

Best Practices for Storing and Retrieving Depository Materials in On-site or Off-site Storage

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INTRODUCTION

With libraries facing increasing pressure to accommodate both shelving and study space, depository coordinators may find some or all of their collections slated for closed stacks or off-site storage. In 2014, the Depository Library Council charged the [Off-site Storage Working Group](#) with developing best practices for on-site and off-site storage of tangible resources received through the Federal Depository Library Program. The Working Group conducted an initial survey in late 2014 and a targeted follow-up survey in early 2015 to determine where and how depository libraries house their collections. The results of these surveys, which discuss the different spaces, places, and methods libraries use to store and retrieve their documents, are available in the [FDLP File Repository](#). The data collected from these surveys, in conjunction with the [Legal Requirements and Program Regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program](#) and various guidance articles from [FDLP.gov](#), was used to develop this best practices document.

This document addresses issues related to depository collection moves to on-site and off-site storage, including what to do before, during, and after the move itself; bibliographic control issues; collaboration involving one or more depository or other libraries and/or other facilities; and alternative sources of U.S. Government information that may be helpful for patron access during a collection move or as finding aids to help identify publications in storage.

FDLP REQUIREMENTS FOR STORING AND RETRIEVING MATERIALS IN ON-SITE OR OFF-SITE STORAGE

When moving collections to on-site or off-site storage or reviewing existing storage arrangements, please remember:

- The [Legal Requirements and Program Regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program](#) apply to any depository publication housing location, even though off-site storage and closed stacks are only specifically mentioned once within the document.
- You cannot store depository publications, which are Federal property, in any location where they remain publicly inaccessible. Doing so is a violation of the agreement that a library has made relating to free, public access and can result in a library's removal from the FDLP. If you currently house Federal depository materials like this, you must immediately take steps to remedy the situation.
- If any patron, regardless of library affiliation or other status, wishes to access a tangible format of a depository publication housed in closed stacks or off-site storage, that publication must be retrieved, even if the library has access to an electronic equivalent.

- Libraries may offer to scan information resources in off-site storage or other special housing rather than retrieve the tangible format of the publications, when acceptable to the requesting library patron.
- Because all Government publications supplied to your depository library under the FDLP remain the property of the U.S. Government, publications must be housed in a manner that facilitates access, preservation, and protection from theft. Your depository library must, at a minimum, provide the same care and maintenance of depository materials as it gives to commercially purchased publications.
- If you house publications at a location not under the administrative purview of the depository library director, you must have an approved Selective Housing Agreement on file at GPO and at your regional depository library.
- Before or after a move of tangible depository materials when they will be publicly inaccessible for a period of time, you must submit a contingency plan to GPO and your regional depository library that outlines the steps your library is taking to provide for continued public access during the move. [Checklists are available for temporary and permanent moves](#). GPO must approve the contingency plan prior to a collection move. On occasion, GPO may require that a library change the plan to support free, public access.
- Depository libraries must post the FDLP depository emblem in a prominent location on or near all public entrances where depository resources are housed if there is public service at that housing location. The emblem indicates that Federal depository materials are housed therein and that they are available for use by anyone, including the general public, without charge.
- Libraries experiencing a temporary disruption in service (e.g., housing collections in temporary storage areas during a collection move or building remodel) must continue to provide access to the depository services and the collection for all users during the period of disruption. Typically, this means that information about the depository collection and services are widely advertised and that retrieval services are put into place to retrieve requested publications while they are in temporary storage.
- Staff training should be conducted, where needed, to facilitate collection management and retrieval and so that all library staff may assist patrons with identification of and access to Federal depository materials. This may include staff members who work at an off-site storage facility, those who retrieve publications, interlibrary loan specialists, and any public services personnel.
- Depository publications that are typically used by library staff (e.g., *Library of Congress Subject Headings*) are subject to the same requirements as other depository resources.

- If you are uncertain about your library's unique situation, consult with [GPO's Office of Outreach and Support](#). The librarians there can provide you with different ideas for collection management and services.
- If your library is a regional depository library, you must continue to ensure the comprehensiveness and integrity of a tangible FDLP collection in the state or region, manage the publication withdrawal process in the state or region served, and provide interlibrary loan and reference assistance to selectives, regardless of the housing location of the regional depository collection.

Did you know?

- Your library decides the collection arrangement of depository publications, as long as they are maintained and accessible for free, public access. You may house them:
 - In any classification order (e.g., Library of Congress, Superintendent of Documents, etc.),
 - In any type of shelving or cabinets (e.g., open shelves, cabinets, and medium or high density storage),
 - Separate from or integrated with other library collections,
 - In one physical location or in several.
- It must be clear to all library users, including non-primary patrons such as the general public, when there are depository publications housed in other than open stacks or accessible cabinets and how each user group, including the general public, may access the publications, to the title level.
- All Federal depository publications remain Federal property and must be identified as such for free, public access. Most depositories stamp receipts to indicate they were received through the FDLP, which is not easily viewable when publications are housed in closed stacks or off-site. If in doubt if a publication is a Federal depository publication, retrieve it to verify in order to support free, public access.
- If any depository publications in closed stacks or off-site storage are uncataloged, the library must clearly advertise the collections housed in these locations or otherwise make them visible to current and potential library users; otherwise they are invisible and improperly stored Federal property. This could lead to the library's removal from the FDLP.
 - The location of the piece-level accounting must be in the appropriate location for staff to provide reference and access (retrieval) services.
 - Commercial databases and the [Catalog of U.S. Government Publications](#) are additional discovery tools, but are not to be used in lieu of bibliographic control for any depository material.

- You may house depository publications in facilities with or without public service points.
 - If there is a service point, access may be limited to the formats housed therein. Proper equipment, such as a photocopy machine, must be available.
 - If there is not a service point, a retrieval process must be in place to transport requested publications to the library. If library cardholders request retrieval through the library catalog, another process must be in place, visible, and comparable for any depository patron who is not a library cardholder to request depository materials through the library. Directing unaffiliated patrons to use interlibrary loan from another library is a violation of free, public access.
- You may house microfiche and tangible electronic media in closed stacks or off-site storage; however, the equipment needed to view these resources may be in a different location, as long as there is a process in place to transport requested publications to the location with the equipment.
- The retrieval time to obtain publications from off-site storage facilities must be timely, i.e., usually 48 hours or less; however, retrieval may be limited to Monday-Friday when library staff are more typically available.
- You may weed Federal depository publications housed in closed stacks or off-site storage. They must be weeded properly according to regional depository library direction.
- If your library is developing a Selective Housing Agreement for off-site housing and that agreement is complex, i.e., it is between multiple libraries or there are unique processes in place, you may send a draft to GPO and your regional depository library for review. GPO and regional depository personnel may provide comments and suggestions to help shape the final agreement. Since GPO must approve these types of agreements, this may facilitate agreement development.
- If the library has multiple copies of a Federal publication, only the copy considered to be the Federal depository copy is subject to the free, public access requirement.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A COLLECTION MOVE

Regardless of scope or scale, all collection moves consist of three stages: before the move, during the move, and after the move. This section addresses the specific issues and tasks that should be considered during each stage.

Before the move

Collection moves – particularly major collection moves – can be deceptively complex and time consuming. In order to move a collection as quickly and efficiently as possible, planning should start as far in advance of the move as possible.

- Set a timeline: determine when the move will start, approximately how long it will take, and how the move will impact access to the collection.
- Determine who (library staff, professional movers, etc.) will actually move the collection. Also determine who will supervise the movers and, if the movers are not depository staff members, who will train them to move documents.
- Evaluate the parts of the collection that will be moved. As moves tend to be very hard on materials, try to address and resolve any obvious preservation issues prior to the move. Note any materials or sections that are particularly fragile and may require special handling during the move. Also consider how oversized items or non-book formats such as maps or microforms will be moved; special arrangements may have to be made to move such materials.
- Evaluate the space the collection will occupy once it is moved. Make sure there is enough space to properly house the collection, in linear feet but also in how far apart the shelves are; it is much more difficult to shelve and retrieve materials that are shelved on their spines because they are too tall for the shelves they occupy. Also, determine whether or not/how much growth space needs to be factored into the total space needed to house the collection; this will affect whether or not, or how soon, the collection may have to be shifted or moved again.
- Work with library staff to get as much of the collection cataloged or shelf-listed as possible, particularly if materials will be moved into a high-density storage facility. If it is not possible to get records for every item into the online catalog prior to the move, determine how users will know where such items are housed and how they will be retrieved. See the [BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL section](#) for further details.
- Post information on the library's website and in the library itself about the upcoming move and how it will affect access to the collection.
- According to the [Legal Requirements and Program Requirements of the Federal Depository Library Program](#):

When depository libraries undergo planned remodeling, undertake a move, or otherwise find their operations disrupted, library staff are required to submit a contingency plan to FDLPOutreach@gpo.gov outlining how the library staff will provide access to depository services and collections to the general public during the period of disruption. (pg.6)

In addition to contacting GPO, libraries should also notify nearby depository libraries and their regional of the upcoming move and how it will impact access to the collection.

During the move

Once the planning process is complete, it is time to move the collection. Keep the following items in mind as the move progresses.

- Make sure users and staff have accurate, up-to-date information about the status of the move by posting signs and putting messages on the library's website and/or blog.
- Try to keep as much of the collection accessible as possible and/or practical during the move.
- Ideally, documents personnel should conduct and/or supervise the collection move. Moves that involve significant numbers of documents or non-book formats such as maps, or moves that must be accomplished in a short period of time may require hiring professional moving companies that specialize in moving library materials. All non-documents personnel involved in moving a documents collection – including professional movers – should be trained and supervised by documents staff.

After the move

The move process extends beyond the physical relocation of the collection. The following items should be addressed once the collection has been relocated to its new home.

- Notify GPO, nearby depository libraries, and the regional that the collection move has been completed.
- Update records in the online catalog with new location information.
- Update all signage related to the new collection location.
- Update all library publications (print and online) with new collection location information.
- It is not uncommon to have materials wind up out of order or in the wrong place regardless of how carefully and thoroughly the move was planned and executed. Make sure to build in time to shift, shelfread, and otherwise review the results of the collection move at the end of the move timeline. Ideally, documents personnel will perform or at least supervise these activities; if this is not possible, have documents personnel spot-check any move-related shelfreading and collection placement.
- Review and update retrieval methods and literature shared about them as necessary to ensure that all depository patrons, including the general public, are able to retrieve depository publications from storage. If retrieval methods are not the same for all user groups, they must at minimum be comparable and advertised to all potential user groups.

MOVING A COLLECTION WITH LITTLE OR NO NOTICE

Occasionally a depository collection must be moved with little or no notice due to an administrative mandate or a disaster in the library. In these cases, the best practices described in this document may not be practical or achievable; instead, doing the best possible given the circumstances may be the only option.

Moving a collection due to an administrative mandate

Collection moves with little or no notice are sometimes mandated by administrative units. An unanticipated construction project or urgent expansion needs of another library unit are two examples that may require a quick collection move. When faced with these or similar situations, the following items should be considered.

- Get a clear understanding of the purpose of the move. Make no assumptions. If possible have a direct discussion with the library director or project manager to determine:
 - Whether the move is a temporary displacement or a permanent relocation. Permanent relocations to a facility that is not under the library director's purview may need a new Selective Housing Agreement.
 - Whether the material will be on open shelves or accessed by marked boxes (temporary displacement) and retrieved by staff. If materials must be boxed, devise a simple marking system for boxes that indicates general content and shelf location.
 - Whether the material will be located by call number, shelf location, or another system of retrieval.
 - Whether professional movers, library staff, or hourly workers will accomplish the move, and whether government information staff (best practice) or others (best possible) will supervise the move.
- If the project manager is not a government information staff member, make sure they are aware of [the legal requirements of the FDLP](#) regarding access and comparable treatment expectations: material must be publicly accessible, housed in a manner that facilitates timely access, material of all formats must continue to be made available to the public.
- Survey the relocation space to determine if environmental concerns exist and devise appropriate remedies, if possible in collaboration with Preservation Unit staff (best practice) or best possible knowledge of library staff. Mold can develop in areas with high humidity and high temperatures that lack adequate ventilation. Flimsy shelving unintended for housing books are a hazard.
- If uncataloged material must be stored and retrieved by staff make sure indexing tools (e.g. the *Monthly Catalog* and [Catalog of U.S. Government Publications](#)) are available to

both users and staff in order to make these items accessible. Discuss with Cataloging staff the need to enter uncataloged material in the future cataloging queue.

- After establishing a moving plan, notify GPO and the Regional Library of the move and steps that will be taken to comply with [FDLP legal requirements](#).
- If the material is moved/returned to open shelves, be prepared for cleanup after the move (straightening, shelf reading, book repair, etc.)

Moving a collection in the event of a disaster

In a worst case scenario, a library may have to move some or all of its depository collection quickly due to a disaster such as fire or flood. All depository libraries are strongly encouraged to have a written, up-to-date disaster plan. When faced with moving a collection after a disaster, the following items should be considered.

- **IMPORTANT: make sure the area affected by the disaster is safe to enter before attempting to move and/or salvage the collection.**
- Notify GPO and the regional depository as soon as is reasonably possible in the event of a disaster that affects the collection and/or access to the collection.
- Take steps to keep users out of the area affected by the disaster until recovery is complete, for their own safety as well as that of the collection.
- Although a disaster is an urgent and often chaotic situation, resist the urge to start moving materials immediately; take at least a few minutes to evaluate the situation and formulate a plan of action.
- Determine how much of the collection needs to be moved in order to repair or restore the damaged area. If the collection is otherwise unharmed and work on the area can commence without damaging materials, it may be best/easiest to leave the collection in place.
- If some or all of the collection must be moved:
 - Try to keep the collection in order. This will make it easier to retrieve materials if necessary and make it easier to return the collection to its original location.
 - Make notes about and/or take pictures of the collection's original arrangement; this will also make it easier to return the collection to its original location.
 - Resist the urge to rush through the collection move; try to be as methodical as is practical given the circumstances. Rushed moves can result in damage to the collection or worse, injury to staff members.
- If some or all of the collection will be inaccessible to users during the recovery phase, determine how access will be provided in the interim.

- Make sure users and staff have accurate, up-to-date information about the status of the collection and the recovery phase by posting signs and putting messages on the library's website and/or blog as soon as reasonably possible after the disaster occurs.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL

In an ideal world, every document will have a full descriptive bibliographic record in their library's online catalog; libraries with items housed in closed stacks and/or off-site storage will have a request system for patron-initiated retrieval of items.

If the ideal world is not possible, here are some alternatives:

- Item-level records with full descriptive bibliographic records in an online catalog and every item cataloged. No automated request system, but can ask staff to pull materials from off-site storage.
- Full descriptive bibliographic records in an online catalog, but no attached item records. Perhaps a summary of holdings. Some mechanism available for document retrieval requests.
- Brief online catalog records with item-level holdings. Some mechanism available for document retrieval requests.
- Library published publicly available online finding aid to local document collection. Some mechanism available for document retrieval requests.
- Finding aids - these, by themselves, are never acceptable substitutes for bibliographic control, but can be an additional aid to discovery.

Online: links to government and vendor online content to assist in document existence and availability. Examples include [the Federal Digital System \(FDsys\)](#), [Catalog of U.S. Government Publications \(CGP\)](#), [GPO's MetaLib tool](#), OCLC WorldCat, ProQuest Congressional, and Readex's U.S. Congressional Serial Set.

Print: print finding aids (Document Catalog, Monthly Catalog, etc.) to assist user in locating the existence of documents and possibly Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) numbers.

COLLABORATION

The following are examples of collaborative arrangement best practices between one or more depository libraries, other libraries, and/or other facilities. In an ideal world:

- When one or more depositories share an off-site storage facility, all depository and non-depository participants fully support free, public access to the Federal depository

publications housed therein, documented in an official Selective Housing Agreement or memorandum of understanding. Participants, including the off-site storage facility if it provides a public service point, share visible and clear information with their library users about free, public access to Federal depository resources housed in the facility.

- When several libraries are planning to collaborate in a shared facility, the depository library or libraries involved complete and submit a Selective Housing Agreement or official memorandum of understanding to GPO and the regional depository library well in advance of any collection move. The plan accounts for any special processes, ongoing collection management, and public services for all depository users. (Please note that, given the complexity of some of these arrangements, development of past agreements may have taken several months. Remember – GPO must approve such agreements prior to the move of a depository collection(s).)
- Depository libraries sharing a storage facility collaborate on depository collection development, including publication acquisition and retention.
- Depository library staff and the storage building or facilities manager collaborate on building design and continued support for ideal environmental publication storage conditions.
- The depository identifies a primary point of contact, or liaison, and a backup for Federal depository issues at a selective housing site or off-site storage facility. These individuals become the depository specialists at the location and are fully trained in FDLP rules and regulations to help ensure compliance at the site.
- All depositories participating in an off-site storage facility collaborate so that publication retrieval takes no more than one day, on average.

ALTERNATE SOURCES FOR GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

During a library's move, you may find it necessary or expedient to redirect users to alternate sources for government information and services. Your staff training for the move should include identification of these alternate sources and how to find them easily. If your library website is not already providing a strong list of links to relevant resources, this move might be sufficient justification for expending that effort. These resources may also help you and patrons identify relevant depository publications housed in on-site or off-site storage arrangements.

Other libraries:

- If you will be directing users to other libraries then consider what might be available at nearby non-depository libraries as well.

- If none of the nearby libraries have collections of equivalent size, breadth, depth, or subject strength, then determine if there is another large selective depository library that users might be willing to travel to visit which is nearer than your regional library.
- Reach out to build or strengthen relations with your counterparts at each of the institutions to which you will be referring users.
- Verify the hours and access policies of those institutions for tangible and online resources.
- Determine how best to make direct contact from you or your staff in case a user's query is more complex and would benefit from mediation.

Finding aids:

- Determine whether or not certain finding aids will remain accessible during the move.
- If a user is being referred to another library, access to a finding aid before they make a trip might help identify a specific document; the user can then check with that library to verify whether or not they have it.
- After the move finding aids should be accessible at the location where your staff provides research assistance to users rather than in the storage location. If staff at the storage location requires those same finding aids to process, catalog, manage, and/or retrieve documents, another copy should be created or obtained for that purpose.

The full text of the documents sought by the user might be available online, either through free services or commercial subscriptions. The information might also be reproduced in commercial print publications housed elsewhere in your library and accessible during the move.

The following are some of the online sources that might provide alternate access as finding aids or full text resources:

Free:

- [Catalog of U.S. Government Publications \(CGP\)](#)
- [Documents Data Miner 2](#)
- [Federal Digital System \(FDsys\)](#)
- Aggregation federal websites, e.g., [USA.gov](#), [Data.gov](#), [Benefits.gov](#)
- Websites and databases of executive agencies, Congress, the federal courts, and other governmental organizations, e.g., [U.S. Census Bureau](#), [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), [Congress.gov](#), [United States Courts](#), [Federal Reserve Archival System for Economic Research \(FRASER\)](#), [AGRICOLA](#), [ERIC](#), [PubMed](#)
- Web resources from non-profits and universities, e.g., [CyberCemetery](#), [Sunlight Foundation tools](#), [STATS America](#), [Technical Reports Archive and Image Library \(TRAIL\)](#)

- [HathiTrust](#) - many government documents are available to non-members
- [Internet Archive](#)
- [Archive-It](#)

Subscription/fee-based:

- GPO Monthly Catalog
- HeinOnline
- LexisNexis Academic
- PAIS International
- ProQuest Congressional and Statistical Insight
- Readex - Serial Set, FBIS, JPRS

Interlibrary Loan (ILL):

Verify that all users including those not directly affiliated with your institution have ready access to an interlibrary loan (ILL) service in case that is the patron's best option for acquiring a particular document during a move. Public libraries in some communities do not participate in interlibrary loan; you might need to provide a mediated ILL process at your institution.

Research Assistance:

Besides access to finding aids and the full text of documents, your users may need direct research assistance that you and your staff may not be able to provide during the move. Identify which organizations provide chat, email or telephone assistance, such as:

- [Government Information Online](#)
- Ask A Librarian services at your regional depository, state library, or other selective depositories.
- [USA.gov Information Specialists](#) are available at 1-844-USA-GOV1 (1-844-872-4681) to answer questions about federal agencies, programs, benefits, or services.
- Many federal agencies also provide helplines and chat services.

Be aware that storing government information in such a way that the material cannot be physically browsed creates a barrier that decreases access to some degree.

- Browsing bibliographic listings in an online catalog does not provide the same visual clues as browsing physical shelves.
- Having identified a specific document from a keyword search, many users browsing physical shelves discover highly relevant information in adjacent documents.

- Even if a specific document has been fully digitized with high-quality OCR, the experience of working with the digital version is not the same.
- Certain types of research that cannot be easily reduced to an electronic search algorithm often benefit from serendipitous discovery resulting from browsing with intent.

After the move is completed, will it be possible to retrieve everything that would have been located together on one or two shelves in the open stacks for a user who needs to replicate the prior browsing experience? If not, and you are not able to provide that user with access to your remote storage shelving, you might need to help that user locate the nearest other library with similar documents that still has them available for browsing.

DEFINITIONS

- **Closed stacks** – any library storage areas that are inaccessible by library patrons; also called on-site storage when located within the library itself.
- **Off-site storage** – any library storage area that is located in a building other than the library itself; may be a facility located off campus or at a location not in close proximity to the actual library.
- **High density storage facility** – facilities that store material in size-sorted bins for manual or automated retrieval, or that shelve materials according to size rather than by classification scheme.
- **Major collection move** – one that requires relocating a significant portion or entirety of a collection; requires a significant amount of planning; may take a significant amount of time and resources to complete; often involves moving materials to different parts of the library or out of the library entirely.
- **Minor collection move** – small in scale relative to the size of the collection as a whole; does not necessarily require long term planning; can be completed in a short period of time; usually does not require moving materials to another building.
- **Selective Housing Agreement (SHA)** – an agreement between two libraries, signed by the directors of each library, to house material owned by one in the facility of another; if FDLP materials are included under an SHA, a copy of the agreement should be sent to the regional library and to GPO.

GUIDANCE ARTICLES RELATED TO ON-SITE OR OFF-SITE STORAGE

These articles from [FDLP.gov](https://www.fdlp.gov) contain advice on how to comply with the FDLP regulations.

- [Access to Collections](#)
- [Bibliographic Control](#)

- [Depository Users and Service Expectations](#)
- [Free, Public Access](#)
- [Moving Your FDL Collection](#)
- [Physical Facilities and Collection Maintenance](#)
- [Security of Library Users and Collections](#)
- [Selective Housing Agreements](#)
- [Visibility of the Depository Library and Collection](#)

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