



U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE | KEEPING AMERICA INFORMED

Public Access Assessments

Focus on free public access

October 16, 2007

What is it?

A revitalized library assessment program

Goal is to emphasize how Federal depository libraries serve the general public Federal Government information needs by reviewing how they provide access to and services for their Federal Government information products

What is the purpose?

“The Superintendent of Documents shall make firsthand investigation of conditions for which need is indicated and include the results of investigations in his annual report.”

44USC§1909

Responsibility of GPO to ensure that the resources it distributes to the depositories are made accessible to the general public

Integral part of liaison activities between the libraries and GPO

What is the process?

A progressive approach is planned

Review of an individual library's Biennial Survey responses and its Web pages

Further review if warranted

- Phone call to depository coordinator
- Review of policies not available online
- Voluntary self-assessment
- Regional librarian or peer review
- Onsite visit by GPO librarians

Recent activities

Surveyed regional librarians

Consulting with library network personnel at the Patent and Trademark Depository Library Program (USPTO) and the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (Library of Congress)

Reviewing literature on library and institution assessment

Update

Application

- Assessment may be conducted anytime upon request or as need is determined
- Late 2008 or 2009 for scheduled assessments of depository libraries

SOD policy on individual library assessment

Focus on Access, Collections, and Service

- Communication is a component of all three
- Presents a new organizational scheme

What's next?

Requesting your review of the document entitled “Focus on Access, Collections, and Service”

GPO will share guidelines for the Public Access Assessment process, after collaboration on the above document with the depository community

- The guidelines will be familiar for any library complying with Title 44, Chapter 19 and the Instructions to Depository Libraries

What's next?

Self-assessment resource development

- Voluntary
- Depository management educational and strategic planning resource
- Potentially, regional librarians and other peer experts may use when visiting depository libraries

GPO will review and finalize the draft SOD policy on individual library assessment

What this can do for your library

Information sharing with GPO

Benefits

- Certificates of accomplishment? Considering OPAL focus group session on what you would find most valuable as a deliverable from the assessment
- Documentation that your library is providing free public access and participating successfully in the FDLP

Strengthening the FDLP

Is there anything new?

Focus is on the outcomes, whether the public gains free public access

General public feedback to GPO will be actively solicited and considered

- FDLP emblem
- Web form
- Public access complaints

How may depositories prepare?

Keep doing what you're doing following Title 44 of the U.S. Code and FDLP rules and regulations

- Free public access
- Collections and services are visible and promoted

GPO is looking for positive evidence of the above, e.g., cataloging, Web pages, access policy for Federal depository use, etc.

Routinely review general public depository access at your library

Example of an initial review

An initial individual university library assessment reveals an invisible depository

Biennial Survey shows:

- None or only a few depository resources, in any format, are cataloged
- Tangible publications are in closed stacks
- Web pages do not indicate the library provides assistance with U.S. Government research
- Web pages indicate that the library serves only the university community

For discussion

Five sample scenarios related to Federal depository library free public access

For each scenario, how would you address these situations to ensure free public access?

Scenario 1

A depository library has the majority of its tangible depository receipts in closed stacks or remote storage

Scenario 2

A review of the Biennial Survey and other library documentation shows appropriate depository management practices; however, the library and/or institution Web site, building signage, and phone recording state that the library is closed to the general public

Scenario 3

A depository library has restrictions on access by minors to Federal depository resources

Scenario 4

A depository library is a mostly electronic depository library and selects only a few primary depository resources in tangible format

Scenario 5

A depository library is using patron authentication or filtering software on all of its public access computer workstations

Follow-up question

What other situations are similar that might, if not managed properly, lead to limitations on or denial of free public access?

Your input is requested

Please review and provide feedback on the document entitled “Focus on Access, Collections, and Service”

Supplementary handout is now available that provides additional details about the scenarios discussed today

Public Access Assessments: Focus on Access, Collections, and Service



Background

Public Access Assessments of individual Federal depository libraries emphasize how the libraries serve general public Federal Government information needs by reviewing how they provide access to and services for their Federal Government information products. The Public Access Assessment program complies with 44USC§1909 and conforms to the Federal Depository Library Program legal requirements. Systematic implementation of scheduled assessments for individual depository libraries is planned for late 2008 or 2009; however, Library Services and Content Management (LSCM) may conduct individual library assessments at any time upon request or as need is determined.

Public Access Assessments have a different focus from the library operations review conducted through inspections and self-studies in the past. Public Access Assessments, designed to be a more concise review, are focused on FDLP legal requirements and have a special emphasis on 44USC§1911, which states that “depository libraries shall make Government publications available for the free use of the general public”.

This document outlines the focus and organizational scheme of the Public Access Assessment and describes the major categories of Access, Collections, and Service. Communication between the general public, selective and regional depository library administrators and personnel, and Library Services and Content Management personnel at GPO is an important element which falls into all three categories. A category of overarching responsibilities spanning all other categories is also included. Various outcomes-based measures will be developed for each category, after review of this document by the depository community.

The official body of regulations governing the FDLP remains in place. These regulations, which focus on operational activities and FDLP requirements, were described in the Instructions to Depository Libraries, the Federal Depository Library Manual, and the Guidelines for the Federal Depository Library Program and have been incorporated into the new Federal Depository Library Handbook. LSCM plans to develop a self-assessment resource based on the elements described in this document as well as those in the official regulations. This resource, which may be considered to be an update of the Self-Study of a Federal Depository Library (Federal Depository Library Manual Supplement 3), will be available primarily for individual library strategic planning and educational purposes and will not be required in a Public Access Assessment.

LSCM is very interested in receiving comments on this draft document. Please send any comments to Kathy Brazee in the Office of Education and Outreach by the close of business on November 30, 2007.

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PUBLIC ACCESS ASSESSMENT CATEGORIES DESCRIBED

Federal depository libraries provide access.

Access is defined as providing free public access to Federal Government information products regardless of format. It involves making Federal Government information products available and usable for all users, including those with disabilities. It also involves but is not necessarily limited to bibliographic, physical building, tangible collection, Internet, and onsite computer access. It is the degree to which the public is able to retrieve or obtain the information products, either through the FDLP or directly through a digital information service established and maintained by a Government agency or its authorized agent or other delivery channels, in a useful format or medium, and in a time frame whereby the information has utility.

This is evidenced by:

- Any member of the general public may use Federal Government information products in all formats at a Federal depository library free of charge without impediments.
- Access to Federal Government information products is equal to or exceeds that provided for other collections in the library.
- The general public gains access to use resources in the collection through direct browsing on open shelves, through timely access to resources retrievable from closed stacks or remote storage, or through public access computer workstations.
- The general public gains access to use online resources onsite or remotely.
- Libraries respond to and address general public access complaints or concerns made directly to the library or through GPO in a timely manner.
- Libraries select appropriate secondary resources which support use of the Federal Government information products to gain bibliographic access to the collection.

- The general public may gain accommodated access to libraries in buildings with limited general public access (e.g., Federal libraries) through such services as resource sharing and remote reference when timely access to the resources is an issue. The libraries continue to provide public access to the depository general public when visiting the library is the only option to gain access to needed resources and expertise.
- Libraries designated as Federal depository libraries through the highest state appellate court library designation are exempted by statute from the free public access requirement.

Federal depository libraries select and manage collections.

Collections are defined as the Federal Government information products in all formats maintained so they are accessible and meet the Federal Government information needs of the general public.

This is evidenced by:

- Libraries maintain their collections by technical processing of new receipts for access in an appropriate time period and properly storing and caring for all the resources acquired through the FDLP.
- The general public has ready access to all parts of the collection. If the resources are in closed stacks or housed remotely or must be installed on a public access computer workstation, they are retrieved for use or installed in a reasonable period of time.
- Libraries identify and select resources that best meet the Federal Government information needs of the congressional district or local area, in cooperation with neighboring depository libraries.
- Selective depository libraries served by a regional depository may withdraw tangible publications retained for the statutory minimum period of five years from receipt after securing permission from the regional library for disposal. Unneeded materials must be made available to other depositories per disposition guidelines. (Those libraries designated as Federal libraries and the highest appellate court libraries are not subject to this requirement.)
- Regional depositories, representing a state or region, retain permanently at least one copy of all tangible Government publications received on deposit, unless they are superseded or the discards are authorized by the Superintendent of Documents.
- Regional and selective depositories communicate and cooperate regarding publication disposition.

- Libraries respond to FDLP communications regarding disposition of Federal Government information products. The products remain Federal Government property and must be withdrawn from public access, destroyed, or returned to GPO upon its request.
- All libraries maintain a library collection, other than the Federal Government information products received through the FDLP, of at least 10,000 books.

Federal depository libraries provide services.

Service is defined as activities and professional expertise oriented to the Federal Government information needs of the local community and surrounding areas and provided to support the visibility and use of the Federal Government information products of the depository library.

This is evidenced by:

- Libraries provide reference assistance to the general public.
- Library personnel have and maintain expertise in reference services which support research of Federal Government information products in all formats.
- Libraries promote the Federal Government information products to their primary constituency and the general public, to ensure that the depository resources are utilized and to help ensure that the Federal Government information needs of the community are met.
- Regional depositories work with selective depositories in their region, with GPO, and with depository libraries from other regions to assure that all depositories in their region have free access--either through online access or through interlibrary loan and additional reference assistance.

Federal depository libraries share overarching responsibilities

This is evidenced by:

- Libraries provide comparable access to and services for the Federal Government information products for the general public in a manner comparable to access to and services for primary patron use of other library collections.
- Libraries communicate and cooperate with GPO, their regional or other regional depositories, other depositories, and Federal government information patrons, in order to ensure the effective functioning of the FDLP.
- All libraries receive and respond, as appropriate, to FDLP communications from GPO regarding the functioning of the Program.

- Regional depositories communicate regularly with selective depositories to facilitate reference assistance, interlibrary loan, and selective depository publication disposal processing.
- All libraries report the conditions of the depository library to the Superintendent of Documents every two years and respond to all other required communication completely and promptly.

Document terminology

Access: Providing free public access to Federal Government information products regardless of format. It involves making Federal Government information products available and usable for all users, including those with disabilities. It also involves but is not necessarily limited to bibliographic, physical building, tangible collection, Internet, and onsite computer access. It is the degree to which the public is able to retrieve or obtain the information products, either through the FDLP or directly through a digital information service established and maintained by a Government agency or its authorized agent or other delivery channels, in a useful format or medium, and in a time frame whereby the information has utility.

Collections: Federal Government information products in all formats maintained so they are accessible and meet the Federal Government information needs of the general public.

Federal depository library: A library designated under the provisions of 44 U.S.C. §19 which maintains a depository collection for use and local access by the general public and which offers professional assistance in locating and using Federal Government information products and services.

Federal Government information products: Discrete units of Federal Government information in all formats.

Free public access: Perpetual, no fee, and ready access to Federal Government information products without impediments is available to the general public.

Public access assessment: Review by GPO of individual Federal depository library conditions focusing on public access to Federal Government information products.

Service: Activities and professional expertise oriented to the Federal Government information needs of the local community and surrounding areas and provided to support the visibility and use of the Federal Government information products of the depository library.

Public Access Assessments



Overview

Public Access Assessments emphasize how Federal depository libraries serve general public Federal Government information needs by reviewing how they provide access to and services for their Federal Government information products. The Public Access Assessments program fulfills GPO's responsibility to conduct "firsthand investigations of conditions" at individual depository libraries. (44USC§1909). Systematic implementation of scheduled assessments for individual depository libraries is planned for late 2008 or 2009; however, GPO may conduct individual library assessments at any time upon request or as need is determined. GPO will provide a self-assessment resource in upcoming months and will also continue to provide consultation with our library partners on any depository management issues to assist libraries in their preparation for a Public Access Assessment.

Public Access Assessments have a different focus than the library operations review conducted through inspections and review of Self-Studies and Biennial Survey submissions in the past. Public Access Assessments, designed to be a more concise review, are focused on FDLP legal requirements and have a special emphasis on 44USC§1911, which states that "depository libraries shall make Government publications available for the free use of the general public". Public Access Assessments conform with the draft Superintendent of Documents policy on review of individual Federal depository library conditions.

Your review and input requested

GPO is disseminating a document entitled "Public Access Assessments: Focus on Access, Collections, and Service." It describes the focus of the Public Access Assessments program, which is organized around the major categories of Access, Collections, and Service. Various outcomes-based measures will be developed for each category after review of this document by the Federal depository library community. Your comments are welcome. Please respond by November 30, 2007.

Background

Public Access Assessments will begin with a review of Biennial Survey submissions and the library and institution Web pages. Further review will include a phone call to the depository coordinator and a request for additional information. Further review does not necessarily mean free public access is being limited or denied but that further information is necessary for GPO personnel to confirm that free public access is being provided. How your library performs depository management is a local decision dependent upon

your library's overall situation; however, the ultimate objective remains free public access.

The primary principle of free public access remains of paramount importance in the Federal Depository Library Program, despite the many changes currently underway in the FDLP. GPO acknowledges and appreciates that all sizes and types of Federal depository libraries go to great lengths to assure free public access is provided to their depository collections, which are designed to meet the Federal government information needs of their local communities.

For discussion

Sample scenarios related to Federal depository library free public access

The following examples illustrate scenarios when free public access to Federal depository resources may be affected. They are examples of triggers or indicators which are likely to prompt further review during a Public Access Assessment.

1. A depository library has the majority of its tangible depository receipts in closed stacks or remote storage.
2. A review of the Biennial Survey and other library documentation shows appropriate depository management practices; however, the library and/or institution Web site, building signage, and phone recording state that the library is closed to the general public.
3. A depository library has restrictions on access by minors to Federal depository resources.
4. A depository library is a mostly electronic depository library and selects only a few primary depository resources in tangible format.
5. A depository library is using patron authentication or filtering software on all of its public access computer workstations.

Questions

1. For each scenario, how would you address these situations to ensure free public access?
2. What other situations are similar that might, if not managed properly, lead to limitations on or denial of free public access?

Additional information about these scenarios will be available at the Council program on Public Access Assessments in the Crystal Ballroom A -B on Tuesday, October 16, 2007 from 1:30-3:00 p.m.

October 2007

Public Access Assessments

Additional information regarding the sample scenarios related to Federal depository library free public access



This paper provides supplemental information to the briefing paper on Public Access Assessments that was provided in the conference attendee packet.

The following content provided for each scenario is not meant to be comprehensive but illustrative of major issues GPO will consider during a Public Access Assessment.

1. A depository library has the majority of its tangible depository receipts in closed stacks or remote storage.

Access is being provided bibliographically:

- When the general public may access records representing all publications in the catalog or another publicly accessible database or catalog;
- When library public services personnel may immediately assist the general public with identification of all depository publications in the collection through a staff accessible shelflist, and this service is advertised to library patrons;
- A combination of the above to accomplish full bibliographic control over the collection is performed.

Access is being provided when depository publications are available for patron use through:

- Retrieval from closed stacks within a reasonable period of time, either paged immediately upon request from closed stacks or within the time period identified by the library in an official policy (e.g., 2 times daily);
- Retrieval from remote storage in a reasonable period of time, either daily or within the time period identified by the library in an official policy (e.g., 2-3 times/week);
- Retrieval options are free of charge and available to all library users, including members of the general public who are not eligible to be library card holders.

Access is being provided when depository publications in the library are managed comparably to other collections, i.e.:

- They are provided the same level of bibliographic control as other collections in closed stacks or remote storage and are housed comparably to other library collections;
- The choice to house them in closed stacks or remote storage is comparable to that for other library collections;
- Publications are retrieved for members of the general public on the same basis as those for a library's primary patrons, as applicable. (e.g., no depository publications on placed in a "Reserves" collection where a specific type of identification is required for use, even within the library).

2. A review of the Biennial Survey and other library documentation shows appropriate depository management practices; however, the library and/or institution Web site, building signage, and phone recording state that the library is closed to the general public.

Access is being provided when:

- The access policy very clearly and visibly states exceptions to the restriction on public access by stating that Federal depository patrons are permitted access to Federal depository resources. This statement must be stated in close proximity to any access restriction. Stating the exception on a separate Web page, such as a page featuring government documents, is insufficient and unacceptable if the library's home and other main pages and other documentation indicate that the library is closed to the public.

To alleviate this situation, libraries are encouraged to state affirmatively who the library provides access to. To avoid any potential confusion and "chilling effect" on Federal depository usage, GPO prefers that libraries do not indicate they are "closed to the general public" and then list exceptions for those groups including Federal depository users who are exceptions to the restricted access policy. We do acknowledge that many libraries choose to write their access policies this way.

Having a "chilling effect" means members of the general public may assume they are not permitted to access U.S. Government information at the library. This is a serious issue because we have no way of knowing how many members of the general public will decide they are not permitted to access depository resources through the library. A Federal depository library may not indicate they are closed to the general public without also stating they serve Federal government information researchers, Federal depository patrons, or those identified through a similar descriptive name. (Exception to this are libraries designated as the highest state appellate court libraries per 44USC§1915.)

Even if this depository library is performing depository management activities at an exceptional level for its primary patrons, it has a potentially serious situation which may require immediate attention if it is not willing to provide access to the general public. If it is not readily obvious to potential general public users of the Federal depository that they are permitted access, this library is in violation of the free public access commitment. GPO will work with the library to determine whether this is a temporary situation which may be immediately rectified or if it is meant to be long-term. Libraries which cannot or will not comply with the stipulation of being accessible to the public should voluntarily relinquish depository status. As a reminder, "Depository libraries shall make Government publications available for the free use of the general public." (44USC§1911) A library must observe this stipulation in order to gain, and thereby retain, its depository designation.

3. A depository library has restrictions on access by minors to Federal depository resources.

Access is provided when:

- The library's access policy, its Web site, and signage indicate that free public access is provided to Federal depository patrons without impediments, including age, and

depository public services are available to minors in a manner comparable to those provided to adults from the general public. Obviously, the safety of children is very important to consider here; however, minors, even unaccompanied minors, are still considered members of the general public for the purposes of Federal depository usage.

To ensure free public access is provided to minors, depository libraries should:

- Regularly train security or library access personnel in the library's access policy to ensure that minors and other members of the general public may gain access to the library to use Federal Government information products.
- Assist legitimate general public researchers of any age who do not pose a security risk with their need to access Federal Government information products.
- Develop a policy, as appropriate, whereby minors, or depository users of any age, may be accompanied while they utilize Federal Government information products.
- Provide assistance to minors with their Federal Government information research needs. If a library has a policy indicating that unaccompanied minors are not permitted to access the library building, those with legitimate research needs must be accommodated through mediated assistance. Signage and access policies must be in accordance. See scenario #2 for information about appropriate signage.

4. A depository library is a mostly electronic depository library and selects only a few primary depository resources in tangible format.

Access is provided bibliographically:

- When patrons may access records representing all or most Federal Government information products selected for the community in the catalog or through another publicly accessible bibliographic resource;
- When library public services personnel may immediately assist patrons with identification of all publications in the depository collection through a staff accessible shelflist, and this service is publicly accessible or its availability is advertised to library patrons;
- A combination of the above to accomplish bibliographic control over the collection is performed.

Access is being provided when depository publications and services are visible as:

- The FDLP emblem is posted on the library building indicating that the library is a Federal depository library;
- There is demonstrable evidence of FDLP participation within the library (e.g., the library directory indicates where "Government publications" are housed or made available and/or where reference assistance for Federal Government information products is available);
- Knowledgeable public services personnel who are familiar with Federal Government information products in all formats are available.

Access is being provided when depository publications in the library are managed comparably to other collections, i.e.:

- Depository publications are identified bibliographically in the same way as other library publications;

- U.S. Government information products are promoted in the same way as other areas of emphasis in the library;
- Comparable time is devoted to Federal depository collection development as other areas of emphasis in the library;
- Comparable time and resources are allocated for training library personnel in U.S. Government information librarianship as in other specialties.

5. A depository library is using patron authentication or filtering software on all of its public access computer workstations.

Depository libraries may certainly employ authentication or filtering software; however, special attention must be taken to ensure free public access to Federal depository users is provided.

Libraries should have the following up-to-date policies in place, either as separate policies or part of a larger policy:

- FDLDP Internet Use Policy
- Public Service Guidelines for Government Information in Electronic Formats
- Access policy for or including information about Federal depository users.

Libraries may address the issue through a combination of the following:

- Signage by or at the public access computers directs those who do not have the ability to log on and authenticate usage to go to a public services desk for further assistance.
- Signage at public access computer workstations may indicate that the primary purpose of the computers is research. Recreational or non-research use of the computers may be prohibited or limited to off-peak times.
- Guest logins may be utilized for non-primary patrons to gain access to public access computer workstations.
- Library public services personnel may mediate access to Federal Government information products. If non-primary patrons are not permitted to access depository resources on public access computer workstations, public services personnel must provide comparable service to the depository patrons, giving them adequate time and assistance to complete their research as primary patrons have but through mediated assistance.
- If public access computer workstations are limited to certain domains (e.g., .gov or .mil), assistance must be made available in a timely manner to gain access to any Federal Government information products located on other domains.
- If public access computer workstations are filtered and any Federal Government information products are inaccessible because they are filtered, the message which indicates the sites are filtered on the computer should direct researchers to the public services desk where access to the resource will be provided.
- A set of public access computer workstations may continue to be set aside for Federal depository usage.
- Time limits for computer usage for non-primary patrons is acceptable, but libraries must have recourse for patrons unable to complete their Federal Government information research in the designated time period in a comparable manner to the time primary patrons are permitted to use the computers.

- Online Federal Government information products are made available to anyone who is not a primary patron and does not have direct access.
- The FDLP Electronic Collection, including the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications, must be accessible.

What you can do to monitor free public access

If there is any question that current access procedures at your depository library could be seen as inhibiting free public access, you should consult with GPO and your regional librarian.

GPO relies upon the judgment of depository library administrators and personnel who best know their local needs and circumstances to determine how to provide free public access. GPO does not dictate a library's operating hours, access and security procedures, collection organization, acquisition guidelines, or other related operational activity as long as these local policies do not violate the principle of free public access.

GPO encourages you to perform the following on a routine basis and address problems as needed:

- ❑ Check the library for signage or posted policies that may have a “chilling effect” on general public usage, i.e., those which state “private”, “not open to the general public”, “available only to authorized persons”, or “university identification required”.
- ❑ Review the library's and parent institution's (not just the depository's) policies and procedures, such as those covering age, public access computer workstations, various tangible publication housing locations, etc.
- ❑ Search the library's and parent institution's Web pages for policies including potential access problems that you may not be aware of.
- ❑ Take a fresh look at how the depository collection is made accessible. Are the tangible publications visible on open shelves or are they housed in closed stacks without any corresponding catalog records? Are the online selections identified through cataloging or library Web pages?
- ❑ Check to ensure that public services personnel are trained to identify Federal depository resources that are relevant to patron requests, even if the patron has not specifically requested a U.S. Government publication or U.S. Government information.
- ❑ Review hours of operation and services for any adverse effect on public access to ensure that the library provides opportunities for those patrons who work a traditional 8am-5pm work schedule to access Federal depository materials.
- ❑ Verify whether identification is required to use depository resources and how members of the general public who may not have the appropriate identification are

directed to gain public services assistance in order to access Federal depository library resources.

- Verify that all library personnel, especially any security personnel at the library entrance, are aware of the free public access requirements of Federal depository libraries. Routinely train new personnel to minimize any misunderstandings about the access requirements the library has as a Federal depository library.

Security and access

GPO recognizes legitimate security concerns of Federal depository libraries. Permissible actions your library may undertake to ensure security include such activities as requiring library patrons to sign a guest register and/or show identification to access the library building and/or public access computer workstations, asking questions that screen patrons to make sure that the library has what they need, and even escorting patrons to the depository collection.

Such actions in no way violate the responsibility of depository libraries to provide free public access to the depository collection under 44USC§1911. Issues relating to patron behavior are best managed through a library patron conduct policy rather than a policy which focuses on limiting access to groups of library users, e.g., minors. Depository libraries have the right to bar or remove any individual who poses a threat to library personnel, other patrons, or the security of their collections. Also, under a strict interpretation of the statute, the public patron may be restricted to using only the depository collection. Efforts to limit inappropriate conduct must not affect free public access for those who are performing legitimate research.

October 2007

Individual Library Assessment: Draft SOD policy



SOD 3— SUPERINTENDENT OF DOCUMENTS POLICY STATEMENT

Subject: Review of individual Federal depository library conditions

Purpose

To validate the purpose and role of the U.S. Government Printing Office to investigate conditions in individual Federal depository libraries.

Background

“The Superintendent of Documents shall make firsthand investigation of conditions for which need is indicated and include the results of investigations in his annual report. When he ascertains that the number of books in a depository library is below ten thousand, other than Government publications, or it has ceased to be maintained so as to be accessible to the public, or that the Government publications which have been furnished the library have not been properly maintained, he shall delete the library from the list of depository libraries if the library fails to correct the unsatisfactory conditions within six months.” 44USC§1909

The purpose of depository library assessments is to ensure that depositories comply with Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) legal requirements. The U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) has the responsibility to ensure that the resources it distributes to Federal depository libraries are made accessible to the general public. As libraries formally agree to provide free public access upon designation as Federal depository libraries and as the publications disseminated to Federal depository libraries remain Federal property, the U.S. Government Printing Office must account for the conditions in depository libraries for proper administration of the FDLP.

The review of depository conditions has always been viewed as an integral part of GPO library liaison activities with the Federal depository library community. It is an opportunity for each library and GPO to share information in order to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the FDLP. Historically, the review was conducted through onsite inspections and reviews of Self-Studies and Biennial Survey submissions.

Policy

The current program for investigation of Federal depository library conditions is named Public Access Assessments. It is administered by the Library Services and Content Management business unit (LSCM). Public Access Assessments emphasize how Federal depository libraries serve the general public Federal Government information needs by reviewing how they provide

access to and services for their Federal Government information products. Public Access Assessments conform to FDLR legal requirements and have a special emphasis on 44USC§1911, which states that “depository libraries shall make Government publications available for the free use of the general public”. The process of assessment focuses on outcomes, i.e., whether the general public gains access to a depository library’s Federal Government information products. Comparability in the management of and service for the information products as compared to other library resources is also emphasized as this affects access and service.

Guidelines

An assessment may indicate failure on the part of a library to provide public access for and service to or to properly maintain the depository collection. If the problems have not been addressed and rectified within 6 months, the Superintendent of Documents has the authority to revoke Federal depository library status.

Anyone (e.g., member of the general public, library administrator, library personnel, or regional librarian) may request a Public Access Assessment. A library user complaint about denial of free public access may trigger an assessment as GPO takes these complaints seriously and investigates them.

Scope

This policy pertains to assessment of all individual Federal depository libraries. Any statutory exemptions noted for certain types of libraries in 44 U.S.C. §1907 and 1915 will be accounted for in the individual library’s assessment.

GPO relies upon the judgment of depository library administrators who best know their local needs and circumstances to determine how to provide free public access. GPO does not dictate a library’s operating hours, access and security procedures, collection organization, acquisition guidelines, or other related operational activity as long as these local policies do not violate the principle of free public access.

Public Access Assessments offer an opportunity to consult with our library partners on depository management best practices.

Application

Assessments of all depository libraries will be performed on a periodic basis, although GPO reserves the option to assess a library at any time to address public access concerns. An assessment is a report on the conditions on the day of evaluation, but ongoing library projects and plans are also taken into account. Frequency and scheduling of onsite visits is a programmatic decision. Onsite library visit priorities may be established based upon available funding and personnel strength.

References

Title 44 United States Code Chapter 19
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