



Project Summary

September, 2009

Public Access Assessments

BACKGROUND

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.

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. (44 U.S.C. §1909)

The Public Access Assessments program is the primary way that GPO fulfills this requirement. It is a program within GPO's Library Services and Content Management (LSCM).

The Public Access Assessments program was established in 2007, succeeding the previous iteration of GPO's individual library assessment through the Inspection program. This updated assessment program, which reflects the greater service orientation of depository libraries today in a more electronic environment, continues to allow libraries to have the flexibility to determine their own depository processes in support of the FDLP. Libraries have been able to request an assessment since 2007 through the Request for GPO Participation Form. LSCM conducted assessments in 2008 and continues to schedule and conduct PAA reviews.

A Public Access Assessment (PAA) is a review by GPO of an individual Federal depository library's operations and services and is categorized by these topics: access, collections, service, and cooperative efforts. Public Access Assessments largely emphasize whether depository libraries serve the general public's Federal government information needs by reviewing how they provide access to and services for their Federal depository resources. Public access involves access to depository resources through bibliographic, physical building, tangible collection, Internet, and onsite computer access.

PURPOSE

The primary goal of an assessment program remains to ensure that Federal depositories comply with their legal responsibilities, as outlined in 44 U.S.C. §19, and the Program requirements, outlined in the Federal Depository Library Handbook and on the FDLP Desktop.

Of special concern is the provision of Section 1911 which states in part that “*depository libraries shall make Government publications available for the free use of the general public.*” A library must observe this stipulation in order to obtain, and thereby retain, depository designation. This responsibility touches on almost every aspect of library operations and service. As has always been the case, individual depository libraries have the flexibility to determine locally how to apply the requirements.

A second purpose of the assessment program is to advise libraries how to reach greater compliance with the legal and Program requirements. The review is intended to be supportive of each individual depository library and involves sharing of best practices and recognition of notable achievements that will help a library continue to enhance its operations and services.

Public Access Assessments benefit depository libraries and strengthen the FDLP as they require changes in any depository operations that do not support free, public access to Federal depository resources. Any problems or issues noted at an individual library are directed at improving the depository operation and service.

Through Public Access Assessments and related depository management education and information sharing activities, GPO remains informed of the status of individual depositories and exchanges information with depository personnel about the FDLP with the goal of increasing the Program’s overall efficiency and effectiveness. The mutual commitment and partnership between GPO and the libraries to provide access to U.S. Government information resources is reinforced.

HISTORY

Federal depository libraries were infrequently visited in the early years of the FDLP. Since 1947, the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries provided GPO with information about all individual depository libraries. In the mid-1970s, the Depository Library Council and the American Library Association Government Documents Round Table concluded that depository libraries needed systematic and formal inspection to ensure the effectiveness of the FDLP. The Depository Library Council developed the Guidelines for the Depository Library System, and, based on these, GPO developed the Instructions to Depository Libraries. The Instructions provided the rules and regulations of the FDLP and were used as the basis for a more formalized Inspection program whereby GPO librarians visited and evaluated individual libraries.

Starting in 1996, in an effort to expedite the review of each depository, GPO required that libraries being reviewed complete and submit a Self-Study of a Federal Depository Library as the first step in the inspection process. A review of this document helped GPO determine whether or not to arrange an onsite inspection at the library. Almost every depository library in the FDLP has been inspected at some point in time and has Inspection or Self-Study Evaluation Reports which may be referenced for a snapshot of the depository operation and service at the time of review.

The increasing emphasis on service in a more electronic depository library environment has caused significant changes in depository operations and services. As a result, a new assessment model was developed, with input from the depository community. The new model has a different focus than the library assessments of the past. The review now closely follows the broad Program goals identified in the paper entitled “Focus on Access, Collections, Service, and Cooperative Efforts.” Libraries following the rules and requirements found in the Federal Depository Library Handbook and on the FDLP Desktop meet these goals and will be successful in a Public Access Assessment.

PAA FRAMEWORK

The paper entitled “Focus on Access, Collections, Service, and Cooperative Efforts” has broad Program goals and provides the focus and organization of PAA. The PAA is designed to make a direct connection between the activities that depository libraries perform and the outcomes of those activities, with the ultimate objective being support of desirable conditions at depository libraries that provide for free, public access to Federal depository resources.

LSCM outreach librarians performing a PAA look for evidence that libraries meet each goal. They use the “Public Access Assessments: Initial Review Checklist” and the “Public Access Assessments: Guidelines for Completing Initial Review” to identify the types of indicators that libraries may use to demonstrate how they achieve each goal and to facilitate consistent review of individual depository libraries. Final versions of all PAA resources are posted on the FDLP Desktop.

An overview of the categories examined in a PAA follows.

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 library patrons, including those with disabilities and those of all ages. It also involves but is not necessarily limited to bibliographic, physical building, tangible collection, onsite computer, and Internet 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. 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. Federal depository libraries select and manage collections.

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. Visibility is achieved through cataloging, prominence of location of tangible collection and public service points, promotional activities, etc.

Cooperative efforts. Cooperative efforts involve communication, resource sharing and cooperative collection development between the general public, selective and regional depository library staff, and GPO personnel. These are the activities libraries undertake to participate effectively with GPO and all libraries in the nationwide network of the FDLP.

LSCM outreach librarians assess the current conditions at an individual library on the day of the review but also give the library credit for work in progress or plans being developed that will enhance or improve depository operations or services. LSCM librarians are also aware that changes in the library environment may impact Federal depository operations or services. This is all taken into account in a PAA, demonstrating the flexibility of the assessment program.

PAA PROCESS

The typical review process has up to three phases, comprised of an Initial Review, Follow-up Review, and Onsite Review. Outreach Librarians will be in contact with the library's staff at each juncture of the review process. The PAA process is complete when a library is found to be fully compliant, has only minor compliance issues, or has compliance issues that will be resolved according to an action plan submitted to LSCM.

Phases of the PAA include the following:

Initial Review (conducted at GPO). A LSCM outreach librarian reviews available documentation from the libraries, including Biennial Survey submissions and information on library Web pages. When reviewing a selective depository library, a questionnaire will be sent to the regional. When reviewing a regional depository library, a short questionnaire will be sent to other libraries within the region to inquire about publication disposal processing and other cooperative efforts. The purpose of the questionnaire is to gain knowledge about activities within the region that LSCM is unable to determine remotely through other mechanisms. A phone call is scheduled with the depository coordinator to ask further questions and to gain clarification about any issues that are unclear. The outreach librarian may request that the coordinator provide copies of any policies (e.g., access policy or collection development policy) not on the library's Web pages. The PAA may conclude at this point if the library is fully compliant or has only minor compliance issues. If LSCM determines that further review is needed or it is requested, the PAA remains open and unresolved until the library addresses the compliance issues and LSCM finds that the actions are in accordance with FDLP rules and requirements.

Follow-up Review. If the outreach librarian determines that the library is lacking in any area, GPO will request that the library take action, either by resolving the problem and achieving compliance or by developing a plan to address a problem that will take considerable time to address. Typically, a depository is given 3 months to take action and respond back to GPO. A more suitable timeframe may be negotiated. The Follow-up Review may be skipped if there is a request for an onsite visit as part of the PAA. The PAA concludes when LSCM determines that the library is fully compliant, has only minor compliance issues, or has compliance issues that will be resolved according to the library's plan for follow-up review.

Onsite Review. An onsite visit will be scheduled for any of the following:

- Unresolved access complaint. (Library is unable or unwilling to resolve the issue.)
- Free, public access is denied, and there are no arrangements to accommodate library users requiring access.
- Unresolved PAA Follow-up after 3 months.
- 3 or more problems requiring follow-up identified during the Initial Review.
- The Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries was not submitted.
- A request for a PAA Onsite Review.

Typically, LSCM will provide between 4 – 6 weeks notice between notification and the onsite visit.

At an Onsite Review, the outreach librarian will review all elements of “Focus on Access, Collections, Service, and Cooperative Efforts”; however, special attention will be focused on

those areas that were not fully compliant. The outreach librarian will typically meet with the depository coordinator, other library staff involved with the depository operations and services, and, at the end of the visit, the library administrator.

A Follow-up from the library may also be requested after an Onsite Review.

The PAA concludes after an Onsite Review, and any appropriate follow-up, is received, when the library is fully compliant, has only minor compliance issues, or has compliance issues that will clearly be resolved according to the library's follow-up action plan.

LSCM reserves the option to place a library on probation during an Onsite Review if a depository library is found to restrict free, public access. Outreach librarians will work with the library by requesting follow-up, when appropriate, before placing a library on probation. A depository library will be reevaluated no earlier than six months after placement on probationary status. Libraries that fail to complete requested improvements may be removed from the FDLP.

An onsite PAA may be scheduled even if the library has no known issues upon mutual agreement between the library and LSCM. This allows both LSCM and library staff to discuss the FDLP and share best practices.

PAA Expedited Process. The PAA may be expedited, meaning the library staff have fewer than 4 weeks notice that an onsite PAA will be conducted. This will typically be done upon request or if LSCM staff have been requested to travel to a certain geographic area within a short time frame and decide to make the trip. In this case, the Initial and Follow-up Review phases may be skipped. In lieu of sending a questionnaire (outlined in the Initial Review above), LSCM staff may phone libraries to gather information. This may also be conducted after the onsite review.

PAA REPORT TO THE LIBRARY

Each library reviewed will receive an official report or reports, if there is follow-up. The PAA report includes the following sections.

- Brief background of the library's depository operation.
- Type of review conducted (initial review, follow-up review, or onsite) and the sources used (e.g., library Web page, access policy).
- Narrative with discussion about access, collections, service, cooperative efforts and, if applicable, general comments.
- Notable achievements.
- Summary of findings (any Critical Needs, General Needs, and/or Recommendations).

A **Critical Need** indicates that the library is non-compliant in the referenced component and must address the need to provide for adequate and appropriate service. This is a non-compliance issue requiring corrective action. For example, failure to submit the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries or having an access policy that indicates that the general public may not use the library is a Critical Need.

A **General Need** indicates that a need must be addressed in order to be in full compliance but is not as serious as a Critical Need. For example, although the vast majority of depository resources are identified as Federal depository resources, failure to identify the library's small

depository collection of maps as Federal property is a General Need. A General Need may also require corrective action. When numerous minor compliance issues are noted in one category (i.e., access, collections, service, or cooperative efforts), these compound into a larger compliance problem and are noted as a Critical Need.

Recommendations may be included and should be considered to improve the overall effectiveness of the depository.

FDL RESPONSIBILITIES

A PAA is a GPO program whereby LSCM staff evaluate a library on its application of the legal and Program rules and requirements. Current information about PAA is on the FDLP Desktop.

Federal depository library staff have the responsibility to know and remain knowledgeable of the FDLP legal and Program rules and requirements. Depository staff should read and review the information found on the FDLP Desktop, especially under Depository Administration, and ask questions of LSCM personnel any time there are questions. LSCM staff are available for consultation about depository management issues, especially as they must be interpreted for the current library environment or individual library situation. Selective libraries may also contact their regional depositories for consultation about depository management.

Other resources that may be helpful for library staff to locate and review include the revised Self-Study of a Federal Depository Library, useful to determine a library's level of compliance, and previous Inspection and Self-Study reports, which provide snapshots of the depository operation and the level of compliance at those points in time.

Library staff are encouraged to review all depository and library-wide policies and content on library and institution Web pages for compliance with the FDLP. These should be revised as needed.

SCHEDULING

Those interested in a PAA may request an assessment via the Request for GPO Participation Form on the FDLP Desktop.

Determining a schedule for PAA has many variables. Scheduling will be based on the following:

- Any library failing to submit the Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries.
- Chronology of the last assessment of a state or region, starting primarily with those last inspected in the mid-1990s and before.
- Where requested. LSCM will review any requests for PAA and prioritize based on any urgency related to the request to ensure public access will be provided at the depository.
- Where need is determined. This may be based on a variety of sources, such as a large number of compliance problems noted in the routine Biennial Survey data review, direct notification to GPO, or by happenstance.
- Any library on probation.
- Regional depository libraries in any state or region being reviewed. Since the regional libraries provide such an important role providing consultation to selective depository libraries and they also have the added responsibility of permanent public access to

the tangible collection, LSCM will make every effort to perform PAAs of regional depositories first in states where other PAAs are scheduled.

It is a goal to evaluate as many libraries as possible in the same state or region around the same time to make the best use of resources and also to help promote local and regional cooperation between depository libraries. Regional librarians are always invited to accompany LSCM outreach librarians during onsite reviews; therefore, LSCM also works to coordinate these visits with the regional librarians.

MAJOR MILESTONES AND DELIVERABLES

Completed

- Final version of the Public Access Assessment documents “Focus on Access, Collections, Service, and Cooperative Efforts”, “Initial Review Checklist”, and “Guidelines for Completing Initial Review” disseminated in June, 2008.
- Conducted initial assessment of responses to the 2007 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries submissions to identify major categories of actual or potential compliance issues. Contacted several libraries directly about particular issues or shared information through FDLP-L messages and with regional librarians about problems identified. Started June, 2008 and ongoing.
- Conducted Public Access Assessments, including four onsite visits. July-September, 2008.
- Updated Outreach information on the FDLP Desktop, including this PAA Project Summary and FDLP On the Go. September, 2009.

Planned

- Next scheduled Public Access Assessments. October – December, 2009.
- Select two additional Outreach Librarians. December, 2009.
- Develop regional librarian tool for review of their selective depositories. Summer, 2010.
- Continue to develop additional depository management educational resources, based in large part on frequently asked questions and information learned during Public Access Assessments. Ongoing.