Transforming Government Information:
The Digital Evolution of the United States Government Publishing Office

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Introduction

The United States Government Publishing Office (GPO) and the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) are undergoing a digital transformation. This poster examines the impact on libraries and public access to government information based on the GPO Director's Task Force Report and interviews with stakeholders.

Key points:

- The digital FDLP enhances accessibility and expands the reach of government information.
- Challenges include preserving physical materials, loss of expertise, the digital divide, and disaster preparedness.
- Careful planning and stakeholder engagement are crucial for ensuring continued accessibility and preservation.

This poster explores the benefits, challenges, and implications of the GPO's digital evolution.

Background

Brief History of GPO and FDLP
- U.S. GPO, established in 1861, initially focused on printing for Congress
- FDLP integrated into GPO in 1895
- 1895 General Printing Act broadened GPO's scope, introduced regional and selective depositories
- Today, the FDLP network includes approximately 1,150 libraries nationwide

Recent Developments
- GPO and FDLP committed to adapting to technology for public access
- 1993 GPO Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act set the stage for digital transformation
- GPO Director's Task Force assessed the feasibility of transitioning FDLP to a digital format
- In 2023, the GPO Director expressed the intention to adopt Task Force recommendations

Methodology

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the GPO's digital transition on libraries and public access to government information, we employed a two-pronged approach:

Analysis of the GPO Director's Task Force Report

1. Conducted an in-depth review of the Task Force's findings and recommendations
2. Focused on the three working groups most relevant to libraries:
   - Title 44 Working Group
   - Impacts on Access Working Group
   - Digital Deposit Working Group
3. Examined the feasibility and implications of transitioning to a digital FDLP
4. Explored the Task Force's assessment of the digital transition's effect on non-FDLP libraries and public access to government information

Interviews with Task Force Members and Stakeholders

1. Conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the government documents community
2. Interviewees included:
   - Task Force members
   - Library professionals from FDLP and non-FDLP libraries
   - MARCIVE
3. Explored perspectives on the anticipated impact of the digital transition on library operations, access, and services
4. Identified potential benefits, challenges, and concerns related to the shift to a digital FDLP

By combining a thorough analysis of the Task Force report with insights from key stakeholders, the authors developed a comprehensive understanding of the digital transformation's implications for libraries and public access to government information.

Quotes

Aimee Quinn, from Northern Arizona University, praised the FDLP and GPO and the benefits of being a depository with federal support.

"Why wouldn't you want to be a member of the most significant organization out there for libraries? Who wouldn't want free cataloging assistance and free support to help you with research questions, and all those great marketing tools to help you help others understand the legislative process and how the government works, most people don't understand how the government works. So why wouldn't you want this help for free?"

Gwen Sinclair, of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, cautioned how the digital shift will affect the number of government documents experts.

"It just seems like the number of people who have that in-depth expertise is declining. And there are fewer and fewer librarians who are people like me who do government information full time."

Jim Noel, of the recently closed MARCIVE, which worked closely with depositories, suggested expanding promotion to non-FDLP libraries to spread education about government information.

"Some of the things they are doing are good and could be expanded, like the FDLP Academy-type of webinars they offer ... they tend to promote them primarily to the document's depository communities themselves. I think broadening that - there's no reason to limit it to just that community."

Key Findings

Benefits

- Enhanced accessibility: Digital platforms allow users to access government information anytime, anywhere.
- Streamlined library operations: Reduced need for physical storage space enables libraries to maintain comprehensive collections.
- Expanded reach: Non-FDLP libraries gain access to government documents, democratizing information access.

Challenges

- Preservation of physical materials: Concerns about potential loss of historical resources and ensuring long-term access to digital documents.
- Potential loss of expertise: Need to preserve and share knowledge of government documents librarians during the transition.
- Digital divide: Ensuring equitable access for communities with limited digital resources or skills.
- Disaster preparedness: Developing robust digital preservation strategies to safeguard information.

Opportunities

- Improved discoverability: Enhancing search tools and user interfaces to facilitate access to government information.
- Data-driven decision-making: Leveraging user statistics to inform collection development and resource prioritization.
- Collaboration and innovation: Engaging stakeholders to create a more inclusive, efficient, and effective system for disseminating government information.