spreads on the social media platforms. There are two important features of social media platforms that this report

points out. One of them, the algorithms that are being used by the social media companies is being very well covered in the Congressional hearings and by the news media. The other, not so much. That is with social media platforms, we all along to user networks. Some of us keep our user networks restricted in the sense of family, friends, colleagues, but others of us expand outward and have thousands of friends in our user networks. Even if you are attempting to restrict your network, it is very easy for it to continue rolling, as you add students, as you add friends, as you add other family members. Those user networks also are parts of what contributes to the spread of misinformation in that, let's say my cousin, John, would like for everyone in the family to stop wearing masks. He puts that in a family post, in a family group. Then, my friend, Susie, who reads it, passes it on to her social network. So, yes, the algorithms that these social media platforms use to feed us information our one problem, but our very own user networks that we create can also be part of the problem of misinformation . From this same report, the report points out that those of us who use social media, and I would guess that is virtually all of us in today's world, we both produce and consume content . We can post text, we can post images, we can do videos, we can consume other's content and so it becomes very difficult to design algorithms that filter out misinformation, although I think it can be done better than it has been done. Also, there is the question that this report talks about briefly of censorship, is it a form of censorship to create algorithms that filter out information on our own user networks? We are almost certainly, by what we post, absorb, et cetera, practicing some form of censorship. According to the pew research center as reported in this CRS report, 72% of all adults, that is 184 million of us, and that number 19 accidentally got in there. It is not supposed to be. Used at least one social media site. Many people use as many as nine different social media sites. That is a 5% increase since 2005 . Uses varied by age. The highest percentage is 18 through 29 and then those 30 to 49. The majority of those who use social media in the United States report visiting sites at least weekly and many reports daily. This is a direct statement from this report that I thought was very important. Misinformation can spread on social media sites even with content moderation. These social media platforms and the tech companies behind them are attempting to moderate and look at the information that is being posted for its veracity, it's hate speech. It is still very easy for that to be spread. It can be spread before the people moderating the site even discover it. Most of us use more than one media platform and it is very easy to send something from Facebook to Instagramming something from Instagram to twitter and something from Twitter to WhatsApp. If I put out something that is totally false or that is hate speech on Facebook, even if Facebook takes it down, someone may have picked up on it and already spread it to the other social media platforms. That is the big consideration for I think how any future regulation of social media platforms may look. Again, this report used COVID-19 as example. A range of information about COVID-19, it's origin, how it got transmitted. What measures are being used to stop it have been disseminated throughout social media. Some of this information is accurate and has been accurate based on the knowledge that existed at the time of its original publication . For instance, part of the controversy that we currently face over using masks and what kind of masks came from initial guidance that masks were not necessary and at that point, that was accurate based on knowledge coming from agencies within the United States. Later, the science actually changed and it was no longer accurate information, but it stayed out there on social media. Some information that has believed to be accurate before has become an accurate due to, and I think this is a very important statement, the evolution of scientific consensus of what is known as new evidence becomes available. That is not just true for COVID, that is true for any other misinformation issues that we ever had to deal with. That scientific knowledge doesn't just happen and never change. There are questions posed in this report for Congress. I think they are questions that all of us as citizens, and in particular those of us who work in the world of government information should also consider and think about, should Congress or the executive branch take action to address misinformation or content regulation? Is action necessary to reduce the spread of misinformation and/or to prevent censorship? Remember, one side of regulating social media platforms is going to need to be, how do you avoid

ensorship of our right to free speech and to differing opinions , while at the same time, preventing the spread of obviously false or misleading information? If action to address the spread of misinformation and prevent censorship is necessary, then what institutions, public and/or private are going to have responsibility for its? Is it going to come out of the control of Homeland security and its agencies, is it going to be a private entity, are we going to create a new public institution, is it going to be a part of the federal trade commission or the Federal Communications Commission? All of those are questions that need great thought and how this will be handled. Perhaps most importantly, who, who gets to define this information? How do they define it? What purpose is it defined and under what authority? I think that all of those are questions that all of us as citizens and as providers of government information should be thinking about. If you get an opportunity, read this full report, it was very interesting. Here is a little more, moving on to other information. This is an article that I came across, which pulls together information about how you go about combating specifically the fake information that has been put out about COVID, that it is good advice for any version of misinformation. In February, the world health organization director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus I have no idea if I am pronouncing his name correct the, told an international security conference, we are not just fighting an epidemic, we are fighting an info to make. There is so much information about COVID, that it is an infodemic. So how do we go about separating what is trustworthy and what is real and what is fake? The Smithsonian magazine asked a bunch of experts studying science communication and misinformation, what should readers and what should users keep in mind while we are watching the news, reading an article or scanning Facebook or other social media? Here are some of the things they say. The first one, simply take a minute when you read or listen to something before you send it off, before you react to wow, that sounds great, or that is awful, pause for a minute and say, is this accurate? Do it before you send it to someone else. Obvious and important to remember, don't just rely on one source. Don't get all of your news from the same television news network, even if you can barely stand to listen to Jordan Ott usual new source, do it sometimes to get a different point of view, don't rely on one source. Go through what Smithsonian experts identify as the three-step process, check the source. What magazine did this come from? What news agency? What newspaper? What expert did this come from? Check the author. Who wrote this? If there isn't an author, you probably should be suspicious. If the author is an expert in history and is writing about science, maybe you should also be suspicious at judge the content. Would someone else verify the content you are reading is duplicated somewhere else? We all know this is information we need to be applying to all of our users as well. Some of the questions, and this is from the national Institute of health, how do you go about looking at a website? This is important because much of our information, much of our public users' information, much of our students, and even sometimes our faculty's information is coming from online websites. This was specifically written about health information. I think it applies to political information. I think it applies to social information. You will find websites that are not well known. If you don't know the websites, ask the following questions, these should be familiar to all of you , but we consider in the light of so much disinformation out there and or is making sure that we are passing on to our users, students, faculty, family members, friends. What are the questions you ask? Who sponsors this website? Is it for commercial product? Is the information easy to find? Can I find it somewhere else? Does the website tell me who is sponsoring it? Who wrote the information? Who reviewed the information? Be careful about testimonials. The testimony out there that says that, every night I have lemon juice and rum and take a hot shower and gargle with more lemon juice and I haven't gotten COVID is a testimonial and is obviously not true. Who wrote the information and who reviewed it? If someone else is an expert, look at it. When was the information written ? In particular when you are dealing with rapidly changing information like that and politics like that and science, when was it written is very important. What is the purpose of the site? Does the site want to convince me that voting rights once need to be changed? Does the site convince me that I am going to buy a particular commercial product? Does the site want to convince me that I

should quit wearing my mask? Does this site want to convince me that one kind of vaccine is better than another? What is the purpose of the site? Will this website protect your privacy? Does this website have a privacy policy? In particular, if you are talking about any site where you may have to share personal information, that is important that your privacy is protected. We all know this, but we need to point it out and I think in particular, if we have older users, and I am one of those, when I was a student, our Social Security numbers were also our students identification numbers. There was no sense that not giving out my Social Security number was a dangerous thing. That is obviously not true. Getting giving out your Social Security number can be a very dangerous thing. How can I protect my health information? Health information and health insurance fraud is a big deal. Does this site look at health information? Protect that. Does these sites offer quick and easy solutions to my health problems, to my other problems of any kind? Does it offer me a miracle cure? We all know these, it is good for us to review them and we need to be hands-on. Now I will go to a few sites that I found that have information on dealing with misinformation and in particular some of the misinformation problems we are currently dealing with. This one is the COVID-19 public education campaign from health and human services. It is specifically designed to offer information to combat COVID vaccine misconceptions that exist. There is a wealth of information here if you may need it. It is also one of those sites, and those of you that know me know that I always -this is one of the sites you can switch to Spanish if you have finished taking users. There are many of them that address misinformation, in particular COVID misinformation . At the moment, I think political misinformation, voting rights misinformation and COVID misinformation are among the biggest kinds of misinformation we are dealing with. These are just three articles that talk about dealing with COVID misinformation. What are some reliable information sources? You are all going to know these, I am pretty sure. USA.gov is very reliable starting spot for our users to acquire reliable information. Again, you can change the site to Spanish if you have Spanish-speaking users . Based on my years of experience and of my own personal experience in 40 years of learning Spanish as my second language, I somehow find that my users who are native speakers of Spanish more comfortably accept information that is provided in their native language as being reliable. I find myself the opposite after 40 years and with considerable fluency in Spanish. I still admit that reading information in my native language makes it easier for me to perceive that as accurate. That is perhaps a point to keep in mind when providing government information to your speakers of other languages. They may be more receptive to that information if it exists in their native language and more likely to perceive it as being reliable. These are a couple of states information sources that I found on USA.gov. We have one from the state of Hawaii, which has its own office of information practices and one from Washington state, which has provided a useful site of information on COVID misinformation. The national Institute on aging has numerous sources of reliable health information, including teaching older users how to find reliable online health information. Science.gov , which is the main portal into United States government science information is a reliable source of finding information. USDA nutrition.gov, and I included this one because the site is not really well known and it is an excellent site, including finding daily requirements for how much vitamin you need. The site also combats by providing reliable information and misconceptions about food, about what we eat, about whether or not if I eat enough onions, I'm not going to get COVID, or if I put garlic around my neck, I'm not going to get bubonic plague. It provides reliable information about nutrition and about the various uses of food. Obviously, the CDC and of course, if there is anyone in the United States who does not know about these centers for disease control at this point with COVID, it might be surprising. However, there are many varying levels of perception about what the CDC does and does not do about how reliable they are. Just yesterday, I had a student told me they needed information on vaccines and COVID outside of the hospital and that they knew that the CDC did not do any of that kind of research. Who told you that, where did you find that? The CDC is maintaining information on everything from babies to grandmothers in and out of the hospital and all kinds of different settings with COVID. That was just actually a subtle sort of

misunderstanding about the information the CDC provides. CDC, one of our reliable sources and one that we need to help our users understand is also a wealth of reliable information. PubMed, a government based site for psychology reviewed fields, which has peer reviewed publications. Finally ERIC, which is out of the health field, but ERIC provides reliable, peer review level studies on any topic that has to do with education. If you have users who are teachers, parents, concerned about COVID in schools, ERIC will have articles on all of that information. With that, thank you. I hope there is some interesting questions in the chat and I am generating some discussion. Joe, what has popped up in the chat? I am open for questions.

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Thank you, Jane. Great webinar. I really appreciate it. Any questions for Jane? Please put them in the chat box. You know, sometimes I have been looking for medical information and evaluating products, medical products and you will see something that looks like a real sites, but it turns out a lot of times to be an ad and the company is advertising a product in the mist of [ Indiscernible- muffled ] and it looks government.

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One of my favorites is the Medicare supplement insurance adds that pop up on television because I have been exploring. I am about to take my Social Security, since I have reached the age it is at its top, and trying to explore Medicaid insurance and supplemental insurance, compared to my employer's plans, since my husband and I are still employed, and it is sometimes very difficult. The ads that pop up on television, wow, they promise all kinds of things that aren't necessarily true. That is one reason why going to something like PubMed , or if you don't want to go heavily into peer-reviewed, Medline plus is a good source that can give us that information and makes it more readable.

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Allison had a question, how do you handle people who do not believe government information is reliable?

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That one is difficult. I know with many users who are native Spanish speakers, Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States. I have friends and users who would say that is an excuse because I don't want to call it Quan Ellison, it is very difficult to take someone-- if you are talking to someone that generally says nothing the government does is reliable, you are probably not going to be able to convince them. I find that if I am talking to someone that has one particular belief, then I can usually, say for instance, okay, we never landed on the moon. That is still a conspiracy theory out there. That person with that belief, I can generally say, here are scientific reports that say that we did not land on the moon. Here are products that you use that were developed because of our landing on the moon, like Velcro, for instance , and lead them to some acceptance that maybe there is accurate information. Sometimes it's just, and in our very divided world, it may be almost impossible. I have taken it on occasion to a personal level and said, you know me as a person. You have known me for X number of years, I recently did this with a professor who is very reluctant to accept anything from the U.S. government as being reliable and I finally just looked at him and said, okay, how many years have you known me? You know me to be honest and reasonably intelligent and reliable. I have worked with your classes in Puerto Rican history. I have worked with your political science class. You know that if I find something that I think is suspicious or that the government did do wrong, because the government isn't perfect, that I will point them out. Why don't, instead of saying everything the U.S. government does is bad, why not say, I know you, you have worked with this information for many years, you are not the kind of person that would work with information that was false and continued perpetuating it. That can be effective with someone that you know of. Speak good points, Jane. Justin makes the comment, trying to read this right, do you know where I can find info on vexing social media post for accuracy, as opposed to standard websites? God knows off the top of my head I cannot think of any. They are supposed to be scrubbing and analyzing,

the various twitter, Facebook, et cetera, I don't know how good of a job dated at that. They are supposed to be examining.

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I think obviously the congressional hearings are currently ongoing, filling the strain of the extreme difficulty of vetting social media sites and I don't know, I suspect we will be toward some version of government regulations of the social media site. What I tell our students, and this is not an answer, it is an answer to how to handle them yourself. We tell all of our students the following, first of all, be very, very careful on what you put out there on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or anything else because some prospective employer is going to look for it and you may lose a job on the basis of putting yourself out there. Our head of human resources does a presentation with our students on what you shouldn't put on social media because you may not get a job because of it. I also asked hours to dance, why do you think you need 5000 friends? 5000 friends on Facebook are not really 5000 friends. A part of the control and vetting it I think it has to do with how many friends you accept, not passing on something you think is incorrect. I think part of the main problem with all of the social media is, you don't have to site the information you are putting there, so it becomes really difficult. I did not, in working in information for this webinar, find anything about not so much the talked about websites, but with social media platforms. If that helps any.

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Wendy had a good comment, on social media, the scrolling by post from someone else also constitute viewing? If someone posts something questionable, i.e. the high supposed to ignore it. I don't want to contribute to the spread of misinformation. They have all kind of tracking ability, I don't think they can really pull up anything you have done, unfortunately.

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I am very sure that they are tracking. Obviously, if you ever bought anything online and the next day you go to Facebook and you get 12 ads from six companies that sell the same thing you just bought, obviously we are being tracked. I actually not only scroll past or hide those posts, but if I find nothing that is clearly racist, sexist, hate speech, completely inaccurate information, I actually report it to Facebook. I am probably on some Facebook list as the crazy old lady reports fake information all the time. It is our only recourse I think with the social media platforms and helping to combat the misinformation.

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Charles says, dealing with misinformation--how does one deal with this information we did is contained in a renowned and credible news outlet, that is a good question.

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This is a personal comment. I think that in the world in which we currently live, we are frequently confusing my right to free speech and a different opinion with the spread of what is obviously false information. I do have the right. I have the right to believe what I want to believe. I have the right to different opinion, but now we are extending that into I also have the right to insist that you believe it and it does not matter how obviously absurd it is, it is still my right to free speech. I am not sure what it is going to take societally to have us begin to make that distinction again between what is my right to free speech and opinion and I think we also have a problem that we are into a world in which my individual rights, in many cases , are perceived to outweigh societal good and I don't think the concept of individual rights was intended to work that way, but do I have any answers for it, other than for all of us to continue doing our best to provide reliable information from the government and elsewhere, no, I don't.

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Deborah had a good comment. I did not notice this in the chat, yes, scrolling past the message counts as viewing on Facebook. I think hiding it only hides it on your own profile. I guess it is counted and tracked.

Good or bad. I see that KT is asking, once I get the link to your slide deck , you are more than free to adapt it. I will put my email address. I always say in my webinars, if you would like the actual PowerPoint slide deck and not the PDF, said the an email and I will send you my slide deck and you are absolutely free to--I just put my address in the chat, my email address. You are absolutely free to use the slides and adapt them to your students.

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About five more minutes for questions. We have got time. I just want to thank you, Jane, for a terrific webinar as always. I'd like to thank Ashley for her great work with tech support today. This is the last webinar for October. Next weekend Thursday, there should be a good webinar Thursday, November 4th, introduction to research. That should be really good. Tuesday, November 9th, we recently had our virtual depository contents and all of those presentations are up on our website so you can view those now if you missed them before. We also have the poster session, a little webinar from some of the poster presenters on Tuesday, November 9th. Give that a look. You can always learn about our webinars. Ashley, if you could put the satisfaction survey, if you have not done that, you can do that and the other links to our webinar. She has the webinar satisfaction survey in the chat . If you go to the bottom of FDLP .gov, you will see a link of the FDLP Academy webpage and see the archives of our webinars and also you can volunteer to present a webinar. Jane has been meeting for us and I am sure there are people in the audience who could do a great one also. Let's see if we have any other questions, there is the satisfaction survey, please fill that out. Let's see if we have any other last questions here. Sending the slides? That will be on our website probably tomorrow. It will be available in the archives. Great topic in the news right now. Okay. In the last questions for Jane? I am just dipping into Facebook a little bit. We've got some topics I'm interested in, medical advice research. [ Laughter ] we've been pretty good about responding back with some good comments. That is my little story. Any last questions for Jane? It looks like we are just about out of time. Ashley made the comment, the archives will be there tomorrow with the slides and certificates will go out also. We will have all of that. It looks like the questions have much runout. Just about out of time. I'd like to thank you one more time, J.

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As always, you are welcome.

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I look forward to working with you on future webinars. Thank you, Ashley for that support work. Thank you, audience. Please come back to the FDLP Academy for more great webinars, the posters session. That should be a terrific one. Have a great rest of your day. Thank you.

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Thank you.

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[Event Concluded]