Modeling a Sustainable Future for the Federal Depository Library Program in the 21st Century: Findings

Note: Ithaka S+R has been commissioned by the Government Printing Office (GPO) to analyze the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and recommend a sustainable and practical model or models, consistent with its existing vision and mission, for its future. This document provides a draft of the section summarizing our research-based Findings that, subject to further substantive revision and copy-editing, will be incorporated into the final report.

This document is a summary of findings drawn from the drafts of the Background, Environmental Scan, and Existing Library Networks sections (and comments provided and revisions planned subsequently). For references, details, and further information, please consult the drafts of these sections which may be found at http://fdlpmodeling.net. We will welcome the reader's reactions to help us bolster the objectivity and accuracy of this document.

For more project background or to provide comments, please visit http://fdlpmodeling.net or email the project team at fdlp-modeling@ithaka.org. Reactions provided by January 24, 2011 will be especially helpful in our preparations of the Direction and the Models that will result from it, so we will be most grateful for your immediate review. In addition, we expect that any further comments made before February 15, 2011, can be accommodated in the final report.

Based on the previously completed Background, Environmental Scan, and Existing Networks sections, we have compiled key findings that we see being especially important in modeling a sustainable future for the Federal Depository Library Program in the 21st century. This brief section compiles these findings, structured into three broad categories: functional considerations with respect to collections and formats, functional considerations with respect to services, and structural considerations with respect to the network of libraries. It also provides an implication for each finding, as well as an overall implication for each category, that will help shape the Direction and Models that will be delivered later during the course of the project.

Collections and Formats

Finding 1: Users increasingly prefer to access many types of collections in electronic form, although tangible collections remain important in supporting access needs

- Digital and digitized materials are becoming the format of choice for a growing share of user needs, for government information as well as more broadly.
- Although widespread, this transition has been felt differently across different user communities, with significant concerns remaining that digital materials do not equally well serve the needs of all user communities.
- In the absence of digital versions, print collections remain important for access purposes.
- Even following digital availability, some access needs may be best met through print, due to the preferences and needs of the user.

Implication: The Program should continue to emphasize, and come to further emphasize, the new avenue for increasing access provided by digital versions. But, because it will be some time if ever before all needs for all content types are met through digital/digitized versions, the ongoing role played by tangible versions in supporting access needs must not be overlooked.

Finding 2: Born digital versions of new FDLP materials are widely available, and digitized versions of historic FDLP materials will increasingly become widely available

- Virtually all *new* federal publications are freely available online and are incorporated into the FDLP through FDsys or various interagency partnership agreements.
- Digitization of the historic collection is proceeding steadily through a variety of initiatives, including formal GPO partnerships with a variety of libraries.
- Google's digitization partnership with Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) libraries has been the largest scale digitization effort to date, making a large number of government documents freely available through HathiTrust.
- Based on today's estimates, it seems that the lion's share of historic collection will be digitized and freely available in digital form within 5-10 years

- Many of these projects will result in digitized collections being ingested by GPO into its FDsys platform.

Implication: The Program should anticipate the eventual relatively comprehensive digitization of historic collections to accompany its nearly comprehensive born-digital collections, and GPO should continue and enhance its work to bring digitization outputs into the formal structure of the Program alongside born-digital materials; these activities will dramatically increase the accessibility of FDLP materials by the American public.

Finding 3: Many libraries are moving away from a "just in case" model of proactively collecting and holding tangible collections locally in case of need

- Many libraries are seeking to free up space occupied by collections storage to be used for other purposes, and see digitization as providing an important opportunity to do so.
- Even some of the largest research libraries are migrating print collections – especially serial collections also available digitally – away from local storage and towards consortially-managed shared print provision, allowing them to free up space for additional collecting or for other purposes while maintaining access to and preservation of print originals.
- Many libraries that do not consider themselves to be research libraries are taking their role as "working collections" more seriously, in some cases prioritizing patron-driven acquisitions of local print collections.
- Much library community emphasis, especially among research libraries, has begun to turn towards distinctive local collections and locally provided user services, including the acquisition, digitization, cataloging, and support of the use of special collections, data curation, and similarly locally focused undertakings.
- In many cases, these changes are the result of strategic decisions made by the library that began with scholarly journals, which are now proceeding to impact other collection types.
- Tangible collections are a declining source of value to many FDLs, and, in recent years, many libraries have already begun a reassessment of FDLP tangible collections, resulting in significant de-accessions (and in some cases library departures), notwithstanding what has thus far been relatively modest levels of digitization.
- If Regional FDLs continue to drop their status, it will call into question the long-term sustainability of the tangible preservation and access backstop of the Program, and if Selective FDLs continue to withdraw tangible holdings, it will reduce an additional source of implicit preservation assurance for the Program as well as diminishing access to materials not available digitally.

Implication: FDLP materials will not be immune from many libraries' large-scale strategic reassessment of both tangible acquisitions and collections management, and, as digital availability expands, the Program's structure will need to accommodate changing library strategies for tangible collections while continuing to support access to needed materials.

Finding 4: Organizing an appropriate investment in digital preservation and integrity will require new approaches

- GPO will continue to invest in the preservation qualities of FDsys and future platforms, which provides the community with basic assurance of the long-term preservation of the materials hosted by GPO.
- GPO cannot on its own serve as the single trusted party to ensure the preservation and integrity of the digital and digitized FDLP collections.
- While GPO has made FDLP collections bulk downloadable through FDsys and added LOCKSS permissions statements to FDsys, no role has been formalized in the Program structure to incorporate library interest, in some cases individually and in other cases collaboratively, in hosting copies of these collections to support their long-term preservation and integrity.

Implication: Digital and digitized collections must be held outside the control of the Federal government to provide a credible system for preservation and integrity of FDLP collections, and new models and incentives will be required to provision this need.

Finding 5: Many libraries invest little in locally held and managed general collections in digital format

- Most libraries license digital collections of journals and books from centralized service providers to support their users' access needs to content.
- The preservation and integrity of centrally provided digital collections is provisioned in some cases on a centralized basis and in other cases on a decentralized basis.
- A minority view holds that locally held and managed general collections in electronic format are imperative to service provision and the assurance of preservation and integrity. Still, bespoke digital services built atop locally loaded digital general collections are only known to be made available through a small number of research libraries and consortia.

Implication: A robust and flexible infrastructure and associated Program structure and participation requirements should empower those libraries wishing to do so to hold and preserve digital collections locally while allowing other libraries the ability to provide outstanding services without holding digital collections locally.

Collections and Formats: Overall Implication

The diversity of user needs and library strategies should be recognized and supported by the Program, with flexibility for libraries to elect to either (1) hold local copies of FDLP collections, in print and/or digital form, in order to collectively ensure their integrity and preservation, or (2) to take advantage of the opportunity to provide access to and support the use of government information with a reduced emphasis on local collections.

Services

Finding 7: Services to support the use of collections remain a unique and valuable contribution of the library

- Due to the networked environment, channel duplication, and open access, exclusive access to content is a declining source of value as users are increasingly able to access needed materials without intermediaries. Users often lack, however, skills to effectively discover, interpret, and use needed materials.
- The expertise of the library remains essential in supporting users in making effective use of collections; libraries continue to add significant value for users in discovering, interpreting, and making effective use of collections, through the development of information literacy skills, direct reference assistance, and the creation of tools to guide users in working with information. Other information service organizations have similarly emphasized the importance of tools to support use in addition to simply providing access; for example, Lexis and West curate "free" and uncopyrightable government collections and add highly valued services.
- New innovative services are being developed across libraries and information services organizations, in areas such as data curation, text/data mining, discovery, visualization, and student instructional services, all of which will help support future user needs to make sense of the information available to them.
- Some services will continue to be best provisioned on the local level by individual FDLs, but others will benefit from scale and be provided most effectively via collaboration.
- The flood of content available online only increases the importance of help using it, but while GPO has developed partnerships with certain new service providers it has insufficiently incorporated innovative services into the structure of the Program.

Implication: The Program must better support and encourage service innovation, both by individual libraries and by groups of them collectively, well beyond the provision of access to collections and traditional reference support.

Finding 8: Available sources of support in working with government information are not able to effectively meet the needs of the American public

- Public access to government information has increased due to the free online availability of digital formats but services in support of its use have not experienced a similar expansion, and in many cases investment in dedicated services to support the government information needs of the broad public has declined. Services remain significantly underprovided, especially but by no means exclusively for members of the general public not otherwise served as a special constituency (such as by their campus library).
- While many users have increased access to digital and digitized FDLP materials, these collections are not always associated with services to support their effective use, creating both opportunities and challenges in ensuring that both collections and services are available to all potential users at their point of need. Libraries continue to experiment with a variety of new

models to reach users at their point of need, such as online reference help, embedding librarians in research groups or in the classroom, and more.

- For many Americans, public libraries are the most important source of services in support of the use of government information, but due to resource constraints these libraries often face real challenges in providing such services.

Implication: The Program should better ensure that services are available to all Americans, increasing access to services in support of government information at libraries nationwide and exploring innovative ways to deliver services to users at their point of need.

Finding 9: Additional training and outreach is needed to ensure government information skills among specialist and non-specialist librarians

- Librarians outside of FDLs, and even non-specialist librarians within FDLs, often have extremely limited awareness and knowledge of government information; government information is often seen as the specialized purview of specialist librarians at FDLs. As a result, non-specialist librarians may not take full advantage of government information resources in working with users.
- In a rapidly changing information environment, specialist government information librarians may lack up-to-date awareness of current resources and best practices, and may benefit from additional training to maintain and develop necessary skills.

Implication: The Program should work to raise awareness among non-specialist librarians of the value of government information, and should facilitate the development of basic government information skills among non-specialist librarians; the Program should also better coordinate and support skills development and maintenance among specialist librarians.

Services: Overall Implication

Dialogue about the future of the FDLP has often privileged questions of collections and their preservation over vital services in support of their use. Going forward, services to support users in discovering, accessing, interpreting, and making effective use of government information must receive equal weighting with collections in planning for the Program's future, in terms of emphasis, incentives, and library participation, and both specialist and non-specialist librarians must be supported in developing necessary skills to effectively provide these services.

Findings: The Network of Libraries

Finding 10: The roles of depository libraries are defined by tangible acquisitions and collections management, but new roles are vital to meeting the Program's vision and mission in a digital environment

- Both the Selective and Regional roles are defined in Title 44 as connected to tangible collections acquisitions, retention, and management.

- No roles are defined in the Program for the provision of print preservation, such as conservation, disaster recovery, preservation reformatting, etc.
- No roles are defined in the Program for the acquisitions, management, or preservation of digital collections.
- Although a key element of the Program's mission is the provision of "Expert assistance rendered by trained professionals in a network of libraries," no roles are defined in the Program around the provision of services.
- Existing and potential FDLs have demonstrated ample interest in claiming these roles, even while some are decreasingly interested in the tangible collections that are currently at the heart of the Program.

Implication: Defined roles must support the full range of Program priorities and durably accommodate participant interests, recognizing that libraries value roles and responsibilities differently.

Finding 11: The state-based multi-faceted Regional role is not uniformly sustainable

- The essentially state-organized Regional role does not accommodate the tremendous variation in state size and population, and the challenges in collaborating across state lines in provisioning this role have reduced its sustainability.
- The combination of retaining large-scale collections and providing supporting and coordinating services to their state can make for an awkward combination for some Regional libraries. State library agencies and county library systems coordinate library services and sometimes provide sharing and trust networks for public libraries, but they can only sometimes assume the full Regional role. Research universities hold large tangible collections, but not all are well positioned to fully embrace the coordinating aspects of the Regional role.
- In some states, the Regional role is strong and its requirements are provisioned effectively; in other states it has been difficult (and sometimes impossible) to provide effective Regional collections and/or coordination.

Implication: Mounting pressures on the Regional role indicate that the role itself should be reexamined to better align with library abilities, and that the performance of this role may be able to be organized more creatively, including through collaborative efforts.

Finding 12: The Program's organizational structure is weakened by its inability to leverage the strongest trust networks

- Libraries and their parent organizations have developed numerous trust networks that provide vehicles for collaboration.
- Some of these trust networks are sufficiently durable to serve as preservation bulwarks, while others may be best suited for service provision, digitization, and other types of roles.
- While many libraries, especially academic libraries, are members of such trust networks, other libraries continue to operate on a largely individual basis.

- The Program works only with individual libraries and has no ability to formally incorporate library trust networks and other types of collaborations into its organizational structure (although GPO has gone out of its way to provide other mechanisms to recognize and support their contributions).
- Advances in collection management and preservation, especially following digitization, reduce the need for local or geographically proximate print collections, and support the development of innovative strategies for collaboration.

Implication: The Program should find ways to embrace the strongest networks, including those that are not geographically organized, that can advance its mission.

Finding 13: The mix of library types in the Program is idiosyncratic and not strategic

- Original anticipations for a role for the state library agencies in coordinating services have in only some states held traction.
- Public libraries participate in the Program on a patchwork basis rather than consistently, and the Program offers no particular incentives or requirements for public library participation.
- The apparent benefits of participation have declined for many libraries, especially academic and law libraries, both of whose directors may increasingly believe that they can serve local government information needs through licensed and freely available online services without serving as a depository. If academic libraries continue to reduce their role in the Program and/or withdraw from it, the needs of the American public will be less well served, adding to importance of the role of public and state libraries in providing services to the American public

Implication: The Program must afford additional focus to serving the needs of the American public in addition to specialized local communities, prioritizing the participation of public and state libraries to the greatest extent possible and considering additional incentives to drive academic and law libraries to broaden to the greatest extent possible the communities they are able to reach out to and serve.

The Network of Libraries: Overall Implication

To be sustainable, the network of libraries that makes up the FDLP must accomplish Program priorities through the organization of libraries into roles that more closely align with the priorities and strategies of the library community, supporting libraries in taking on roles individually or collaboratively that match with local strategic priorities.