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Depository Services Staff Talktable Highlights

Federal Depository Conference
April 9, 1992

Joe McClane, Chief, Depository Services Staff, and the library inspectors were on hand to answer questions.

There were a number of questions concerning GPO's definition of "free access."

Libraries were told to review Chapter 7 of the revised **Instructions to Depository Libraries**. Libraries are allowed to bar entry to individuals who violate library wide policies on conduct, but are not allowed to impose restrictions based on age, sex or non-student status. Librarians were urged to call GPO if they suspected their present library access policy might be viewed as hindering free public access. Except for the highest state appellate court library, **all** depositories must provide free public access.

Several librarians asked why GPO does not give a longer lead time between notifying libraries of upcoming inspections and the actual inspection. There were also questions concerning inspection visit flexibility. Why can't inspectors be more flexible in when they come? Sometimes they come at the worst possible time.

It was explained that libraries are usually given six weeks notice prior to inspection visits. This is much better than the past practice of making unannounced visits. With a small staff, GPO needs the flexibility of revising itineraries as conditions dictate. Past experience has shown that projecting schedules months in advance and then having to change them is far more disruptive to the libraries than the present six weeks' notification. The main reason inspectors cannot be more flexible in scheduling visits to individual libraries is the cost involved in such visits. Each inspection tour must be as cost effective as possible. It would be nearly impossible to achieve such efficiencies if inspectors did not visit every library in the same area at the same time. Also inspections tend to be more effective if the inspector visits adjacent libraries during the same trip.

There was a question as to why the inspection form is not given out prior to the inspection.

GPO opposes this practice because past experience has shown that having the form beforehand negatively affects the accuracy of the responses. If the form did prove to be a good study tool, GPO would recommend it. As it is, the "form" is actually a worksheet. As the worksheet offers no explanations, it is open to all kinds of interpretations. The best preparation remains a thorough review of the **Instructions**, the **Manual**, and the **Guidelines**. Libraries that do well on inspection do well because they have reviewed these publications, which provide definitions and explanations of what is considered acceptable library practice.

There was a question on why GPO did not adopt a pass/fail grading system.

GPO has adopted such a system for basic responsibilities. But GPO and most libraries want some recognition for depositories that exceed minimum standards. Good and excellent ratings recognize these exceptional libraries and provide a motivation for other libraries to offer superior depository service.

Many librarians also ask that future conferences allocate more time to "talktable" discussion and that future conferences be scheduled in conjunction with other events.