South Dakota State University

From the SelectedWorks of Vickie Mix

Summer 2017

Streamlining Collections: Disasters, Consolidation, and the Digital Landscape

Vickie L Mix

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons CC_BY International License.

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/vickie-mix/16/
Streamlining Collections: Disasters, Consolidation, and the Digital Landscape

Vickie Mix, Associate Professor & Government Documents Librarian, South Dakota State University

Collection development decisions in libraries often are based on several criteria: library user needs, budget, location, environment and space. These influences on those decisions may challenge Federal Depository Library Program coordinators to manage government information sources in the physical and virtual space while continuing to meet the community user needs. In my experience as a Federal Depository Library Coordinator of an academic library, expected and unexpected events and administrative decisions have dictated the course of documents collection management. The best advice for meeting these challenges is to be prepared…for anything.

**Banned from the Basement- Disasters, Renovations, Recovery and Access**

Although seldom envisioned, unexpected events may influence streamlining government documents collections and challenge documents coordinators to provide public access to materials as required by law. Planned renovations offer opportunities to streamline collections either through consolidation, relocation to remote storage or weeding. Although natural disasters, are not typically seen as “opportunities,” they can translate to strategic collection development and management decisions. At my library, both renovations and natural disasters presented “opportunities” to streamline the documents collections.

When one thinks of natural disasters and libraries, likely examples reflect large scale destruction: hurricanes, river floods, tsunamis, earthquakes and fires may readily come to mind. Disasters have plagued libraries throughout time. Historians speculate that the Library of Alexandria succumbed to negligent fire or intentional destruction. However, many libraries may experience “disaster” on a smaller scale. Minor flooding has plagued my library for the last few years due to extensive campus construction projects, inadequate drainage, and aging facilities. Water events have varied from leaky pipes, blocked drains and standing water caused by heavy rain. As in many Federal Depository Libraries, Hilton M. Briggs Library houses its documents collection in the basement, fondly referred to as the Lower Level. Microforms, print documents, maps and tangible electronic resources comprise the collection of over 573,000 items.

In 2010, the library was slated for re-carpeting on the lower level. Collections were readied and moved to temporary spaces while the professionals worked to install new flooring. Staff were temporarily assigned work spaces away from the lower level and expected a two week renovation process. The Government Printing Office (now the Government Publishing Office) and the Regional Depository Library at the University of Minnesota were notified of a public access plan as required by law.¹

Documents staff had created an extensive plan to accommodate relocation of maps and microforms during the re-carpeting project. Maps and microforms had been moved to vacant study rooms for the duration of the flooring installation. Items had been removed from map cases and microform cabinets as the literature indicated moving full cabinets would be dangerous for
movers and damaging to the cabinets. Little did we know what lay ahead. Library staff first became aware of a problem when a janitor reported water raining from the ceiling, along with ceiling tiles. It seemed just as if Chicken Little had predicted it, the sky was falling. Indeed, water rained from above, not from nature, but from a plugged drain pipe in the ceiling. As fate would have it, many library staff were attending staff development in another city and were unable to assist with disaster recovery efforts. The most recent disaster plan proved problematic as it was outdated and gave little guidance for recovery, particularly for microforms. Flooding and subsequent construction delays required basement closure until collections could be assessed, damage control initiated and items returned to rightful places. The post disaster analysis revealed the loss of approximately fifty-six maps. Ninety-four reels of microfilm suffered water damage beyond recovery. The bulk of affected materials were spared extensive damage, albeit were a little worse for wear. A quick response by the library Dean mobilized all available staff to attend to disaster recovery. Hundreds of microfilm reels were removed from boxes, gently dried and set aside for damage inspection by the University Archivist. After two days, salvageable materials received new boxes and labels and returned to microfilm cabinets.

The next “flooding disaster” occurred in the apocalyptic year of 2012. A series of unfortunate events converged to cause a deluge of water in the basement. A heavy rain, a blocked parking lot drain, and an inadequate drainage pipe produced yet another disaster resulting in the disruption of collection access and staff work spaces. When emergency crews responded to the flooding, untrained respondents removed library materials and equipment from the affected area. Map cases and microform cabinets were haphazardly relocated to dry areas (not emptied this time) and Federal Documents on bottom shelves moved to shelving away from the flood zone. The basement and its collections (Government Documents, Microforms, and Bound Periodicals) became off limits to the public and all but a select few library staff. Documents Department staff were assigned temporary workspaces for several months, due to water damage to office walls and floors. Following mold abatement, the Government Documents office was utilized for additional disaster recovery efforts, primarily as storage as flooring was replaced in collection areas. Fortunately, disruption to documents collection access lasted but a few weeks and the public was allowed entry to the basement. The office, however, remained a storage room and staff remained in library exile.

The Chief University Librarian took charge of the disaster response and embraced it as an opportunity to expedite plans for collection shifts and consolidations. Efforts to do so became a priority as yet another round of Lower Level re-construction began. About a third of the flooring that had been installed in 2010 needed replacement as a result of the 2012 water event. To accommodate flooring replacement, documents collection shelving, map cases and microform cabinets were moved accordingly. As flooring replacement ensued, plans for upper level (books collection) and lower level (Federal Documents, Microforms, Bound Periodicals) collection consolidations and massive shifting proceeded over a period of six months. A professional library mover was hired to shift the main collection on the upper level, but lower level shifting was accomplished with library staff. Because of budget constraints, library management decided to use local resources for shifting collections on the lower level of the library. Twelve ranges of documents shelving were removed and minimal growth allowed for the physical government
documents collection. With the removal of the shelving and the re-location of sixty-eight microform cabinets new student study spaces opened in the area formerly shared between all microforms and the Government Documents print collection. Activities designed to consolidate the Federal Documents collection and microforms significantly reduced the footprint on library building space and hopefully removed materials from future floodwaters path.

Strategies to reduce the footprint of a documents collection included weeding and de-selection. Selective depository libraries must follow the five year rule for weeding materials. Materials that are five years old or older may be removed from the collection with approval from the Regional Library. Since 2010 (“the flood years”), the physical collection has been reduced by over 4,600 volumes through weeding. Of course, weeding decisions should always be made with patron needs in mind. Typically, outdated materials and materials readily available online may be considered candidates for weeding. Given the resources available on the internet and through numerous information databases, bibliographies often present themselves as weeding candidates, as well. Regional Libraries can provide excellent guidance on weeding as can a review of the professional literature. GPO identifies three qualifications for weeding:

1. Superseded publications
2. Substituted publications
3. 5-year rule

Once weeding options are explored, the library selection profile may be examined to identify areas where tangible selections might be suspended when electronic substitutions might suffice. Since the Government Publishing Office provides online access to a significant percentage of agency publications online, it is indeed feasible to streamline collections by focusing on electronic access. In 2014, the GPO revised FDLP requirements for selective depository libraries. Selective libraries are not required to select specific item numbers as in the past and can opt to move to online collection access. According to the GPO 2015 Annual Performance Report, most GPO distributions to the 1200 depository libraries are online.

Responding to mini-disasters, renovations or unanticipated disruptions may force depository libraries to streamline collections in the short term when materials are damaged and not replaced. In the longer term, libraries have opportunities for rethinking the collection footprint and serving patron needs. Free public access to government information remains the primary mission for all Federal Depository libraries so it is imperative that we be prepared for the unexpected.

**Lessons Learned**

The most important lesson learned from my experiences is to have a current disaster plan in place easily accessible to all who will be responsible for disaster response. Disaster plans should include a communication plan, response team contact information (phone tree), safety and security measures, response procedures according to the scale of event, salvage procedures relevant to the event, and salvage priorities. In each of our recent experiences, a current, workable disaster plan could have reduced the chaos, provided speedier public access to materials, and critical staff access to the documents collection. Instructions to Federal Depository Libraries remains clear:
“You must continue to provide free, public access to materials if your library experiences a temporary disruption of service that is out of the ordinary (e.g., building remodeling, collection relocation). Your options for providing access are through retrieval of tangible publications and/or access to electronic equivalents where feasible.”

Your disaster plan should include how your library will continue to provide public access to government publications. Our current “Draft Disaster Response Plan” sits before me now as I contemplate yet the latest disruption caused by the unexpected. Fortunately, this time, we have not been banned from the basement.

**Booths & Berths: Consolidation and Changing Space Needs**

Traditional library collections, including documents, face the constraints of physical space, government documents included. Competing agendas and priorities may impact collection management decisions. Fifty-nine percent of Federal depository libraries identify physical space and facilities as challenges in managing collections. The most recent strategic plan implemented in 2013 by H.M. Briggs Library, South Dakota State University, cites four main goals, one of which focuses on space:

*Offer welcoming, accessible environments that nurture creativity, collaboration, reflection, and engagement*

a. Adopt innovative technologies and maintain a dynamic Web presence that enhance discovery of and provide seamless access to information resources.

b. Develop and begin implementation of a comprehensive building plan that will improve accessibility and expand the capacity for learning, research, programming, collaboration, and creative activity. Ensure that the plan considers the roles filled by International Affairs and Outreach, the Teaching Learning Center, and the Writing Center and ties the library into the vision for the Jackrabbit Green.

c. Develop and implement a shelving plan that invites use of physical collections while facilitating other utilization of library space.

d. Design and install signage that directs, informs, and engages library users.

This goal offers a description for space utilization that accounts for collections, yet emphasizes the building not only as a center for research and learning, but as a multi-use facility. Housing university classrooms, meeting rooms, collaborative work spaces, computer workstations, non-library offices and non-library student support services are but a few competing purposes vying for space in our building. I call this phenomenon, booths and berths. Booths represents patron work spaces and berths represents non-library tenant spaces.

As my library implemented its strategic plan, the government documents collection area, as other collection areas, underwent serious consolidation with minimal allowance for growth. Twelve ranges of over one thousand shelves were removed from the paper documents area. Since our library is a selective depository, decisions to adjust selections to meet strategic goals included
Selecting more items in electronic formats and reducing selections of print formats allows us to provide access to the government information that meets the needs of the university and community at large while freeing physical space for other purposes. Indeed, South Dakota State University students benefitted from additional quiet study space and additional computer workstations as resources were re-distributed throughout the building. Having more students utilizing spaces adjacent to Government Documents may also encourage use of the collection and services offered by documents staff.

The documents area as yet has not been encroached upon by non-library entities, but the day may come when the newly created open spaces may be eyed for additional offices and services. Areas within the library have been re-created to accommodate library staff and university partners that have been assigned space in the library. The Library Management Team has an eye on the public service point in the documents area for additional librarian office assignments. Other areas within the library continue to be re-purposed for non-library use. Multi-use partners in our building include or have included the Honors College, the Office of International Affairs and Outreach, the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching Learning (Faculty Development Office), and the Writing Center. These centrally located services bring students and faculty to the library and enhance their experience. We can take advantage of these increased visits by promoting library services and actively engaging with all library visitors.

Your library spaces may comprise a central building, satellite libraries and remote storage. When planning for changing library priorities, we often face difficult decisions. Recently, a FDLP library posed the question via a discussion list: How do we manage reducing a documents collection from 420,000 to 50,000 while considering moving volumes from the main library to remote storage? In 2007, soon after being appointed as the coordinator of Federal Documents at H.M. Briggs Library, the University Archivist advised the removal of Federal Documents from the library’s remote storage facility since the space would be re-purposed. Over 17,000 volumes including 5,000 United States Congressional Serial Set needed review for relocation or weeding. University officials had accepted a large “gift” from a former United States Senator and had designated the remote storage facility as the temporary and perhaps future permanent housing for that collection. No additional library space had been allocated for the “gift,” thus the need to provide a storage and curation necessitated creative use of existing resources.

In order to comply with University priorities and an uncertain future for the federal documents in remote storage, it became imperative to develop a project plan for relocation and/or disposal of those volumes. Planning for projects of this nature require compliance with FDLP guidelines and Regional Library directions. The University of Minnesota Regional Library serves as the regional depository library for South Dakota, Minnesota and Michigan. Their disposal guidelines are based on a bi-monthly cycle for SuDoc Stem ranges which means there may be a minimum of a six month turn-around for discards submitted for consideration. At the time of our project, the disposal guidelines were based on a monthly cycle, so the turn-around minimum was 12 months. During the course of planning for that 12 months, Documents staff addressed the following:
• Access to documents during transition: Assure access to collections during renovations and relocations
• Communication with GPO and the Regional Library about access plans
• Timeline for disposal and/or relocation: Comply with Regional Library and FDLP guidelines for weeding collections
• Staffing considerations: Balance workflow with additional responsibilities, enlist temporary assistance from other departments for the big move
• Space considerations for relocations: Weed and shift in-house collections as necessary to allow for additions from remote storage and anticipated growth

A detailed project plan to accomplish university, library and departmental goals was crucial in clearing remote storage space while serving the government information needs of our community. The project planning included these elements:

• Project scope: Identify planning participants, determine objectives, communicate structure and operation of the project
• Project Plan: Establish timeline, identify major stages and deadlines, identify necessary resources, determine measures for quality of outcomes
• Plan implementation: Engage and distribute resources, evaluate and communicate, adjust and respond to changing needs
• Project Control: Track progress, communicate, timely action as needed, flexibility

**Lessons Learned**
Planning is key. Having a project plan in place that is flexible enough to account for unforeseen circumstances greatly enhances chances for successful collection moves. Adjust, adjust, adjust. Flexibility is critical in an uncertain world of variables. Staffing changes often impact large scale projects in more ways than one. Institutional knowledge of the plan may be lost when key players leave. In our case, a part-time staff member had created a detailed database that identified all the materials in remote storage. From this database, discard/weeding lists could be easily extracted to comply with the regional depository withdrawal requirements. Upon the departure of the staff member, others needed to learn how to use the database or create workflows that accomplished the same goal. Timelines are approximate and though important need room for flexibility. Our original twelve month plan extended into twenty-four months as a variety of circumstances required project plan adjustments. Weather, staff, institutional priorities and a wide number of variables may necessitate plan adjustments throughout the cycle. Scheduling the services of non-library staff, such as rubbish removal, also impacts timelines. In South Dakota, weather is always a variable, so moving collections during the winter months definitely is not ideal, nor during the rainy season.

**The Digital Landscape-Balancing Legacy Print and Online Access**
Collection management has undergone tremendous change in the digital age of publishing. Ninety-seven percent of Federal agency publications are now born digital. Federal depository libraries, particularly selective program participants, may choose a variety of agency publications
in online formats instead of tangible print, CD/DVD, or the dreaded microfiche. The Federal Depository Library Program is about providing public access. In an age when 83% of households report computer ownership and 74% report Internet access, it makes perfect sense for FDLP libraries to select digital documents. In the 2015 FDLP Biennial Survey, 96% of respondents reported offering electronic access to government information. Some libraries are opting for “electronic only” collections, freeing space for other collections and services. As mentioned earlier, current GPO partnerships primarily focus on electronic collection access versus physical collections.

Over fifty percent of respondents in a survey at the University of Idaho identified digitization-on-demand as a desired service. Libraries and patrons appear to embrace electronic access to government information not only to current information, but to existing print information. Digitization on demand can fulfill the patron’s desire for electronic access. Online finding tools may enhance the user’s ability to access information and although the GPO provides tools such as FDsys and govinfo, many users in the University of Idaho study relied on generic search engines, most often Google. The changing nature of government information to electronic formats impacts collection development decisions in federal depository libraries. Libraries choosing to participate in the Federal Depository Library program have a variety of collection development options available. Chadwick, et.al. offer scenarios for public library participation in the FDLP that reflect motivations to free physical space within a building.

1. Shift from separate documents collections to reliance on professional assistance with web based services.

2. Focus on existing physical collections with greater emphasis on e-government access via the library website.

3. Cease new selections with move to online access, historical digitization and Web 2.0 patron contributed resources.

4. “Pay to Play” access to datasets and emphasis on the instructional role in the library.

Public library directors surveyed about these four scenarios recognized the value of government information but were not all familiar with the FDLP program. Those whose libraries had print and online documents collections communicated a need to focus also on state and local government access. The study did not illuminate a clear scenario preference. Directors cited economic considerations, local priorities and alternative access to government information as factors in their perceptions of FDLP collection needs in their libraries. Peter Hernan and Laura Saunders offer an analysis through a discussion of six scenarios of the future of the FDLP. The study of Academic Research Libraries (ARL) FDLP member libraries verified that library directors recognize the value of establishing a foundation for “discussing key issues and developing a dialogue with the GPO.” ARL directors surveyed, overwhelmingly preferred digital access as a means for saving shelf space, reducing staff costs, and meeting patron preferences. What is apparent is both academic and public libraries may struggle with the economic and space challenges associated with physical documents collections. Citizen access to government information remains a primary value for libraries whether or not the library has a
physical collection. Libraries can provide patrons with professional services and technology to tap into the government information needed.

The digital landscape shapes library collections and spaces. When discussing alternatives for government information in libraries, Drake observes, “digitization is the most significant program in terms of enhancing availability of information and reducing costs for libraries.”

Although the FDLP produces significant born digital documents for the public, historical legacy collection access may be negatively impacted without digitization efforts by GPO partners. HathiTrust, DPLA, and institutional repositories help to assure public access to materials that might otherwise be lost (or forgotten) to issues of space, money and time. The FDLP has created the Digitization Projects Registry as means to identify digital repositories of legacy collections hosted by libraries, government agencies and non-profit institutions.

Indeed, space considerations, economic realities, accessible information and patron needs drive the discussion of government document/information collection building decisions in all types of Federal Depository libraries. Public libraries are not unique in addressing these collection challenges. Academic libraries comprise 72% of the respondents in the 2015 Biennial Survey of FDLP libraries while public libraries comprised only 15% (Outsell, 2016). Seventy-two percent of those academic libraries reported budget challenges to maintaining collections, 71% staff shortages, and 59% space issues. Although digital collections present alternative an access option, documents librarians must recognize the time honored value of preserving the intellectual record. Digital collections in current formats may offer access in the current term, but long term sustainability remains the elephant in the room. Remember the floppy disc? Many FDLP libraries, including mine, retained their 5 inch floppies (yes, five inch) and 3 inch floppies well beyond the equipment used to access the data on the discs. CDrom and DVDs currently reside in a lone locked cabinet, seldom opened and hardly ever used. What will be the next greatest and latest technology for the dissemination of information? I’ll leave that to the computer scientists. Information professionals caution us not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Streamlining collections by substituting digital documents may seem a splendid idea. However, we must remember tangible collections in our charge represent the “records of our democracy.”

Lessons Learned

Today, federal depository library collections need not consume a lot of space, nor deter access to government information. The key purpose of the federal depository library program is provide access. We as information professionals must determine what access best suits the needs of our communities and preserves the historical record. The fear of an all-digital collection is the loss of that information should formats change, agencies change, the power goes out and aliens invade. Well, perhaps, we can hope the aliens will have preserved government information in their preferred formats. At least someone or something will have access.

Shaping for the Future

A few years ago, the President of my University visited library staff as was his custom each year. In his opening statement, he referred to the building as a “warehouse for books.” The perceptions about library buildings as warehouses is definitely outdated as the realities of library space use
defies this definition. R. David Lankes in his new book, *The New Librarianship Field Guide* observes that libraries need to “shape themselves and their services to the specific communities they serve.”

No longer can the library regard itself as a physical repository for collections, including government documents. The changing nature of government information from paper to fiche to cloud to service, challenges documents professionals to strategically manage documents collections and spaces in ways that better serve our communities. “Depository libraries and librarians should not and are not going away. Depository librarians provide a safety net and expertise to ensure that people have free and permanent access to the records of their government and its activities.”

The shape of library spaces and services changes to embrace the needs of the community and in some cases, respond to unforeseen circumstance. As a result of shifting priorities and looming realities, opportunities for streamlining federal documents collections arise as do alternatives for library patrons. FDLP libraries continue to fill the government information needs of the American public whether in house or online. The space and time continuum in the 21st century does not divert libraries from the core values of the Federal Depository Library program. If anything, alternative collecting activities for federal documents collections frees freely available information to be freely available anytime, anywhere. FDLP libraries shape themselves to provide access to America’s legacy as well as America’s future.

**Resources**


---

1 “All Federal depository libraries are required to ensure continued public access to the depository collection, including both tangible and online materials. When depository libraries undergo planned remodelling [sic], undertake a significant move, or otherwise find their public service operations disrupted for an extended period of time, library staff are required to submit a contingency plan to the GPO’s LSCM Office of Outreach & Support. A contingency plan outlines how the library staff will provide access to depository services and collections for all library users, including the general public, during the period of disruption. A contingency plan should be submitted prior to the disruption. A checklist is available to assist you with submitting a contingency plan to GPO.” Government Publishing Office. Moving Your FDL Collection, (2014), [http://www.fdlp.gov/requirements-guidance-2/guidance/2065-moving-fdl-collection](http://www.fdlp.gov/requirements-guidance-2/guidance/2065-moving-fdl-collection).


8 Questions about moving to offsite storage for govdocs. Discussion of Government Document Issues, (June 7, 2016), GOVDOC-L@lists.psu.edu.


11 Outsell, p.51.


13 Ibid., 33.


15 Ibid, 44.

16 Ibid, 45.


19 Outsell, 46.


22 Drake.