Key Assumptions of Balancing Access & Security Issues

This discussion focuses on libraries that are struggling to find a balance between providing access to depository resources and ensuring the security of their collections, staff and users at the same time. Most access impediments or potential access problems proceed from three situations or conditions: (1) overarching library *policies* that restrict library resources and services to primary clientele; (2) limited *resources*; and (3) *security* concerns.

Assumptions:

1. The people of the United States have a right to know about the information put out by the Federal government.
2. The FDLP exists as a cooperative network of libraries that provide free public access to the published information products and services of the Federal government.
3. Libraries are responsible for the proper maintenance and care of the Federal depository materials in the Depository collection and also for protecting the staff and library users.
4. GPO and the libraries participating in the FDLP work together to develop collections and services to meet the Federal information needs for the people of the congressional district or service area they serve.
5. GPO has never been able—and never will be able—to publish a "one size fits all" set of rules that will precisely define every possible access challenge faced by every library in the FDLP.
6. Since professional judgment-calls must often be made, in access situations that are not precisely defined, different depository library personnel will make different access judgments in similar situations.
7. While most depository libraries strive toward access perfection, attainment of the ideal of free and equal public access in depository libraries is never 100% perfect.

Examples of Access Problems

1. ***Overarching library policies may conflict with FDLP access requirements***
   - (a) Access to an academic library building is restricted to faculty, students, and campus staff
   - (b) The general public is welcome, but minors under the age of 12 cannot enter the library unless accompanied by a responsible adult.
   - (c) An entire academic campus is closed to all but faculty, students, and campus staff.
   - (d) Users of Internet computers must have a library card, which is not available to non-primary users.
   - (e) Local ordinance or library board policy mandates filters that cannot be turned off on all library public computer workstations.

2. ***Limited resources may lead to access restrictions***
   - (a) Public computer workstations cannot be upgraded to GPO standards because there is not enough money in the budget to do so.
   - (b) Staff cuts reduce depository staff to the point where depository processing backlogs are constant.
   - (c) Failure of a local bond measure to build a new main library building, coupled with existing space challenges, convince the library director that the bulk of the uncataloged depository collection must be moved to remote storage.
   - (d) New library staff are no longer trained in depository access policies because the staff training budget has been zeroed out.
   - (e) There's a staff hiring freeze and the depository coordinator has just retired, tempting the library director to consider relinquishing depository status; the depository's regional convinces them to stay in the program, yet there is no money to run a viable depository program and the library becomes a depository "in name only."
   - (f) There's no money to purchase cataloging for selected depository materials, making those materials invisible to reference staff and patrons, particularly if materials are located in closed stacks or remote storage.

3. ***Security concerns may impede public access to government information***
   - (a) After GPO counseling, a private academic library that refused library access to members of the general public seeking government information reluctantly allows public access, but instructs security officers to sit with any member of the general public and watch his/her every move.
   - (b) Government-issued photo ID must be shown at the door, yet children, the elderly, and the homeless often may not have adequate ID.
   - (c) A library has a policy of not including catalog records containing PURLs in the catalog, because of worries that members of the public inside the library will use these links to gain access to the Internet on computers meant only for OPAC access.
   - (d) A library refuses to allow patrons to bring in portable USB storage devices to download large government information files.