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## The Collaborative Federal Depository Program: Managing Federal Depository Library Program Collections in the Southeast

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## The Collaborative Federal Depository Program: Managing Federal Depository Library Program Collections in the Southeast

### Abstract

The Collaborative Federal Depository Program (CFDP) is an endeavor by the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) and Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) libraries in the Southeast to create collaborative "Centers of Excellence" (COE) collections of tangible U.S. Government information.

The CFDP was created to provide workable solutions to address the increasing cost of managing, preserving, and providing access to large collections of federal government publications in the Southeast. From its beginning, the program sought to not only relieve collection management pressures among Regional and Selective depository libraries but to provide a model for future development of innovative shared collections and services, improving preservation, intellectual control, and access for legacy FDLP collections nation-wide.

*From the Field*

## The Collaborative Federal Depository Program: Managing Federal Depository Library Program Collections in the Southeast

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### Program Overview

Collaboration is at the core of the Collaborative Federal Depository Program (CFDP), an endeavor by the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) and Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) libraries in the Southeast to create comprehensive Centers of Excellence (COE) collections of tangible U.S. Government information.

Figure 1. ASERL logo



For over sixty years, the engagement of ASERL members has led to numerous collaborative efforts that effectively address pressing issues for research libraries in the region. Thirty-six of ASERL's 37 members are FDLP libraries, with 12 regional depository libraries and 231 selective depository libraries in the 10-state region served by ASERL. These collections are a regional asset,

and it is not surprising that ASERL members worked together to embrace a collaborative strategy to address the challenges of managing these large historical print collections.

ASERL's exploration of a collaborative stewardship model for management of tangible federal document collections began in 2006. Working within the legal mandate and policies of the FDLP, the CFDP model sought to establish comprehensive collections at partnering libraries to increase the completeness of holdings, and improve access to and enhance services that support the use of these important collections, while easing the problems of increasing costs, diminished staffing, and space allocation. The program was bolstered in 2009, when ASERL was awarded an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant to test the model at three pilot sites. Today, forty-one libraries serve as Centers of Excellence; thirty of which are selective depository libraries. Not limited to ASERL member libraries, 23% of COEs are depositories

outside ASERL's membership. COE collections include six Cabinet-level agencies, one format collection (maps), two subject collections (Panama Canal and Cuba), and over 200 Superintendent of Documents (SuDoc) classifications.

### Common Set of Operating Principles

Collectively, libraries participating in the CFDP agree to operate within the boundaries of Title 44, Chapter 19, of the United States Code, especially Sections 1911 and 1912, and to manage holdings according to the *Southeast Region Guidelines for Management and Disposition of Federal Depository Library Collections: The Collaborative Federal Depository Program*.<sup>1</sup> Each COE is responsible for cataloging and inventorying its holdings for its chosen agencies and conducting research to identify other publications from those agencies that are missing from their collections. The COE commits to obtain the missing items, if possible, in order to establish a comprehensive collection of publications from these agencies as a resource for its own university, the state, and the Southeast Region.

Publications supplied to depository libraries through the FDLP remain the property of the United States Government and may only be disposed of through approved disposition processes.<sup>2</sup> Under Title 44, Section 1912, of the U.S. Code, regional depository libraries may permit selective depository libraries to dispose of government publications which they have retained for five years. Before disposing of materials, the selective library must first offer them to depository libraries within its state or region before making them available to others.

Building consensus on a common set of policies, procedures, and best practices that simplify and streamline the disposition process improves the management of tangible collections throughout the Southeast Region. Depository libraries can assess, weed, and develop collections more effi-

ciently. The intentional building of comprehensive collections provides assurance of future availability to these important resources. While a regional depository will not discard material because it is held by a COE, it may stop retrospectively collecting that material, which not only frees up space but time to focus on other portions of its collection.

The ASERL Documents Disposition Database, created and hosted by the University of Florida, supports the disposition process through a coordinated listing of available items, making it easier for a larger pool of libraries to consider adding these materials to their collections, not being limited to libraries that share the same regional depository. Enhanced functionality in the database provides an automated mechanism for matching items posted by selective depository libraries (OFFERS) with the needs posted by depository libraries seeking to fill gaps in their FDLP collections (CLAIMS). The ability to enter needs into the database is extremely helpful in filling known collection gaps. Matches are made by SuDoc number or stem, word or phrase in title, publication date, or format, which then generates an email listing the details of the matched offers – freeing staff time in routine monitoring of postings.

The database operates on a 45-day disposition cycle (as set forth in the guidelines), in which the availability to view and select offered items is based on priority access to ensure compliance with FDLP mandates. This is a cumulative process; once libraries have been granted view access, they retain the ability to view until an item is selected or the 45 days elapse. When an offer is posted to the database, first priority is granted to the primary regional depository (the regional library to which the selective library is responsible), which has exclusive access for five days. Second in priority, with access on day six, are selective depository libraries that are served by the same primary regional depository as the posting library (affiliated libraries). Beginning on day 11,

COE libraries are granted access for items that are within scope of their COE collections. All remaining regional depository libraries in the Southeast Region have access on day 26, followed by all remaining selective depository libraries on day 31 through 45.

After 45 days, unclaimed items may be discarded, unless they are rare or likely to be of significant interest beyond the region, in which case, it is strongly recommended that these items be offered via the national Needs and Offers List maintained by the Superintendent of Documents. The database has the functionality to export expired offers to facilitate an import into FDLP eXchange,<sup>3</sup> the Government Publishing Office's (GPO) needs and offers listing.

Since the disposition database was implemented in 2012, more than 2,106,000 items have been posted for adoption by other FDLP libraries, of which over 96,750 items were claimed. Of those claimed, 47,830 were claimed to augment Center of Excellence collections.

### **FDLP Regional Depository Library Models and the CFDP**

The current structure of regional and selective depository libraries was established by the Depository Library Act of 1962 and is overseen by GPO.<sup>4</sup> The Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993 (Public Law 103-40), known as the GPO Access Act, delegated primary responsibility for permanent public access to online content to GPO, while assigning responsibility for all tangible publications distributed by the FDLP to regional depository libraries.<sup>5</sup>

In 2018, the Office of Superintendent of Documents established guidelines to assist depository libraries in participating in both intra and interstate shared regional collaborations that "offer practical and economical means to maintain public access and reallocate library space, while

achieving operational efficiencies for the participating regional and selective depository libraries."<sup>6</sup> For COE libraries, this provided an opportunity for a re-exploration of existing regional service models and the creation of new shared regional agreements.

**Figure 2.** Federal Depository Library Program logo



Multiple FDLP regional depository library models are present in the ASERL region:

- One Regional serving one state (KY, MS, SC)
- Two Regionals serving one state (AL, LA)
- One Regional serving multiple states or areas (FL, PR, VI)
- One Regional with a distributed collection (TN), and
- Newly established, Shared Regionals across state boundaries (FL, GA, NC, VA)

### **Two Regionals Serving One State - Collaborative Collection Coverage in Louisiana**

Louisiana's Federal Depository community is served by Louisiana Tech University in Ruston and Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Together, these two regionals serve 25 selective depository libraries in the state. To equitably divide the responsibilities, each selective is assigned to a specific regional. Louisiana Tech University is the point of contact for 11 selectives throughout the state, and Louisiana State University is the point of contact for 14 selectives in the Baton Rouge and New Orleans areas.

The Louisiana Federal Depository Library Council's Plan for Federal Depository Libraries in Louisiana outlines the discard process for selectives, which is coordinated through the ASERL

documents disposition database. Each regional receives an automated notification of offers posted by the selectives in the state.

Both regionals are active in the government documents community in Louisiana and maintain open communication between themselves and the various selectives through meetings and the use of a state listserv, Bayoudoc-L.

### **Shared Regionals Across State Boundaries – New Shared Regional Agreements**

Creating a shared regional agreement, from conception to paperwork to putting it into practice, requires a strong partnership. Depository coordinators at CFDP libraries have built a foundation of collegial relationships, perhaps first due to geographic proximity but certainly strengthened by their participation in ASERL's program. When the *Guidelines for Establishing Shared Regional Depository Libraries* went into effect, it was not surprising that ASERL libraries were among the first to take advantage of an opportunity predicated upon an existing framework of collaborative collection building and resource sharing. Common practices and processes, already in place, removed barriers to establishing these shared collections.

To date, four COE libraries have signed agreements with GPO to establish two shared regionals providing services across state boundaries, replicating – to some extent – the COE concept on a smaller scale, with each of the regional libraries committing to retain portions of the collection, allowing the partner library to weed this material. Currently, these four libraries represent the only shared regional agreements across state boundaries – the first between the University of Virginia and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and the second between the University of Florida and the University of Georgia. The guidelines give regional depository libraries the ability to make collection deci-

sions that were previously not possible. For example, the agreement between the University Libraries at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Virginia Libraries creates one shared collection guided by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and a written plan. Each library may choose to discard material the other agrees to preserve, and each library may discontinue receipt of material that the other continues to collect.

### **Challenges and Learning Opportunities**

The CFDP program is not without its challenges. It is well-recognized within the CFDP that establishing a COE for the complete corpus of FDL content in the Southeast is a major undertaking that will take many years to accomplish. The program relies on sustained participation by eligible institutions, drawn from a finite number of depository libraries in the region whose numbers have been slowly declining. While many participating libraries have expanded their commitment to serve as a COE for more than a single agency, many SuDoc classifications remain available for adoption.

Most recently, attrition has led to a reduction in the overall number of COE libraries. The program MOU includes a provision for a library to withdraw from the program; a minimum of 24 months' prior notice is required to allow the library time to make provisions for the disposition or transfer of materials, and to finalize any outstanding activities for its COE collection. Two libraries registered their intent to withdraw as COEs in 2018 and were removed this year: an agency collection (the Women's Bureau) and a subject collection (the City of Atlanta). It is worth noting that CFDP libraries ensured that the content of relinquished collections was sustained. The Women's Bureau continues to be covered by a second COE, whereas the subject collection for the City of Atlanta had not been fully operationalized and was discontinued.

While the subject collection did not prove to be sustainable, it did provide opportunities to experience the complexities in establishing a comprehensive subject collection that continues to inform COE collection decisions. The lack of a national union catalog of FDLP materials makes the process of identifying and acquiring a comprehensive collection within the selected scope of each COE difficult at best. This is compounded when attempting to define and develop a comprehensive collection based on subject, where the discovery, identification and authentication of tangible content may have no clear discovery path or boundaries. Libraries considering a subject COE are cautioned about the difficulties they may expect to encounter.

Like most, the CFDP has not been immune to the COVID-19 pandemic; the discard process facilitated through the ASERL documents disposition database was suspended in early March 2020 due to the inability of libraries to process physical shipments of materials. The service then resumed at the end of July 2020 as libraries returned to more regular library operations. The existing framework for distribution of information greatly facilitates these actions.

### Beyond the Southeast – the CFDP and the National Collection

The collaborative framework of the CFDP influences its member libraries' participation in other initiatives that promote cooperative collection and preservation efforts at the national level.

**Figure 3.** Preservation Steward logos



The Preservation Steward<sup>7</sup> program is a network of libraries that have partnered with GPO to permanently preserve a predefined collection of publications, usually a particular series or Superintendent of Documents classification stem. The goal of this program is to establish the National Collection,<sup>8</sup> a geographically dispersed collection of the corpus of U.S. Government public information, in which every publication distributed in tangible format is committed for preservation. Additionally, once a title is identified as being held by preservation stewards in all four geographic regions<sup>9</sup> – the south, west, midwest, and northeast – it becomes eligible for discard by regional depository libraries.

Traditionally, regional depository libraries were required to collect all materials distributed by the FDLP and to retain them in perpetuity, unlike the more flexible selection and weeding practices for selective depository libraries. But as collections grow and shelf space diminishes, this arrangement becomes increasingly unsustainable. Efforts that promote flexibility, such as the eligibility for regional discard of certain titles, will strengthen the FDLP and help brand it as a program that adapts and grows with its participants' needs. And more preservation stewards leads to more flexibility in managing these valued resources for FDLP libraries.

The similarities between the objectives of the CFDP and preservation steward collections means that CFDP participating libraries are well-positioned to support GPO's efforts, agreeing to preserve collections for which they were already a COE. Seven of the 42 preservation stewards are COE libraries, showing a significant level of contribution from ASERL libraries that are already familiar with the benefits of collaborative stewardship efforts. Indeed, many of the preservation steward workflows, from inventory to assessment to enhanced efforts for retrospective collecting, are similar to the work that is done by COE libraries.

Throughout the development and implementation of the CFDP was the underlying hope for a future FDLP that provides greater flexibility for collaboration and innovation to serve our common mission to manage and improve access to these legacy collections. An FDLP that nurtures

shared regional collaborations and enhanced partnership opportunities are likely to spur additional innovation among CFDP libraries, ensuring the national network of libraries continues to benefit from this regional imperative.

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<sup>1</sup>“Southeast Region Guidelines for Management and Disposition of Federal Depository Library Collections: The Collaborative Federal Depository Program,” Association of Southeastern Research Libraries, approved September 2018, [http://www.aserl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ASERL\\_FDLP\\_GUIDE-LINES\\_Revised\\_Final\\_2018\\_09.pdf](http://www.aserl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ASERL_FDLP_GUIDE-LINES_Revised_Final_2018_09.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>“Legal Requirements and Program Regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program, February 2018,” Federal Depository Library Program, <https://www.fdlp.gov/file-repository/depository-administration/1984-legal-requirements-and-program-regulations-of-the-federal-depository-library-program>.

<sup>3</sup>“FDLP eXchange,” Federal Depository Library Program, accessed September 18, 2020, <https://www.fdlp.gov/req-guide/instructions/fdlp-exchange-page>. Developed by GPO, FDLP eXchange was released in June 2018 and replaced the former national Needs and Offers List.

<sup>4</sup>“Depository Library Act of 1962,” Federal Depository Library Program, accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.fdlp.gov/file-repository/about-the-fdlp/4-depository-library-act-of-1962>.

<sup>5</sup>“Regional Depository Libraries in the 21st Century: A Time for Change?,” Federal Depository

Library Program, June 2008, <https://www.fdlp.gov/file-repository/about-the-fdlp/regional-depositories/54-regional-depository-libraries-in-the-21st-century-a-time-for-change>.

<sup>6</sup>“Guidelines for Establishing Shared Regional Depository Libraries – SOD Guidance Document 2018-1,” Federal Depository Library Program, accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.fdlp.gov/file-repository/about-the-fdlp/policies/superintendent-of-documents-public-policies/3706-guidelines-for-establishing-shared-regional-depository-libraries-sod-guidance-document-2018-1-1>.

<sup>7</sup>“Partnerships,” Federal Depository Library Program, accessed September 18, 2020, <https://www.fdlp.gov/about-the-fdlp/partnerships>.

<sup>8</sup>“National Collection of U.S. Government Public Information,” Federal Depository Library Program, accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.fdlp.gov/about-the-fdlp/the-national-collection>.

<sup>9</sup>“Preservation Stewards Map,” Federal Depository Library Program, accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.arcgis.com/home/web-map/viewer.html?web-map=296646196bd243ef9b832935cbf4ef0f&extent=-152.4372,16.2114,-48.902,57.2772>.