

**Report to the Congress**

**STUDY TO IDENTIFY MEASURES NECESSARY  
FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO A MORE ELECTRONIC  
FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM**

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# STUDY TO IDENTIFY MEASURES NECESSARY FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO A MORE ELECTRONIC FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Emerging technologies afford tremendous opportunities for improved and enhanced public access to Government information. These opportunities bring new challenges that require the reevaluation of current information dissemination programs to take advantage of new opportunities and minimize disruption of public access during this period of rapid change. In August, 1995, the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), at the direction of Congress, initiated a cooperative study to identify measures necessary for a successful transition to a more electronic Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). The study was concluded in March 1996, and a draft report was issued in order to provide an extended opportunity for public comment. This is the final report to Congress on the FDLP Study. In order to complete the study and prepare this report, it was necessary to establish definitions to clarify the meaning of several important words and phrases. These definitions are provided on page v of this report.

To implement the study, the Public Printer established a working group consisting of representatives from GPO, appropriate Congressional committees, the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the Federal Publishers Committee (FPC), the Interagency Council on Printing and Publication Services (ICPPS), the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, and the depository library community. He also invited a number of organizations to identify representatives to serve as advisors to the working group. Comments from advisors are provided in Attachments J through N.

A substantial amount of useful information was gathered and numerous issues and alternatives were identified and examined during the course of the study. These are summarized in this report. A number of specific tasks were identified to provide information and alternatives for consideration. The preparation of the task force reports and the review of public comments resulting from their dissemination were the primary fact-finding activities of the study. The task force reports are included in Attachment D; they were the product of a substantial amount of effort on the part of the task leaders and participants.

Separately, a document entitled the *Electronic Federal Depository Library Program: Transition Plan, FY 1996 - FY 1998* was developed by GPO and included with its FY 1997 appropriations request. Public comments in response to this document also provided useful information to the study participants, and led directly to the development of the *Federal Depository Library Program: Information Dissemination and Access Strategic Plan, FY 1996 - FY 2001*, included with this report as Exhibit 1. The Strategic Plan proposes four ways in which GPO can bring electronic information into the FDLP:

- GPO can identify, describe and link the public to the wealth of distributed Government information maintained at Government electronic information services for free public use.
- GPO can establish reimbursable agreements with agencies that provide fee-based Government electronic information services in order to provide free public access to their information through the FDLP.

- GPO can "ride" agency requisitions and pay for depository copies of tangible electronic information products, such as CD-ROM titles, even if they are not produced or procured through GPO.
- GPO can obtain from agencies electronic source files for information the agencies do not wish to disseminate through their own Government electronic information services. These files can be made available through the *GPO Access* services or disseminated to depository libraries in CD-ROM or other tangible format.

Section V, Policy Issues That Impact Publishing Agencies, GPO, NARA, Depository Libraries, the Public and the Private Sector, summarizes the major issues identified in the course of the study process. While many of these issues are not new, this study has examined the issues in the new context of the rapid shift of the FDLP into a more electronic program.

The major conclusions of the study are summarized below:

**Scope of the FDLP:** There is widespread interest in expanding the content of the program to make it more comprehensive, and a great deal of optimism that the rapid expansion of agency electronic publishing offers cost-effective options to do so. Nevertheless, the highest priority remains the retention of information content that historically has been in the program and is rapidly leaving it as agencies move from print to electronic publishing or eliminate Government information products to save costs.

**Notification and Compliance:** The historical program relied heavily on the ability of the FDLP to obtain material as it was printed or procured through GPO. With the increasing emphasis on electronic dissemination and decreasing compliance with statutory requirements for agencies to print through GPO, identifying and obtaining information for the FDLP is becoming increasingly difficult. There must be new means to inform agencies of their responsibilities and to ensure compliance with agency FDLP obligations. There must be effective means for all three branches of Government to notify GPO of their intent to: (1) initiate, (2) substantially modify, or (3) terminate Government information products. This includes Government information products in all formats, including information available from Government electronic information services, such as agency World Wide Web sites.

**Permanent Access to Authentic Information:** The FDLP has the responsibility for providing permanent public access to the official Government information products disseminated through the program.<sup>1</sup> Historically, permanent access has been the role of the regional depository libraries, and this has been a cost-effective means of ensuring that Government information products remained available to the public indefinitely. Permanent access also is an essential element of the electronic depository library program, but it will be more difficult to attain. To ensure permanent public access to official electronic Government information products, all of the institutional program stakeholders (information producing agencies, GPO, depository libraries and NARA) must cooperate to establish authenticity, provide persistent identification and description of Government information products, and establish appropriate arrangements for its continued accessibility. This includes identification and implementation of standard formats for FDLP dissemination<sup>2</sup> and providing for the technological currency of the electronic information products available at GPO for remote access. In the case of tangible information products, permanent access will remain a

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<sup>1</sup>Permanent access is required by 44 U.S.C. §1911: "Depository libraries not served by a regional depository library, or that are regional depository libraries themselves, shall retain Government publications permanently in either printed form or in microfacsimile form, except superseded publications or those issued later in bound form which may be discarded as authorized by the Superintendent of Documents."

<sup>2</sup>Additional conclusions related to the requirement for assessment of standards for creation and dissemination of electronic Government information products are provided on the next page.

responsibility of regional depository libraries, while in the case of remotely accessible information products, it will be the responsibility of GPO, as the administrator of the FDLP, to coordinate a distributed system that provides continuous, permanent public access.

**Locator Services:** Together, the Cataloging and Indexing Program required by 44 U.S.C. §1710 and §1711 and the Locator Services required by 44 U.S.C. §4101 provide the statutory basis for GPO to assist depository libraries and the public to identify and obtain access to the full range of Government information. In a distributed environment, where libraries and users often access Government electronic information services rather than local collections, tools for identifying and locating information will be critical components of an effective program.

**Timetable for Implementation:** The *Transition Plan*, submitted with the GPO FY 1997 appropriations request, projected an ambitious, two and one-half year schedule for conversion to a more electronic FDLP (FY 1996 to FY 1998). Input from publishing agencies and depository libraries indicates a five to seven year transition would be more realistic and cost-effective since it would allow GPO to convert to electronic information at the same pace as publishing agencies can produce it and depository libraries can absorb it. It will be substantially more costly for GPO to convert agency print publications to electronic formats than it will be to work in partnership with the agencies, assisting them in accelerating their own electronic publishing initiatives. Consequently, the Strategic Plan attached to the report as Exhibit 1 proposes a transition period of FY 1996 through FY 2001.

**Assessment of Standards for Creation and Dissemination of Electronic Government Information Products:** For the successful implementation of a more electronic FDLP, the Congress, GPO and the library community must have additional information about future agency publishing plans, as well as an expert evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and usefulness of various electronic formats that may be utilized for depository library dissemination or access. A central implementation issue is the identification and utilization of standards for creation and dissemination of electronic Government information products. These standards would enhance access to and use of Government information by both the Government and the public. The Government produces an enormous quantity and variety of information. The standards best suited for one type of data may be substantially less suited, or even entirely inappropriate, for another. Consequently, there is no single standard in which all Government information products can, or should, be created or disseminated. Nevertheless, it is in the best interests of the Government, and those who use Government information, to achieve a greater degree of standardization than now exists, and to develop recommended standards for each major type of Government information product in order to facilitate the exchange and use of that information.

To accomplish this, it is first necessary to know the range of formats Federal agencies currently use in the creation and dissemination of information and to assess the de facto or actual standards that are in use for each major type of data. It also is necessary to identify areas where there is no standardization, or such limited standardization that the effect is virtually the same. Finally, it would be useful to evaluate standards utilized by private sector and other non-governmental publishers. This information will provide the basis for an assessment, in consultation with the depository library community, of the usefulness and cost-effectiveness of various electronic formats for depository library dissemination or access. It also will be the basis for a dialog with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and others with an interest in establishing and promulgating Government-wide standards for information creation and dissemination.

GPO is proposing to accomplish this data gathering and evaluation through a joint effort with NCLIS. As an independent Federal agency established to advise the President and the Congress on national policies related to library and information services adequate to meet the needs of the people of the United States, NCLIS is uniquely situated to coordinate this activity. While substantial changes are already underway, this assessment of standards for creation and dissemination of electronic Government

information products should proceed as rapidly as possible in order to assure a successful and cost-effective transition to a more electronic FDLP.

**Cost of Electronic Information Dissemination:** While there are many benefits inherent in the use of electronic information, including more timely and broader public access, there is no conclusive data at this time to support the assertion that it will result in significant savings to the program as a whole in the next few years. Based on comments received, electronic dissemination and access will shift the costs among the program participants. For example, GPO will incur additional, recurring costs to provide permanent public access through its electronic information services, as will other Government agencies that maintain information products through their own services. Costs for migration can be minimized by the adoption and use of open systems standards through the entire life cycle of information products--from the time the original source files are created by the publishing agencies to final preservation by NARA.

Similarly, depository libraries and their users will have to pay to print, or purchase printed copies of, information that is needed in print, but is no longer disseminated in the format through the FDLP. At the same time, depository libraries will have to provide specialized staff training, public access workstations, software and the related services necessary to connect the public to remotely accessible Government electronic information services. GPO will continue to monitor the technological capabilities of the depository libraries to provide cost-effective public access to electronic Government information products, particularly as it relates to the standards utilized by agencies in the creation and dissemination of electronic Government information products. GPO also will begin to monitor the costs to users for printing, downloading and similar services using depository library equipment.

GPO and other study participants have noted that there is a need for more in-depth and concrete data on the life cycle costs to the Government for creating, disseminating and providing permanent access to its information products, to depository libraries for providing public access to them, and to the public for using them. However, the transition to electronic dissemination of Government information is still in its early stages, so it is doubtful that reliable and conclusive data on life cycle costs could be gathered in this rapidly evolving period. Nevertheless, the assessment of standards proposed in this report is an essential first step toward the ultimate goal of collecting and analyzing information life cycle costs. It will provide a basis for further consultation with the library community and for discussions with publishing agencies concerning the appropriate standards for cost-effective dissemination of Government information products in formats appropriate to the needs of users and the intended usage. The assessment also will provide valuable information to Congress for the future development of appropriate and cost-effective Government information policies and programs.

**Legislative Changes:** Substantial changes in the FDLP already are underway within the context of the existing statute. Nevertheless, certain key legislative changes could be made in order to assure a successful and cost-effective transition to a more electronic FDLP. These changes are discussed in the report on Task 6 (Attachment D-5) and many of them are reflected in the preceding conclusions.

## DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are provided to clarify the meaning of several important words and phrases *as used in this report*. Unless otherwise noted, in this report "**Government**" always refers to the Government of the United States.

"**Agency**" means any Federal Government department, including any military department, independent regulatory agency, Government corporation, Government controlled corporation, or other establishment in the executive, legislative, or judicial branch.

"**Depository library**" means a library, designated under the provisions of 44 U.S.C. Chapter 19, which maintains tangible Government information products for use by the general public, offers professional assistance in locating and using Government information, and provides local capability for the general public to access Government electronic information services.

The "**Federal Depository Library Program**" is a nationwide geographically-dispersed system, established under the provisions of 44 U.S.C. Chapter 19 and administered by the Superintendent of Documents, consisting of libraries acting in partnership with the United States Government for the purpose of enabling the general public to have local access to Federal Government information at no cost.

"**Government electronic information service**" means the system or method by which an agency or its authorized agent provides public access to Government information products via a telecommunications network.

"**Government information**" means Government publications, or other Government information products, regardless of form or format, created or compiled by employees of a Government agency, or at Government expense, or as required by law.<sup>1</sup>

"**Government information product**" means a discrete set of Government information, either conveyed in a tangible physical format including electronic media, or made publicly accessible via a Government electronic information service.

"**Migration**" means both: (1) the periodic refreshing or transfer of Government information products from one medium to another in order to minimize loss of information due to physical deterioration of storage media and (2) the reformatting of information to avoid technological obsolescence due to software or platform dependence.

"**Permanent access**" means that Government information products within the scope of the FDLP remain available for continuous, no fee public access through the program.<sup>2</sup> For emphasis, the phrase "**permanent public access**" is sometimes used with the same definition.

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<sup>1</sup>"Government information" has a significantly broader meaning in the context of Federal records.

<sup>2</sup>Permanent access is required by 44 U.S.C. §1911: "Depository libraries not served by a regional depository library, or that are regional depository libraries themselves, shall retain Government publications permanently in either printed form or in microfacsimile form, except superseded publications or those issued later in bound form..." In the case of tangible information products, permanent access remains a responsibility of regional depository libraries, while in the case of remotely accessible Government information products, it is a responsibility of GPO to coordinate a distributed system that provides continuous, permanent public access.

**"Preservation"** means that official records of the Federal Government, including Government information products made available through the FDLP, which have been determined to have sufficient historical or other value to warrant being held and maintained in trust for future generations of Americans, are retained by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).