Providing Access to Government Information: A Survey of the Federal Depository Library Community

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Abstract

The mission of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) is to provide free, permanent public access to federal government information now and for future generations. In the 20th century, depository libraries received tangible materials, in mostly print format, creating what is now often called the "legacy collection." Currently the majority of government information is distributed in a born-digital format, sometimes with multiple avenues to online information through government agencies themselves and repositories collecting and digitizing materials. How are Federal Depository Libraries curating their government information collections, both tangible and digital? This study investigated what depository libraries are doing regarding collection development and how they are dealing with permanent access issues, weeding, and preservation. The goal of this article is to uncover issues that need to be addressed by the government information community as a whole, since libraries in the FDLP collaborate in order to provide citizens access to government information. Findings from this survey include a community focused on preserving born-digital information and a commitment to the FDLP mission of free, permanent public access to government information.

Keywords: government information, federal depository libraries

Introduction

Since 1895 Federal Depository Libraries (FDLs) have offered free, public access to federal government document collections, which are distributed to them via the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) by way of the Government Publishing Office (GPO). Additionally, government information specialists are available at these libraries to assist patrons in locating federal information. Several concerns have recently developed in the government information community around preservation of print and born-digital materials. Part of this concern is over what the community calls the "legacy collection," which consists of tangible materials distributed to FDLs through most of the 20th century. The other part is how to manage capturing and preserving born-digital government information. This study was conducted to discover what collection development issues depository libraries are experiencing concerning access, weeding, and preservation of government information, and their opinions on how the community should deal with these issues.

Background

In order to understand the issues facing FDLs, the structure of the FDLP needs explanation. The GPO works with federal agencies to acquire their information, to make it more accessible by creating catalog records for representation, and (if in a tangible format) to distribute it to the FDLs. While many types of libraries participate in the FDLP (e.g., Public, Academic, State, Agency), they are divided into two categories in the FDLP program, regionals and selectives, and all work collaboratively to ensure access to government information. Regional libraries, of which there are usually at least one per state, receive all documents that are processed through the FDLP, and are expected to retain tangible copies permanently, ensuring access to government information across the nation. They also must provide support for selective libraries in their region by providing access to government information that the selectives do not curate, the interlibrary loan of materials, reference assistance, and a system for the disposal of unwanted tangible government documents for the selectives to follow. Many regionals also provide training activities or do site visits to help selectives meet FDLP requirements. Selectives, as the other category of depository library, are able to select what information they are willing to provide access based on what best meet the needs of their patrons. Selectives are also allowed to weed the documents they receive, with the permission of their regional library.

Historically, the distribution of government information was primarily in print format, but that started to change with the passing of the Government Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993 which pushed for government information to be available in electronic formats. With born-digital materials, federal agencies post their information directly onto their websites and no tangible item is distributed. The only way to access this information is through the internet. Access to these born-digital publications is usually through a Persistent Uniform Resource Locator (PURL) provided by the GPO, and depository libraries provide access to these online publications via catalog records containing PURLs. These PURLs provide stable URLs to online federal information so libraries do not have to constantly update broken links in their catalogs. To put this movement to born-digital information in perspective, as of 2017 fiscal year, the GPO added 18,351 new records to their Catalog of Government Publications (CGP) catalog, but only distributed 4049 tangible titles, demonstrating that most information going through the FDLP is information in a born-digital format.[1]

The GPO is aware that preservation of born-digital and tangible government information is an important topic and is creating a strategy to deal with this issue. The Federal Information Preservation Network (FIPNet) is a plan for collaborative networking to ensure access to the national collection of government information remains freely accessible for future generations. As of now there are over thirty libraries serving as Preservation Stewards but most are focused on preserving the tangible legacy materials.[2]

Literature Review

There have been a few surveys of government information professionals in the past three years. A recent survey by Rabina and Robbins focused on surveying library school instructors of government information. Their findings showed that 52% of instructors discuss the FDLP at some point in their course, and that popular topics focus around digital government information such as E-government, digitization, government agency apps, social media, as well as collection development in general. They found that government information instructors shifted their concerns to focus on access to data, as well as policies regarding government information. Also noted, a shift away from print materials and organization of government information by

agency to teaching more by topic and using aggregate collections such as govinfo.gov or science.gov.[3]

Collins conducted a survey in 2016 on law library directors which asked about their FDLP status, and if directors were considering leaving the FDLP. The findings showed almost half of respondents had considered dropping their FDLP status. When those respondents were asked why they remained in the program, over 76% mentioned the value of the FDLP to their institutions, as well as the GPO's policy change to allow lower selective rates. The biggest reason for leaving the FDLP was the availability of information online, reducing the need to remain in the FDLP. Collins concluded that law libraries should consider staying in the FDLP as the GPO shifts its priorities to align with law library initiatives. Collins also cautioned that in the current government climate there are threats to the freedom of access to information, and that "it seems best to hold on to any means by which we can be players in the preservation and dissemination of government information."[4]

While not scholarly in nature, the GPO conducts a Biennial Survey that FDLs are required to answer by law (44 USC § 1909). The most recent survey was conducted in October 2017, but those results are not available as of this writing, so the 2015 survey has the most recent data. The Survey focuses on how depositories are meeting the legal requirements of the FDLP, and how the GPO can assess and improve the services provided to depository libraries. In the 2015 survey depository coordinators ranked providing access to information highest at 78%, followed by the need for a digitized legacy collection, the need for more historical coverage in the GPO's database FDsys, and the need to create catalog records for pre-1976 titles.[5]

Other current articles cover government information issues and initiatives. Flynn and Hart-

nett review how government information production, distribution, consumption, and preservation has changed with the Trump administration's use of social media. They also focus on the importance of citizen access to government information, as well as collaborations between various groups such as the HathiTrust and LOCKSS, to provide access.[6]

In addition to these surveys, there are also special edition issues of journals revolving around government information access and preservation. The American Library Association's (ALA) Government Documents Round Table's (GO-DORT) publication, *DttP: Documents to the People* (*DttP*) had several columnists in one issue on the, "Thoughts on the National Collection," where leaders in the community provided their individual perspectives about who is responsible for the preservation of government information. They focused mainly on tangible materials, and the feasibility of setting a target for an optimal number of tangible copies for preservation purposes in the FDL community. These individuals included Jacobs who wrote on "how many copies" of print documents the FDLP should keep collectively, and listed some considerations for those libraries who are discarding documents, as well as the need for good print copies for access or re-digitization.[7] Laster focused on how the historic collection provides an, "enormously rich record of the activities and functions of the government," by explaining that not only is the information in the document itself valuable, but how the document can serve as an artifact reflecting the history of the culture at that time.[8] Quinn expressed a need for the government information community to work collaboratively to ensure permanent public access to all government information.[9] The feature ended with Selby's reflections on the need for a regional library model that would allow for more flexibility in requirements on regionals, but still ensure access to government information.[10]

A special issue of *Against the Grain* also deals with government information. In this issue several government information initiative project leaders submitted updates about their projects. Christenson provided an update on the HathiTrust's Federal Documents Program, which is attempting to build a comprehensive digital collection of government documents distributed by the GPO.[11] Sittel gave an overview of the Preservation of Electronic Government Information (PEGI) project – an initiative to address national concerns around the collection and preservation of born-digital government information.[12] Janz provided an update on the DataRefuge project, an initiative to save federal climate and environmental data, and Chodacki wrote on a similar theme about Data Mirror, a project that provides a backup to information on data.gov in the case of link rot or other issues.[13] Phillips and Phillips discussed the End of Term Presidential Web Archive's work in the recent presidential administration changeover.[14] A more collaborative approach to preserving information was discussed by Cole-Bennett on the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) model for managing FDLP collections with their Collaborative Federal Depository Program and Centers of Excellence, which focus on creating comprehensive collections on specific agencies, subjects, or formats.[15] Finally, Jacobs provided a background on the problem of fugitive government documents (government information not distributed through the FDLP) as well as suggestions to alleviate this issue.[16]
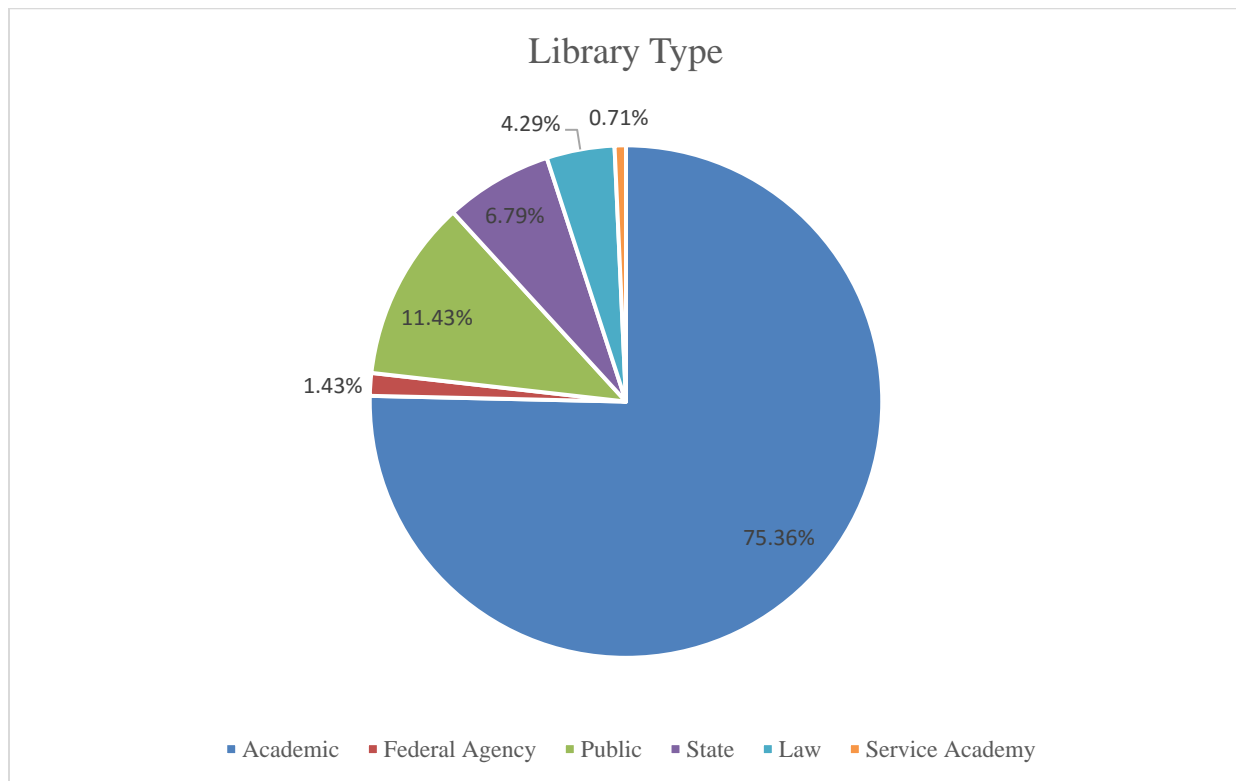
Methodology

This study received Institutional Review Board approval and consists of a cross-sectional survey (see Appendix A). Participants consented to the study by clicking on the link to the Qualtrics survey platform. At the time the survey was sent out, in the spring of 2017, there were 1142 FDLP libraries. An attempt to email the Depository Library Coordinator at each library directly was made, but some coordinators had not updated

or included their emails on the FDLP web site, and so a message was sent to GovDoc-L, the main list-serv used by the government information community, with a link to the survey to catch coordinators who did not get a personal email. The survey asked for the unique depository number of each library, eliminating multiples responses from the same library. There were 302 responses total, but only 280 completed the survey. The percentages of data in the findings are based on the completed surveys. Other than the first question for Library Type and the open-ended questions, all numerical data results are of the responses of all the library types as well as all regionals and selectives combined. Most of the survey questions produced quantitative results, but this survey also included open-ended questions so that qualitative analyses could be conducted and themes of concern from the government information community could be discovered. Statements from the open-ended questions were coded in order to uncover the major themes. Using this mixed-method approach allows the qualitative results to provide insight into the quantitative results.[17]

Study Findings

The first few questions were related to demographics to establish any patterns among FDLs. For Library Type, the majority of the respondents were academic libraries at 75%, followed by public libraries at 11% (Figure 1). These percentages closely match the 2015 FDLP Biennial Survey results of 72% academic and 15% for public libraries. The Biennial Survey had a 98% answer rate and to have close to the same percentage ensures confidence in making sure all FDL types had a voice in the survey.[18]

Figure 1: Library Type

Library Type

Legend: Academic · Federal Agency · Public · State · Law · Service Academy

Pie chart values: 0.71%, 4.29%, 6.79%, 11.43%, 1.43%, 75.36%

Selective libraries choose what types of documents they want from the FDLP and the amount of material selected, varied. Four libraries were electronic only libraries, a relatively recent policy change initiated by the GPO in 2014 to allow libraries to participate in the FDLP by dropping the tangible material requirement.[19] Most libraries had selection rates below 50%. Seventeen FDLs had 100% selection rates and several specified they were regionals. Only 26% of respondents had over 50% of selected items (Figure 2). Some of this may be skewed as some libraries use the GPO selection process for tangible items only, while others noted they use vendor services to acquire MARC records for access to all born-digital items cataloged by the GPO. A few libraries added that they were reducing their selection rate. A related question asking libraries if they kept a research-level collection (defined in the 2017 Biennial Survey as comprehensive collection that intentionally retains older materials to support major research needing a corpus of material on a given topic) was nearly equal, with 51% no and 48% yes.[20]

Figure 2: Library Selection Rates

The trend of having information commons service models and reducing multiple service desks could mean that there might not be a government information specialist located near the legacy FDLP collection. Libraries were asked if they had a central reference desk, or a separate government information desk. Five libraries had both, but most, 226, had a central desk. Only 18 libraries had a separate government information desk (Figure 3).

When asked about providing records for born-digital information, as recommended by the GPO, 230 loaded MARC records into their library catalog. Two libraries were developing policies regarding electronic records. A related question on cataloging the legacy collection showed that most libraries (77%) had over half of their tangible collections cataloged. Only 21% were fully cataloged (Figure 4). Prior to 1976 when the GPO started creating MARC records for government documents, these publications were indexed in the print *Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications*, meaning libraries have to create MARC records for the older materials to show their availability in local OPACs.

Figure 3: Service Desks

Service Desk

■ Central and Separate   ■ Central   ■ Circulation
■ Multi Service Desk   ■ No Desk   ■ Office
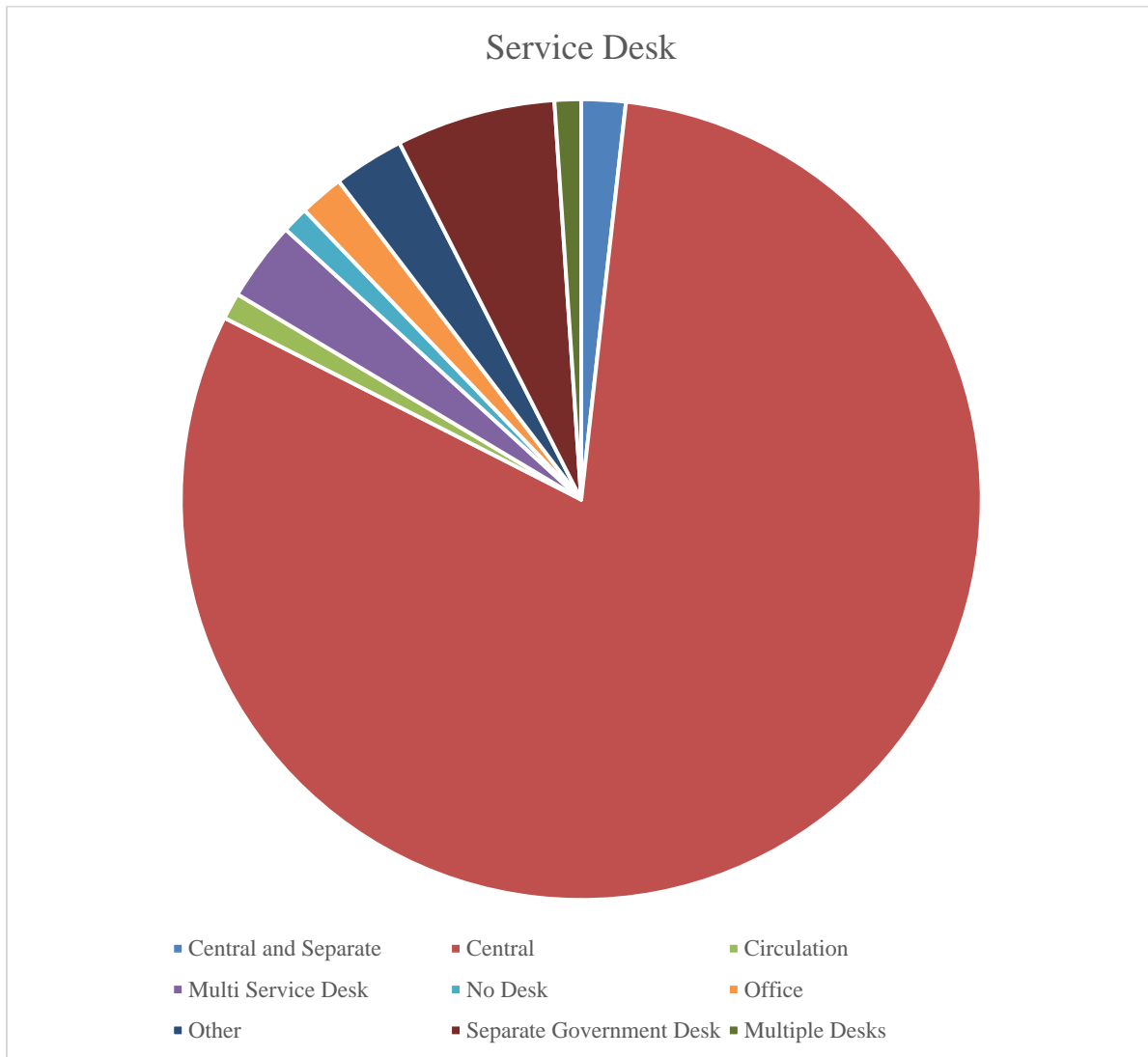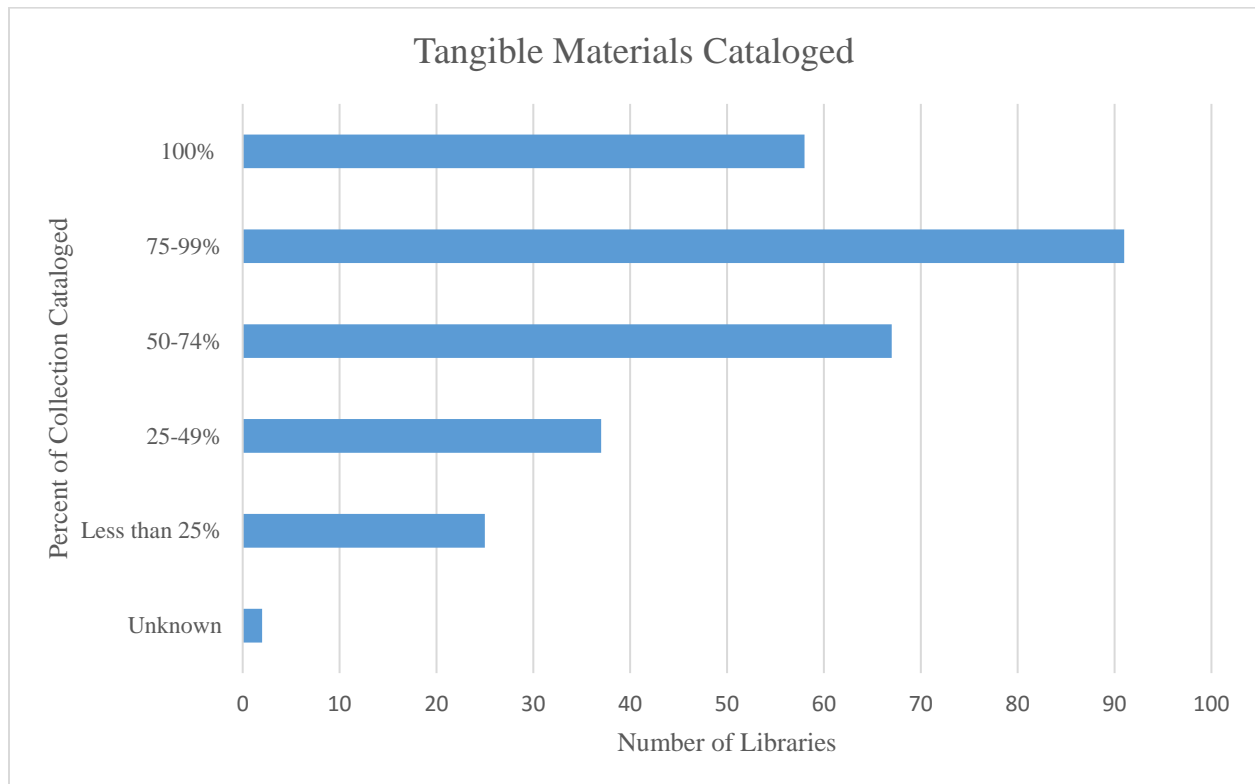■ Other   ■ Separate Government Desk ■ Multiple Desks

Figure 4 Tangible Materials Cataloged

As libraries grow, the legacy collection is often targeted as an outdated collection that can provide needed space if weeded out of the existing collections. To determine how much this is occurring, FDLs were asked how often they weeded. Ninety FDLs said they weed every few years, and 48 weed every year. Thirty-four marked "other" and provided more in-depth explanations, but enough gave the same response (i.e. space, rarely, major weeding, as needed) to be significant enough to create their own category (Figure 5). Several FDLs explained they had either finished a weeding project, were creating procedures for weeding, or were in the process of planning a major weeding project. One respondent explained they were a selective library without a regional library, and therefore could not weed their collection. Five respondents were weeding significant portions or all of

their print materials, with some explaining they were replacing these with electronic equivalents.

Those who did weed were asked what percentage of the collection had been weeded in the past five years. Those that gave a numeric percentage were placed within the range of the results shown in Figure 6. While a seemingly easy question, the results provided were confusing. Of the responses that provided actual numbers, five had moved to electronic only depositories and withdrawn 100% of the collection, (yet only four claimed to be electronic only depository libraries in the selection rate question). The other significant numbers were in the 1-5% range with 59 and 10-25% range with 64.
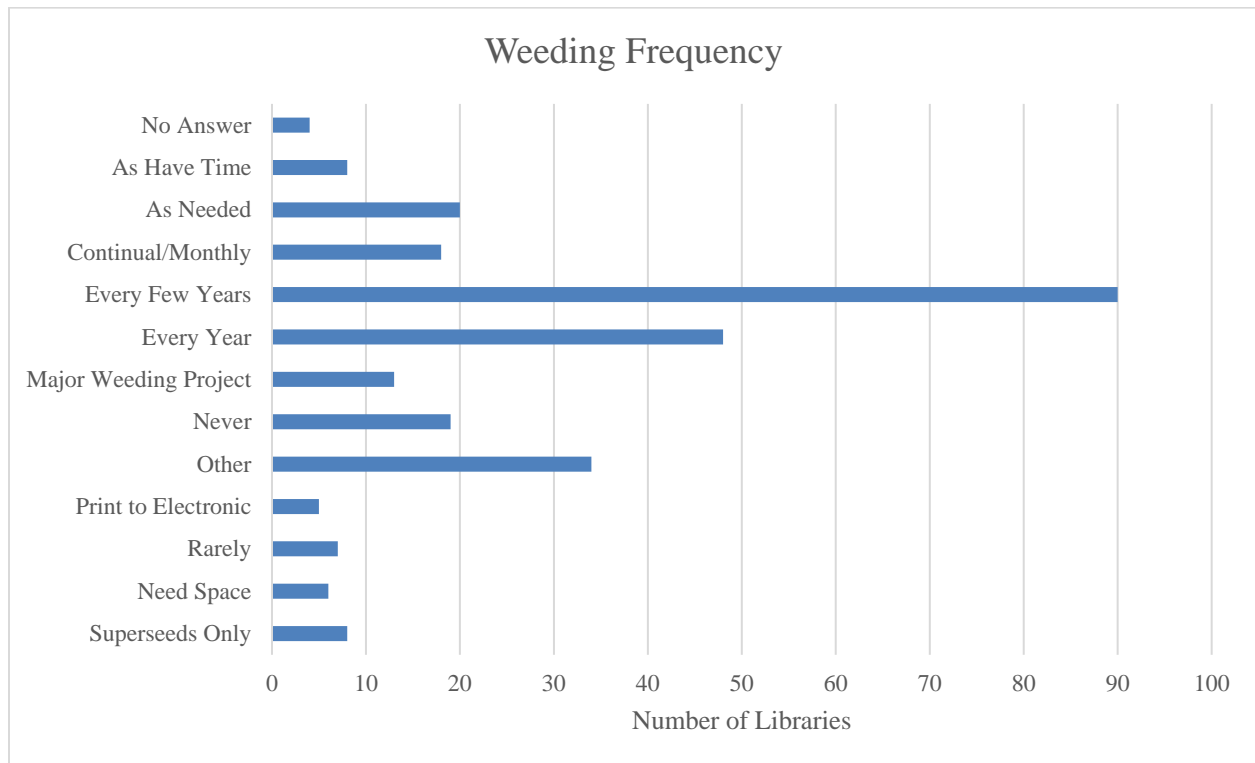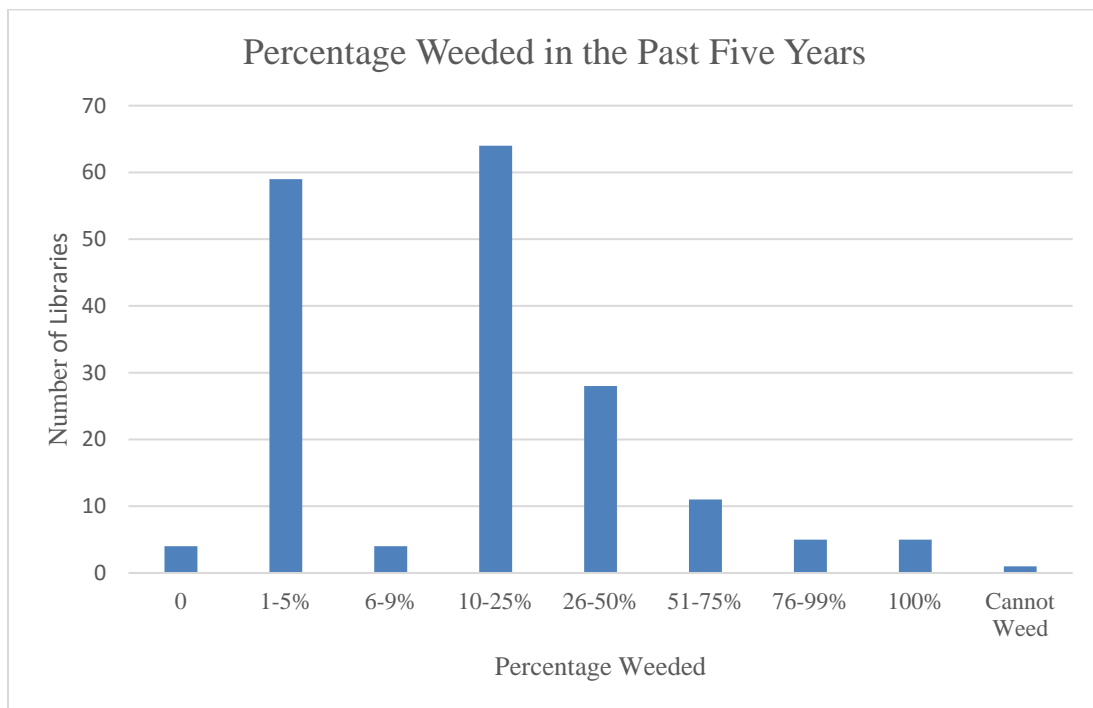
Figure 5: Weeding Frequency

Figure 6: Percentage Weeded in the Past Five Years

Reasons given for weeding included weeding before a cataloging project, while others weeded because it was easier to weed than to try and catalog older documents. Some just focused on removing duplicate copies; one was weeding to be able to do destructive digitization, one to integrate documents into the main collection, one to give the collection a "neat appearance," but the other replies settled into the categories of removing older materials or materials outside collection development polices, switching access from print to digital, and space needs.

Coordinators were asked if they purchase proprietary databases to stand in for the tangible materials that they no longer have. A majority (57%) indicated they do not follow this practice. Nine libraries mentioned that databases were not subscribed to in order to replace print, but to fill gaps in their tangible collections. Only one library specifically noted they purchased a database to supplement the weeding of print documents.

To identify the databases frequently used to provide access, participants were asked to give a list of their databases, both free and subscription based, that were used to access materials they once had in print. ProQuest Congressional topped the list with 73 subscribing libraries, followed by HeinOnline with 49, and in third was GPO's freely available FDsys. Other databases in the top ten include the Readex Serial Set, HathiTrust, ProQuest Statistical Abstract, LexisNexis (now called Nexis Uni for academic version) Congress.gov, ProQuest Legislative Insight, and Westlaw. There was a steady mix of proprietary and free databases listed. Twenty-two specific government agency websites were noted – two were listed in the top ten above, FDsys and Congress.gov, followed by FRASER, ERIC, and PubMed (See Appendix B for list of databases and websites listed by multiple libraries).

Many libraries are dealing with space issues, not just FDLs. Off-site storage is a popular solution. Participants were asked if their government documents were housed in off-site storage – 211 said no, and of the 69 that said yes, only two remarked that their complete collection was offsite. The most popular series to move to storage was the Serial Set, followed by materials on microfiche format. Most libraries had 50% or less in storage, and only 7 had over 60% in storage. Participants were asked to provide their criteria for moving documents to storage and the top five considerations were usage, age (most specified that dead titles, dead agencies or prior to a set year), online availability, and titles that would free up large amounts of space. Other considerations included the condition of the documents, and if the materials were cataloged. One library specified they would probably have to weed because they could not catalog items to be sent off-site.

One question asked the community if they believed there were enough print documents for digitization purposes, a need FDLs ranked highly in the 2015 Biennial Survey. This was also a central theme in the *DttP* issue on the importance of the tangible legacy collection. Two main schools of thought emerged. The first was by smaller selective libraries assuming or hoping that regionals or larger libraries would maintain print collections for digitization and that there were plans in place to do so. Some respondents thought the goal of the FDLP or the GPO was to digitize everything. The other main concept was concern that most weeding was being done without regard to keeping the last existing copy of a specific document.

Libraries were also asked if they digitized materials and only 32 out of the 280 replied affirmatively. These respondents were then queried about how they determined what to digitize. The most popular reasons were patron demand, local value, or subject matter (such as an agency or geographical region). Also considered: if

items have already been digitized or were already in a repository like FDsys or HathiTrust, uniqueness, physical condition, and historical significance. Six libraries indicated that they digitized as part of a collaborative effort, such as HathiTrust, Internet Archive, or other consortia. A final question asked where these digitized materials were stored. Most respondents (27) stored digitized materials on a local server and/or their institutional repository. Others gave copies to HathiTrust (4), Google (3), Federal agencies (3), or Internet Archive (2).

The HathiTrust Digital Library has become a useful tool that provides access to government documents from the legacy tangible collection in a digital form. HathiTrust is a partnership of major research institutions looking to provide long-term preservation and access to many sources of content, both in the public domain as well as copyrighted content. It is popular because most federal government information is in the public domain and therefore viewable in full-text through HathiTrust. Sixty-five percent of respondents use HathiTrust. The top three reasons for use were to locate materials they did not have, access historical publications, or to provide patrons with an electronic version. Other reasons included were the ease of access, convenience, the large amount of material digitized, freely available full-text, or as a tool to decide what to weed. Seven people replied that they used it as a last resort, specifying they preferred finding materials with better scans or with PURLs. Others used it as a faster version of interlibrary loan. One librarian called it, "the alternative online depository collection." For the thirty-five percent who answered no, sixteen said they had no need of it, and eleven said they were not members; of these only one said they did not know you could use it if you were not a member, and it was unclear if the other ten responses also thought you had to "subscribe" as well. Other reasons included not tried using, the cost of being a member, not aware of the site,

and preferring to use other databases. One unique reason presented was that it was not certified as official government information.

The last question of the survey was open-ended to enable FDLs to provide more details on what issues in the government information community most concerned them. Several themes developed, most of these overlapped regarding the issue of access to information, but the number of comments led these access issues to have their own category with a separate discussion. Permanent/Free Access

Access to government information was the topic most discussed and this took many forms. Most FDLs believed providing government information online increases access for the public, but the biggest concern was long term access to born-digital materials. Others understood that one threat to continued information was the need for more funding to enable federal agencies to collect and distribute their information. Several noted that there is data only the federal government has the capacity to gather. Also of concern were agencies not understanding how the general public and researchers used their information and how agencies do not always save their own information. Fugitive documents and, "less desirable materials, e.g. very local or ephemeral materials" were perceived to be more at risk than "popular" materials like congressional documents. Cataloging (archiving/indexing) was also a major theme related access for two reasons, the first being patrons not being able to find materials if they are not cataloged. The other, a need to have a "comprehensive collection" so that the FDLP community knows what information exists and in order to make more informed decisions on what needs to be preserved. Preservation redundancy was also an issue brought up by several people, such as the LOCKSS model (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe) both for safeguarding access and to ensure information was not "tampered" with by the government.

Other accessibility themes discussed were patron format choice, especially by public libraries who had patrons unwilling or unable to use computers, making print a relevant format. Format was also an issue for law libraries needing authenticated publications for legal use. Traditionally print case reporters were considered the "official" version of law to be submitted before courts. With legal resources moving online, to be made "official" or "authentic" means a statute or rule must mandate an online source can be used. To do so, verification that the online source is trustworthy and not manipulated or hacked, is necessary.[21]

Many librarians were concerned about perpetual access in any format, and noted at risk formats such as VCR tapes and floppy disks. While these make up a small amount of material, the information is becoming more inaccessible due to hardware and software incompatibilities.

Promotion of government information was another theme. Many librarians were trying to promote their collections and noted that the general public did not understand how information from the government works, or how much government information exists. Also, FDLs struggled with assumptions by the public, and even colleagues, that all government information is online, or conversely, not knowing that most current government information is now online. A few librarians remarked how the problem of information being so scattered in so many places made it challenging for them and their patrons to locate the information they need. Two librarians believed that this scattering hurts the general public by making it difficult for the public to participate in government activities and to trust the information the government provides. This idea went along with librarians promoting government information as a reputable source of information to combat the fake news phenomenon.

Views about the Federal Depository Library Program

Most librarians seemed to agree that the FDLP/GPO cannot be expected to find/collect/track/preserve all government information and that collaboration will be the key to ensuring access. Many thought preservation should to be a larger community effort, and not just within the government information community, but in the library community as a whole. Some librarians called for coordination of efforts, but remarks did not seem to indicate anyone but the GPO to serve as the main coordinator. Several respondents were hopeful about the GPO's FIPNet initiative and wanted to participate as Preservation Stewards.[22] Also of note, praise for the FDLP in its roles of providing access through websites, maintaining the CGP (GPO's OPAC), creating catalog records, and the Cataloging Records Distribution Program (GPO provides its MARC catalog records to FDLs at no cost). Only a few criticized the FDLP as being out of touch with the new electronic information era.

Regional Libraries

Most of the comments on regional libraries were supportive with a majority of the comments were by selectives explaining how their regional did a good job either providing guidance and/or providing access to print publications the selective did not have. One participant stated, "I think the leadership role of the regional librarian is almost as important as the collection." Most selectives were also understanding of the strains on regionals regarding the space requirements to house regional collections and the duties to support selectives in their region. Recently a Regional Discard Policy was developed by the GPO to allow regionals that need to discard materials a way to do so without losing access to information.[23] While only one librarian strongly supported regional weeding, others saw it as a way to keep those regionals in

the program that may drop their regional status due to space issues, but some smaller selectives worried how regional weeding would affect their patrons' access to government information. Several selectives were concerned about losing their regional and stressed they would struggle without regional guidance and support. One selective suggested other FDLs should be able to take on the role of regional if a regional leaves the FDLP. There were also a few complaints about regionals. One librarian called for regionals to have their collections completely cataloged. Another selective wished they had more support from their regional when they conducted a significant weeding project. A couple FDLs had no support because their regional library did not have a librarian assigned at the time of the survey. As for preservation of tangible collections, most thought enough regionals would keep enough copies, and two librarians remarked it was not possible for regionals to have a copy of everything.

Privatization

A major threat to free access expressed by respondents was the privatization of government information. Several libraries explained they were too small to purchase government information from private vendors, and several specifically cited the privatization of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* as an example. Budget cuts to the Census Bureau in 2011 eliminated the division that produced the *Statistical Abstract* and the freely available publication ceased with the 2012 edition.[24] It was picked up by ProQuest who sells it as a database, and Bernan Press that sells the print version. The issue of paying for information funded by taxpayer money was discussed, along with suggestions that depositories be given free access if fees were charged for accessing government information. Several feared more information would be moved to private publishers and one librarian had misgivings that vendors might have a profit-seeking bias when deciding what information to provide. Another

coordinator summarized this theme explaining privatization means government information would only available to people who can pay for it.

Government Shutdown

Access was also the major topic by FDLs concerned with the government shutdown in 2013. Several librarians explained how the shutdown demonstrated how much the community relies on online information and how vulnerable access is when it is denied. One stated, "Government shutdown issues were a major problem for some of our graduate students when a variety of agency websites were closed or crashed at peak research times." The take down of the Census Bureau site was a major concern, leading one person to suggest that agencies leave their online databases up during shutdowns and that agency websites be considered "essential business." Several mentioned that a shutdown should not penalize researchers and hinder their access to information, and one person suggested imposing a fine and docking the pay of Congress every time they have a shutdown.

Politics

With the Trump Administration coming to power a few months prior to delivery of this survey, the possible effects this administration would have on government information was a popular topic. Most of the comments centered on fears of budget cuts that would lead to agencies unable to gather data or provide information to the public. Two people worried about budget allocations for the GPO. Fear of scientific government information removal was specifically mentioned. One participant stated, "I am most concerned with the loss of essential government information, particularly scientific information, during Presidential transitions. The apparently systematic removal of earth science data on government websites by the Trump administration is a direct threat to the collection

and dissemination of scientific knowledge and an affront to education and informed policy-making." Again, this topic related to access of information, with some noting the frustration about changes in administration and losing historical data. While most respondents discussing administrative changes understood that new administrations often redesign agency websites, others had concerns about the Trump Administration's motives and feared censorship, the removal of controversial topics (e.g. climate-change), losing accountability or transparency, and that previously free information would be privatized or put on a cost-recovery model. The vulnerability of having government information only online was again reiterated, followed by the need to do a better job at collecting and preserving born-digital information. On a related note, the need to collect born-digital information to prevent manipulation of information was also stressed.

Digitization

Most comments were supportive of digitization efforts and provided examples of how librarians use digitized materials to provide better access to government information. Negative comments centered on HathiTrust's bad/incomplete scans (e.g. not unfolding maps) and their policy preventing non-members from downloading the entire full-text (non-members can only download one page at a time). The metadata/cataloging records in HathiTrust were also criticized. A consensus that digitization should not replace official print documents, but serve as an additional format for increased accessibility, developed. One coordinator stated, "I just hope that the need to preserve some level of print collection isn't forgotten in the rush to digitize." Two positions emerged that were somewhat contradictory about digitizing. A few librarians expressed frustration about looking in multiple repositories for digitized information and wanted all government information digitized "all in one place." Others thought it was very challenging

to try to digitize everything, that no one entity could digitize all government information, and that redundancy in multiple repositories was good for preservation. Many called for more coordination among the major digitization projects. Others wanted the GPO to manage the digitization of the legacy collection, or at least back-fill collections available in FDsys to make full runs available. There were a couple of voices concerned about the permanency of organizations such as HathiTrust and the Internet Archive, and thought it might be challenging to use the copies from these repositories to upgrade to the next "new format."

Born-Digital Government Information

By a substantial majority most FDL concerns revolved around born-digital government information. Comments focused on the need for continued or permanent access to these materials. Problems such as government shutdowns, electrical outages, and broken PURLs were noted, but there was also a level of distrust in information remaining available only on agency websites. One participant noted, "there is concern that much of the federal information on more "divisive" topics like climate change, LGBTQ rights, etc., will be altered and/or removed from [the] public domain." Many coordinators called for federal agencies to either be more responsible, or be mandated to serve as better stewards of "older" government information online. The removal of the 1990 Census from American Factfinder was specifically noted, as well as the Department of Education's ERIC database and NASA's Technical Report Server database being temporarily taken down. The next most common concern was a need for better coordination and the creation of a model to preserve born-digital government information, with the various government information agencies (Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, GPO) taking the lead and FDLs collaborating with harvesting and storage in a model similar to the LOCKSS program. Current

web site harvesting efforts were applauded but were thought to only be scratching the surface of what needs to be preserved. Other comments about born-digital information mentioned most librarians and patrons preferred electronic over print publications because it provided greater accessibility. FDsys was mentioned several times as a useful resource. Conversely, there were many concerns about the challenge of finding online information, noting that agency sites and databases were often too difficult for patrons to find or use. Cataloging and PURLs were also a concern, with requests for more PURLs, and better PURL maintenance by the GPO.

Local Library Issues

Several libraries mentioned dealing with the challenge of library administrators not understanding the value of the FDLP or the legacy print collections, with administrators assuming everything is online now. A couple of libraries mentioned they were afraid to push for more support because their administration would view the depository program as a problem and drop out of the FDLP. Two other libraries wanted to help the government information community with digitizing but had administrators or library policies in place that prevented them from doing so. A few librarians were new and were confused about the FDLP. Two respondents mentioned their libraries were considering dropping out of the FDLP. The other major topic in local concerns revolved around staffing. Those that discussed the issue had two main concerns. The first was the need to have government information specialists to answer challenging questions as government information is so scattered throughout various agencies and resources. The second was that library liaison and reference positions are now posted often as part of other subject areas, with government information being one of many duties. Some librarians with the role of FDLP coordina-

tor have few other duties because they have little time to do anything other than meet the FDLP's legal requirements.

Discussion

One of the major reasons for this study was to get feedback from the community about the legacy print collection distributed by the FDLP. While the FDL's in this survey ranked preservation of born-digital information higher than the preservation of the legacy collection, access and preservation of all government information formats was the theme that all in the community expressed. The disposal of FDLP materials was the focus of several questions in the survey, and most coordinators believe there are enough regionals/large research libraries to provide access to a majority of the legacy materials at this time. A few cautioned their opinion might change if a number of regionals start to weed their collections or the number of regional libraries drops. One coordinator expressed they were, "Somewhat concerned since so many publications have been weeded prior to GPO establishing initiatives such as Preservation Steward partnerships and other FIPNet partnerships. Even these partnerships are not appealing to library administrators who mandate reconfiguring space at the expense of collections."

An unexpected outcome from this survey was the issue of coordinators trying to stay apprised of changes and updates both inside the FDL government information community, as well as tangential communities that also deal with government information. Many changes concerning government information preservation are occurring outside of the FDLP. A theme emerged related to the need for better communication, both on the part of project managers of these projects occurring outside the purview of the FDLP in delivering information, as well as coordinators finding new avenues to get information on government information initiatives that suit their needs. While some initiatives are better about

keeping the FDL community informed there are still some improvements to be made. For example, HathiTrust needs to educate smaller libraries in the community on materials available in full-text, and how individuals don't have to be from member libraries to view public domain materials. This is also exemplified by the low response rates about recent digital initiatives. Only eight participants mentioned the DataRefuge or other data rescue projects like Data Mirror, despite there being publicity about data rescue events going around the time of the survey.[25] Several respondents expressed concern about losing data when the administration changed (not just because of President Trump) but only one respondent mentioned the End of Term Web Archive (EOT). This archive, starting with 2008, captures and saves U.S. government websites at the end of presidential administrations.[26] Not mentioned at all was the FDLP Web Archive despite this being formed in 2014, and a FDLP webinar presentation on it in 2017, as well as updates about it by the GPO at library conferences such as the American Library Association and DLC.[27] Both the EOT and the FDLP Web Archive allow individuals to submit suggestions of materials to be harvested. Individuals can also recommend data sets for preservation through the DataLumos project which works to preserve valuable federal government data that may be hard to find or inaccessible in the future.[28] It appears future research is needed on how to better publicize these various archives to information professionals , and what librarians need to know to contribute to these web archives. Coordinators should sign up for FDLP communications, as well as communications from library organizations such as ALA's GODORT or the Digital Library Forum. HathiTrust and other digital initiatives also have updates, newsletters, or social media to follow. A recent book chapter by Johnson provides helpful hints for networking to new government information librarians as a way to get them in the communication loop.[29] Conversely, project managers need to periodically

remind the FDL community about their initiatives so coordinators can stay informed. The community also needs to work with big data users to understand their needs as well as work with digital librarians and scholarly communication librarians to become involved, or at least learn about, recent initiatives and ensure that government information is part of the Open Access conversation.

It is not only digital initiatives that some FDLs are unaware of. As mentioned in the Local Library Issue results above, having a dedicated government information specialist is a challenge for some libraries, and many librarians serving the FDLP coordinator role have other duties as well. While it is challenging to keep up with all the changes occurring, there were some concerning survey responses. For example, a few respondents expressed concern about the preservation of material stored on FDsys but the LOCKSS-USDOCS project is focused on taking care of that issue.[30] Others concerned about preserving obsolete formats may not have been aware of Indiana University's Virtual CD-ROM/Floppy Disk Library.[31] Responses by some librarians indicated they did not know where to find some types of information within the FDLP. In the question asking for the library's selection rate, a few librarians did not know how to determine their percentage. Some comments or concerns by coordinators can be answered by the GPO's Library Services and Content Management (LSCM) division. The LSCM team provides updates to GPO projects multiple times a year at various conferences including the Depository Library Council (DLC) conference that is usually also available through a simultaneously broadcast webinar for those who cannot attend in person.

Communication or lack of understanding about federal agencies was an issue as well. While several librarians complained about the removal of the 1990 Decennial Census data from American Factfinder, they may not have been aware of the

Census Bureau's size limitation in American FactFinder. Only two decennial censuses can be stored at a time, but 1990 data is available on a FTP site, although it is harder to access and use.[32] The temporary takedown of the ERIC database was due to the need to remove copyrighted material, a legal issue. Some coordinators were even unclear on the GPO's role of what it can and cannot do. It is the individual agency that decides to what publish, and in what format, not the GPO. To keep up with the agencies that coordinators often need information from, it can be helpful to sign up for agency email updates, newsletters, or to follow them on social media.

Census data emerged as a very valuable resource for many FDLs in this survey. Concerns with the Census Bureau website being down during the government shutdown, the 1990 Decennial Census removal, the closing of the University of Virginia Library's Historical Census Browser, and the loss of the publically available *Statistical Abstract* demonstrated this data is important and crucial.[33] The community needs to let the Census Bureau, the GPO, but especially legislators know how essential this data is to continue to gather, maintain, and keep freely accessible.

Other concerns mentioned in the survey are now being addressed since the survey was closed. There were many requests that the GPO back-fill the series it has available on FDsys and the GPO is being responsive to calls for historical digitization. In early 2018 the digitization of the *Congressional Record* was completed, as well as the *Federal Register*, and both are now available on govinfo.gov (the replacement of FDsys).[34]

The need for a comprehensive catalog of government publications is also in progress. In 2013 HathiTrust began development of the US Federal Documents Registry, with the goal of identifying the full corpus of US federal documents, including their digitization status.[35] HathiTrust

also has a Shared Print Program to retain print monograph items that have been digitized and placed in HathiTrust. Christenson reports that of those monographs, over 222,000 are federal documents, so this is yet another avenue to save print collections.[36] The GPO is now updating its online catalog by transcribing its historic shelf list and putting records into OCLC making the CGP more comprehensive.[37]

Two major developments occurred since this survey was closed. Legislation to revise Title 44 (the U.S. Code section that defines the role of the FDLP) to modernize the FDLP has been put forward by Congress and is out of scope for this paper.[38] The other development are two initiatives focused on government information preservation. The first is PEGI, the Preservation of Electronic Government Information, a two-year project with a goal to address concerns regarding the preservation of electronic government information for long term use.[39] Additionally, the DataRefuge group is moving forward with their Storytelling initiative anticipating that, "By telling the stories of government data, we protect these public assets from neglect, dilution, or deletion–whether intentional or inadvertent."[40] Hopefully the work of these groups will lead to the coordination and preservation called for by many in this survey.

Conclusion

This survey showed that federal depository libraries form a community who deeply care about providing free access to government information, even if it is in slightly different ways due to the differing missions of our institutions. Despite the differences amongst the types of libraries, FDLs are collaborative in nature, which came through in the comments of coordinators wanting to continue to work together to provide access to government information. The survey also demonstrated that better coordination is needed in both disseminating information about the FDLP and non-GPO initiatives, and how

FDLs can participate and preserve government information in all formats. The depository community perceives born-digital government information as more vulnerable since the new administration assumed power, creating a more urgent need to preserve that format of information above the need to preserve the legacy collection that is considered relatively stable at this time, despite some libraries reducing their collection through major weeding projects. Due to legal and financial restrictions on the GPO, this preservation movement is expanding beyond the FDLP community and demonstrates that all libraries have a role in helping preserve access to government information.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

1. Depository Number (to ensure only one response per institution).

2. What is your Library Type?

   a. Academic

   b. Federal Agency

   c. Public

   d. State

   e. Other?

3. What is your Depository Selection rate?

4. Does your library have a separate government information desk or do you answer government information questions at a central reference desk?

   a. Separate government Information desk

   b. Central reference desk

   c. Other?

5. Do you catalog electronic (online-only) government documents in your online catalog?

   a. Yes, No, It depends.

6. What percent of your print FDLP collection is cataloged?

   a. 100%

   b. 75-99%

   c. 50-74%

   d. 25-49%

   e. Less than 25%

7. Do you try to maintain a research level collection?

   a. Yes

   b. No

8. How often do you weed your collection?

   a. Every year

b. Every few years

c. Never

d. Other?

9. If you weed, can you provide the percentage of the collection you have weeded in the past five years?

10. Why do you weed your collection? Please select all that apply.

    a. Remove superseded material

    b. Need space

    c. Administration wanted collection weeded

    d. Other?

11. Have you purchased databases to cover information your library does not have in print format?

    a. Yes

    b. No

12. Please list databases (free and purchased) you use for electronic access to materials you used to have in print.

13. Have you moved any of your depository collection to off-site storage?

    a. Yes

    b. Some (please provide percentage in box)

    c. No

14. What criteria did you use to determine what was moved off-site?

15. Are you concerned about the FDL community having enough print copies for future digitization?

16. Do you digitize government documents?

    a. Yes

    b. No

17. If you do digitize documents, how do you choose what documents to digitize?

18. If you digitize documents, how are the digital images stored/preserved?

19. Do you use HathiTrust to access federal documents for patrons? (Please type in text box why or why not).

      a. Yes

      b. No

20. I would like to know your opinion on the accessibility of government information in any format. Please provide any concerns you have, some examples to discuss are - print collections, the role of regional libraries, DataRefuge project, GPO, FDsys/Govinfo.gov, FIPNeT, privatization of government information, government shutdown issues, HathiTrust, Internet Archive, TRAIL, etc.

Appendix B: List of Databases and Web Sites Used by FDLs Listed by Multiple Libraries

ProQuest Congressional	**73**
HeinOnline	**49**
Fdsys/Govinfo.gov	**39**
Readex Serial Set	**22**
HathiTrust	**21**
ProQuest Statistical Abstract	**18**
LexisNexis	**17**
Congress.gov	**17**
ProQuest Legislative Insight	**12**
Westlaw	**10**
GPO Catalog of Government Publications (CGP)	**8**
ERIC (3 EBSCO and 4 no vendor listed)	**7**
ProQuest Statistical Insight	**7**
CQ Databases (Various)	**6**
Declassified Documents Reference System	**6**
FRASER – Federal Reserve Digital Library	**6**
Readex Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)	**6**
ProQuest Executive Branch Documents	**6**
Social Explorer	**6**
Statistical Abstract	**6**
Readex Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS)	**5**
LLMC Digital Law Library	**5**
ProQuest (no specific database mentioned)	**5**
Bloomberg (Various)	**4**

PubMed	**4**
Historical Statistics of the U.S. (2 vendor specific)	**4**
EBSCO Military & Government Collection	**4**
Integrated Library System ILS (various vendors)	**4**
American Factfinder	**3**
EBSCO (no specific database mentioned)	**3**
Government Publishing Office	**3**
Library of Congress	**3**
Homeland Security Digital Library	**3**
Internet Archive	**3**
NTIS – National Technical Information Service	**3**
ProQuest Regulatory Insight	**3**
ProQuest Supreme Court Insight	**3**
Readex (no specific database mentioned)	**3**
Serial Set (vendor not specified)	**3**
ProQuest Digital National Security Archive	**2**
ICPSR - Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research	**2**
United Nations Treaty Series	**2**
Gale – The Making of Modern Law	**2**
FRED – Federal Reserve Economic Data	**2**
Medline	**2**
Fedstats	**2**
United States Geological Survey	**2**