

good afternoon

my name is Sarah Erekson and I'm a new regional government documents librarian.

The Federal Depository Library Program aims to bring government information to everyone. How can we maintain and increase access, including serving people with print disabilities?

This gets to the heart of my passion for government information librarianship. Bringing documents to the people to empower all people with information that impacts their lives. As an intermediary, I love helping people overcome barriers to accessing this information.

Read slide: "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

-James Madison

This session will give some historical background on library services to people with print disabilities, such as people with blindness, low vision, or physical disability and providing access to government information.

I will bring awareness to barriers to access in federal depository library programs and ways that electronic government information overcomes some of those barriers.

There are many parallels between library services to people with print disabilities, such as people with blindness, low vision, or physical disability. And providing access to government information.

Don't judge a book by its cover.

Describe slide: On the left there are the blue cartridges used in the Talking Books Service; on the right, there are buckram bound documents – the water supply papers.

While on the outside, a braille book, a talking book cartridge or a website designed to meet standards for accessibility to magnifiers and screen readers may look plain and boring.

Similarly, a government documents section may be considered the ugliest books in the library because they were just endless aisles of buckram bound volumes.

But form follows function and the plainness of both types of library materials are for function and efficiency.

A quick history of government information:

From the earliest times in this country, leaders knew that if the government was of the people, by the people, and for the people, then the people needed to know what the government was doing.

Read slide: “The people have a right to know what their agents are doing or have done, and it should not be in the option of the legislature to conceal their proceedings.”

-James Wilson of Pennsylvania

The foundation for this dissemination of government information is written in the Constitution. However, the process that is private printers were contracted to produce the proceedings of the House and Senate. These arrangements proved to be wasteful at best and criminal at worst. So in 1861 - the Government Printing Office was established. They printed the records, reports, proceedings, and documents and then were tasked with distributing them throughout the country.

So GPO met the needs of the people who needed to know what their government was doing as well as providing general information. From maps and brochures of National Parks to how to care for infants or horses, to how to apply for government benefits, in the print era, the plan was to make lots of printed copies and send them across the country so you would not have to travel far to get to a library who could provide you with these materials.

Describe slide: vast geographic distribution of Depositories, shown in this map, means that an FDL maybe closer than other organizations designed to meet the needs of a specialized population (such as a Lighthouse for the blind or a regional talking books center).

This model was designed for an era of information scarcity. But as information services have transformed, so does the Federal Depository Library Program. 25 years ago, GPO adopted the newest technology to embrace electronic information and the Internet. Less than 10 years ago, the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries formed the Collaborative Federal Depository Program Centers for Excellence. Sharing

resources and providing leadership within the nation as a model of working together in the age of information abundance. And right now before Congress, is a bill HR.5305, which goes further to modernize the program and enable electronic preservation, removing barriers to participation and acknowledging the changes in production and dissemination of government information.

Now for some historical background on services, and later library services designed to include everyone, including people with print disabilities. **I've simplified the timeline into three parts: 1830s, 1900s and 1930s.** The earliest services to these populations started with state institutions that offered education and specific materials, such as books with tactile print - before the standardization braille. **Some of these early institutions were in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.**

The next point, near the 1900s were when dedicated library services began. Around 1895, the Detroit Public Library acquired a huge collection of tactile print books. However, within a year, circulation began to dwindle. They determined that the readers of these braille books had each already read every book they had. A library NETWORK was suggested. If Cincinnati bought 100 different braille books, and were able to share them with Detroit, then the users in both cities would have access to twice the content than either individual library could provide.

Perhaps over-simplifying the next step, by the 1930s, library networks were centralized into the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

Other technological advances enabled better access to information to people with visual impairments.

Read Slide: Overcoming Barriers with Technology:

- **Tactile print – braille**
- **Large Print**
- **Talking books**
- **Magnifiers**
- **Screen readers**

I want to spend most of my time focusing on the positive - the ways we can increase access and use, and especially how electronic information has enabled that. But before I do, I wanted to go over the status quo - and how maintaining government information in print may not provide equity of access or inclusion.

Government information in print creates barriers to access.

Describe Slide: I'm illustrating the print barriers with a photo of the Congressional Record stacks and Compact Shelving

Historically, there was a ton of documents that libraries received and wanted to collect - such as the Congressional Record. They take up a lot of space. So what if we turn the wasted aisle space into more shelving- Wow - we can fit in twice the books! But even these marvels caused barriers. From mechanical issues, to the aisle widths, to lighting, to the amount of time and resources needed to page and shelve things, it was still greatly inefficient. And thankfully, then came High-Density Storage. This has enabled better use of space (storage by size) and better access to

items (by actually have catalog records).

And how do you find what you are looking for? Reference was complex and cumbersome. It's inscrutable and requires several tedious steps -

Read slide: Reference in the Analog Era illustrated with my notes from an analog reference search

- **Specialized indexes**
- **Monthly Catalog**
- **Shelflist**
- **Pulling from closed stacks**

Finally, while tactile print has been around for nearly 200 years, and standardized for over a hundred, I had a very hard time identifying historical government information in braille.

Describe Slide: A snapshot of a shelflist card for a Braille item.

Received in August of 1988, and sent to the Regional Library for the Blind in Springfield. The oldest braille item in UF's depository collection, a medicare handbook from 1984.

In one of the GPO histories I consulted, it mentioned that their bestseller Infant Care was produced in Braille in 1963. According to WorldCat no library has holdings of that document in that formation. It seems that the National Library Service at the Library of Congress, which has its own catalog, has an entry for that book in braille, but only registered users of that service would have access to it. The oldest depository braille document I found, and I actually had my off-site docs team pull it, was from 1984.

Describe Slide: a snapshot of a government information library, the Municipal Reference Library of Chicago, from the early 1990s.

Notice how use of print materials in this reading room may create barriers to access. Tables are so close together, everyone would have issues moving to an open chair when it is busy. We may not always observe or be aware of the changes we have made in our libraries to be more accessible to people. But if your reading room doesn't look like this, progress has been made.

From Print to Electronic

Electronic versions

- **Not physically inaccessible**
 - No closed stacks to navigate, no shelves that are unreachable, no doors that are not motorized, no elevators out of order.
- **Not organized by SuDocs classification**
 - I love superintendent of documents classification. I do. But not everyone 'gets' it. And may choose to avoid it.
- **Keyword searching in full text**
 - So much easier than paper indexes. And no need to understand SuDocs.

So the progress toward electronic government information has increased accessibility by getting rid of the space and distribution issues and allowing anyone to use the documents where they are. Any device can provide you access to a federal depository collection.

Describe slide: This image shows a user viewing the Congressional Record on a tablet. And the GPO seal of authentication.

Our modern devices have a kinds of features that lower barriers to use. My old phone's buttons stopped engaging. I was able to turn on accessibility settings so that those functions can be done by the touch screen.

How will increase accessibility – the first step is awareness. Perhaps that is cliché but if you don't see the barriers, you can't address them.

Describe slide: This image shows a train platform surrounded by cars on highways. Bright blue detectable warning surfaces run parallel along the platform edges.

If only there was a way to help “see” the barriers to access for people with print disabilities the way the raised bumps of the detectable warning surfaces do. There is!

Describe slide: I have a screenshot of a familiar catalog (the CGP) run through Web Accessibility tools like WAVE from WebAIM.

Maybe you need to add Alt-text tags or use hyper link text that is descriptive and unique on the page.

Or maybe you work with vendors and trusted digital repositories to ensure that you are getting the most bang for your buck from them. Demand that they work towards accessibility as Hathitrust is doing.

Describe slide: in this screenshot showing the hathitrust's digital version of That All May Read.

From the print version, on a closed stacks shelf in a depository library, limited the access. But it is amazing that we can search for “That all may read” a 1983 document – search the full text and find the anecdote about Detroit Public Library- so easily on a computer or tablet.

How to increase access and encourage use.

Read slide: Observation – Illustrated with a stairway up to rooms not accessible to people with mobility issues.

Status Quo: accessible in general

In the requirements for participation in the Federal Depository Library Program, libraries need to ensure access.

All facilities housing depository materials must meet the standards set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or have a reasonable alternative to ensure access. The depository collection must be available for all library patrons, including those with disabilities.

You can observe and assess whether your general accessibility is problematic or inclusive to everyone.

Mobility issues within building

Perhaps collections in rooms that don't have motorized doors, or accessible bathrooms only on one floor.

Access aids in disrepair

Perhaps you have escalators or elevators that are constantly out of order. Or you have accessible software on one computer but that one cannot accommodate some wheelchairs.

New technology adoption

Perhaps you had TTY systems in multiple locations, but as the public telephones went extinct, you never upgraded technology to have video relay available.

Programming – How accessible are your programs?

Describe slide: I've got two WPA-era posters advertising programming, Book Talks and informal study groups.

There is great power in getting people together especially over food. And pizza can be a crowd pleaser, but there are plenty of folks for whom dietary restrictions limit their ability to enjoy a catered program. Can you offer a gluten-free pie along with the FDLP anniversary cake? Or a dairy free salad with the pizza order?

Informal discussions on documents topics can go a long way. It may be far-fetched to have a book club that read government documents, although I found Keeping America Informed, 150 at GPO fascinating. But book clubs can certainly benefit from electronic government documents. Mine recently read Killers of the Flower Moon – the Osage Murders and the birth of the FBI. This non-fiction whodunit relied on several federal docs – which thanks to digitization, I was able to gather and provide links to.

Making Accessible slides.

- **Limit words per line**
- **Large sans serif fonts**
- **High contrast graphics and color combinations**

When I started making this presentation, I went with a PowerPoint template with my favorite colors: orange and white. While I thought it was very appealing, after looking into readability issues, it was clear that the pretty colors were bad. Then I choose to use a template that was a lot more boring, a background that faded from black to grey and fonts that were white to gold. But using a test for readability for contrast and font size, my light grey and gold are particularly bad together. Your instincts and intentions may be good, but check and check again. That's easy with

- **Built in accessibility checkers**

Inclusive Presentations

- **Use a microphone**
 - Many folks with degrees of hearing loss or impairment muddle through and may not speak out about your volume as a presenter. Some rooms may create difficulties for acoustics. Mitigate these issues on your end by requesting a microphone.
- **Say everything on the slide out loud**
 - While reading your slides is bad form, make sure you provide oral support for your slides by describing all your graphics. Think about what information you are conveying and if it is illustrated, like my first slide about boring looking book stacks.
- **Prepare ahead of time**
 - When you are captioning your images, go ahead and add alt text tags. Or have your slides ready to distribute in forms that support the learning abilities of your audience members. Perhaps that is printouts, or electronic versions of the slides.

Outreach and Partnerships – get outside the walls of the library. Unlike Paul McCartney’s Band of the Run, I’m not stuck inside these four walls.

Describe slide: Florida at night from NASA’s image gallery.

You don’t have to do this in a vacuum, or go it alone. Work with the government agencies in your area that support your goal of accessibility and inclusion. They may have different names like **Florida Bureau of**

Blind Services or Chicago's Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

Are there institutional supports like Disability Resource Center on campus. Do they have guidelines or supports for helping you create a presentation accessible to everyone.

Are their community partners like the Lighthouse for the blind, or Second sense that may have advice or may be great places to reach new clientele for government information programming.

Finally, I have my little shout-out to our Public Libraries. If you select depository items in braille, then these may be the most economical (i.e., free) ways to get examples of braille materials for the sighted. At my former institution, the Gov. Reference desk shared space near the Talking Book Center. Folks were curious, but the NLS only has resources to serve registered members. Being able to bring out a SSA braille guide with its large, thick pages, and tactile print is a really special way to share accessible formats and government information at the same time.

And if you distribute bulk print publications, see if you can order large print or braille editions. Our state highway maps in large print were actually a lot more popular than the regular size ones.

Moving forward – I'm ending with this image of a Florida Snapping Turtle. He kind of looks scary and spikey. But is rare and endangered. I don't want to sound negative, but I feel like progress that moves forward slowly, like the fable of the tortoise and the hare, will win the race.