

# We Need You! . . . To Become a Preservation Steward

Benefits, Challenges, and Lessons Learned from the Nation's First Preservation Steward

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In October 2016, the University of Colorado-Boulder (CU Boulder) and the Government Publishing Office (GPO) signed the nation's first Preservation Steward Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). CU Boulder, the Regional Federal Depository for the state of Colorado, has pledged to retain and preserve three large collections of legislative history: the U.S. Congressional Serial Set, the bound Congressional Record, and Congressional Hearings. In turn, GPO will cover shipping costs to fill collection gaps and facilitate communication between CU Boulder and other libraries that plan to withdraw large runs of relevant documents. The purpose of this article is to provide a historical context for the Preservation Steward agreement, describe how CU Boulder implemented the MOA, and encourage other depository libraries to become Preservation Stewards.

## A Brief History

The need for the long-term preservation of tangible government documents is not new, but it wasn't until GPO implemented the Regional Discard Policy that the Preservation Steward plan was put into effect. The development of the Regional Discard Policy can be traced back, in part, to the 2012 Forecast Study for Federal Depository Libraries and the 2013 National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) report entitled *Rebooting the Government Printing Office: Keeping America Informed in the Digital Age*. The FDLP Forecast Study "queried Federal depository libraries about their pressing issues, goals, and viewpoints, and asked them to identify initiatives and needs."<sup>1</sup> The need for preservation of tangible and digital documents was a recurrent theme. This was further illustrated by one of GPO's recommendations in the *Future Roles and Opportunities: An FDLP Forecast Study Working Paper* to "allow more flexibility

and collaboration among depository libraries for collection management than Title 44 currently permits (sharing across state lines and regional discards when online version is available)."<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the 2013 NAPA report on the future of the Government Publishing Office stated that,

"To safeguard the historical documents of our democracy for future generations, GPO should work with depository libraries and other library groups to develop a comprehensive plan for preserving the print collection of government documents."<sup>3</sup>

As a result of the FDLP Forecast Study, the NAPA report, and focused discussions with the Depository Library Council and the wider FDLP community, GPO Director Davita Vance-Cooks approached the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) with a proposal to allow Regional Federal Depository libraries to discard depository materials. The JCP responded with a specific set of conditions for the Regional Discard Policy to go into effect. The publication (1) has been retained by the regional in tangible form for a period of seven years from the date of receipt, processing, or shipping list; (2) is available on GPO's Federal Digital System in a format that meets the standards of the Superintendent of Documents as authentic with the digital signature of the Superintendent of Documents; and, (3) exists in tangible format with at least four tangible copies distributed geographically within the FDLP.<sup>4</sup> The third requirement, that the publication exist in tangible format with at least four copies distributed geographically, is the basis for the Preservation Steward agreement. For the Regional Discard Policy to go into effect, GPO must ensure that every document on the discard list is preserved in four geographically-dispersed locations in the

United States. In order to confirm the availability of these copies, GPO developed a Memorandum of Agreement and encouraged depository libraries to become Preservation Stewards.

In the summer of 2016, GPO released a Draft Preservation Steward Memorandum of Agreement.<sup>5</sup> This document described the purpose and background of the Preservation Steward initiative and listed the responsibilities of Preservation Steward libraries and the Government Publishing Office. These included: verifying the existence of the items, ensuring that the items are catalogued, determining that the items are in 'good' condition, storing the items in a climate-controlled environment or housing the items in closed or open stacks with guarantees in place to replace lost documents, and stamping each item and including retention notes in catalog records. The Preservation Steward MOA is completely voluntary, and each library that chooses to join is given the flexibility to identify the specific collections that they want to preserve. Discussions with GPO allow each Preservation Steward to tailor the MOA to their own unique circumstances.

Following the release of the Draft Preservation Steward MOA, GPO hosted a webinar on the Regional Discard Policy and encouraged libraries to become Preservation Stewards. Shortly after this webinar, Peggy Jobe (now retired) and Kate Tallman contacted GPO to start a discussion about volunteering to become the nation's first Preservation Steward. A description of this experience follows.

## An Easy Decision

The decision to become a Preservation Steward was an easy one for the University of Colorado Boulder. The library had a comprehensive, historic, and well-preserved collection of tangible legislative branch documents. For example, in the early 2000's, CU Boulder received a large collection of Serial Set volumes in excellent condition from Colorado State University's off-site storage facility in Fort Collins, Colorado. These documents were shipped directly to CU Boulder's off-site storage facility, the Preservation and Access Service Center for Colorado Academic Libraries (PASCAL), and most volumes hadn't seen the light of day in over 30 years. Additionally, CU Boulder has always received Congressional Hearings and the Bound Congressional Record in paper format, and all of these items have been moved to PASCAL in the past ten years.

Digital access to these collections was also considered during the decision-making process. CU Boulder subscribes to a number of commercial databases that provide access to every item in the Preservation Steward agreement. Public patrons can use these resources on campus with guest wireless or on public computer terminals. Faculty and staff of the library are

also familiar with the many freely accessible sources of digital government information. Circulation statistics for these documents showed that they were rarely requested by patrons, and it was clear that the most frequent users of these documents were library faculty and staff. The government information unit was also eager to contribute to the mission of the new Regional Discard Policy, and the Preservation Steward project was seen as a simple way to make a large impact within the depository community.

The implementation of the Preservation Steward project was dependent on a number of factors. It required institutional support from the University Libraries administration, coordination and consultation with numerous library units and departments, and a willingness of GPO to accommodate unique circumstances. Before bringing a complete proposal to the library's administration, the government information library had to ensure that the project proposal would satisfy GPO's requirements. The Serial Set, Congressional Record, and Congressional Hearing holdings at CU Boulder total over 200,000 individual items and are kept off-site in PASCAL. Therefore, the Government Information library would not be able to physically handle, assess, and stamp every item as required in the draft Memorandum of Agreement. They could, however, provide alternative accommodations, and GPO was agreeable to these modifications. For example, each item in PASCAL has been physically handled and catalogued at some point in time, so a spreadsheet of individual titles was deemed acceptable in lieu of physically inspecting every item.

Soon after receiving the green light from GPO, the government information unit met with library administration and presented their proposal to become a Preservation Steward. Three components of the project were emphasized: (1) the implementation of the Regional Discard Policy would benefit all depository libraries; (2) the project aligned well with the library's new strategic plan; and (3) the library's reputation would benefit from local and national attention. Administrative support for the plan was strong, and only three additional prerequisites were required. First, no item in the Preservation Steward collection could circulate outside of the library. Second, the catalog record for each item must clearly state that the document is retained as a cooperative agreement with the US Government Publishing Office. And third, the signing of the agreement was to be followed with a 'big splash' in the local and regional media.

Five library departments and units were identified as playing a critical role in the Preservation Steward project: government information, circulation, preservation, metadata services (MSD), and special collections and archives (SCA). One or two members of each department were recruited to join the

Preservation Steward planning team and attended a series of meetings. This team took care to ensure that each component of the project integrated well with existing operations, workflows, and procedures of library departments or units. The details of this were hashed out in a long series of meetings, and a description of that process is provided below.

## Circulation and Public Access

The Preservation Steward project required two specific circulation policies: (1) library patrons must be able to request documents from this collection, and; (2) these documents must be available for use on-site for a reasonable period of time. As a result, the Preservation Steward team developed a new set of procedures that could accommodate these policies while meeting the preservation project's standards. When a document is requested from the online catalog, it is pulled from PASCAL and sent to the library circulation department. From there, it is routed to special collections and archives (SCA), and the patron is informed by email that the item may be used in the SCA Reading Room. After use, the document is sent to the preservation unit to be assessed and prepared for its return to PASCAL.

Early discussions with the circulation and preservation department representatives led to a significant change in how the Preservation Steward documents were housed in PASCAL. Each item in the collection was assigned a new location code of SL@P, or "Special Locations at PASCAL". This code represents a special location for rare and valuable items at PASCAL that are evacuated first in the event of an emergency. Preservation Steward materials that already reside in PASCAL receive the location code, but are not physically moved to the SL@P location. The size and complexity of operations at PASCAL would make it too costly, time-consuming, and difficult to move each existing Preservation Steward item to the new location. However, new Preservation Steward documents are given this location code upon receipt, and are physically stored with other SL@P items at PASCAL.

Soon after the Preservation Steward MOA was signed, it was discovered that items with the "limited use" availability status did not produce paging slips at PASCAL. The reason for this remains a mystery, but the circulation department was able to develop a new procedure which involves checking for Preservation Steward requests during a daily analysis of PASCAL requests, and forwarding the list to PASCAL each morning.

## Preservation

Preservation treatment is a critical component of the Preservation Steward agreement. The government information

library worked closely with the preservation unit to identify existing procedures that could be applied to the preservation of these documents. After a patron is finished using a Preservation Steward document, it is routed down to the preservation unit to be assessed for condition and boxed, shrink-wrapped, or placed in a CoLibri cover or pocket. Preservation staff also inspect the catalog record for errors, stamp the document with the official Preservation Steward label, and place stickers on the box or cover. Stickers are never placed on the item itself. These items are then sent to be rehoused in SL@P.

New items receive the same treatment. When a new Serial Set, Congressional Hearing, or Congressional Record arrives from GPO, it is sent down to the preservation unit with stickers and barcodes paper-clipped to bookmarks. The item receives the same treatment as an older document, and is sent to PASCAL with protective housing, condition codes, a SL@P location code, and the "limited use" loan rule. CU Boulder is fortunate to have a knowledgeable and supportive preservation unit. For those libraries where preservation treatment is unavailable or costly, GPO has discussed the possibility of reimbursing the cost of preservation or treating the items at their facility in Washington DC.

## Metadata Services and Cataloguing

The Preservation Steward MOA requires an itemized inventory of all items included in the agreement. For CU Boulder, this has been the biggest challenge of the entire project. The spreadsheet required by GPO includes columns for SuDocs, titles, OCLC numbers, volumes, dates, format, and condition. Depending on the size of the project, this list-making process could vary. For smaller collections, this may be a simple project to host and crowdsource over the course of a few days with some eager volunteers and free coffee. But for a larger collection with over 200,000 items, this requires advanced knowledge of cataloguing procedures and sophisticated list-making skills using the local ILS. For CU Boulder, a strong working relationship and consistent communication between the government information library and the metadata services department was crucial to initiating the project. Multiple list-making meetings and email check-in's were critical to stay on-track with the project. At the time of this article, CU Boulder has been able to provide GPO with a complete list of Congressional Record holdings. A revised list of Congressional Hearings (120,000+ items) has gone through a few drafts and the final list will be delivered by the time of publication. However, an itemized list of US Serial Set volumes is going to take more time. Cataloging practices of the past have made it more difficult for the project team to pull a single list of Serial Set titles and volumes. For now, GPO does

not have any plans to add the Serial Set to the “titles eligible for regional discard”, so this collection is lower on CU Boulder’s list of priorities.

## Daily Depository Operations

The US Congressional Serial Set, Congressional Hearings, and the Bound Congressional Record are still published in tangible formats and shipped regularly to Regional depositories. As a result, the Preservation Steward project is never “complete,” and new items are added every day. Student employees and library staff have been trained to treat Preservation Steward documents differently during the intake and processing of shipping lists and boxes. Rather than stamping and stickering these items as usual, the barcodes are cut out and clipped to bookmarks within the items. These documents are manually delivered to the Preservation unit in weekly batches. Although this process has added a minute or two to the processing time for each item, it has not negatively impacted daily operations.

## Benefits and Challenges

Throughout this project, there have been many unexpected benefits. First, the government information library has developed deeper cooperative relationships with other library departments. This project was a truly collaborative effort and the professionalism and collegiality that has been mutually demonstrated during this time has been extraordinary. Secondly, the promotional “big splash” that was requested by the library administration turned out to be a fun opportunity for the government information library to speak about the importance of government documents to a much wider community. At one point, the department head was interviewed for a popular state-wide news radio show, Colorado Public Radio’s Colorado Matters. As a direct result, the unit received three new library instruction requests from previously unserved faculty.

There were also a few unexpected challenges. Developing a holdings list with every title was, and continues to be, remarkably difficult. Different cataloguing practices in the past led to additional, unforeseen, problems. For example, the government information unit and metadata services department have embarked on a large project to clean up 6,000 Congressional Hearing print records that were erroneously attached to CIS microfiche records. Other challenges occurred when testing the day-to-day project workflow. Student employees found it difficult and time consuming to match, cut-out, and paper-clip the small SuDoc stickers and barcode stickers provided by GPO. Because the SuDoc numbers are visible on barcode stickers, procedures were changed to allow students to only cut-out the barcode stickers. It was also discovered that Preservation Steward

documents and other SL@P items were being placed haphazardly in the same bins as other books arriving from PASCAL. This endangered the items and made it difficult for circulation to identify the correct items to send to the special collections department. The circulation department offered to use a separate bin for SL@P items, thereby providing a cost-effective, easy solution to the problem. Despite these unexpected challenges, if asked whether CU Boulder would go back and do it all over again, the answer would be a resounding yes.

## Why You Should Join

The Preservation Steward agreement is a worthwhile and attainable way for all depositories to highlight their collection strengths and contribute to the mission of the wider FDLP community. All it takes is a phone call to GPO, and they will work to make sure that the Memorandum of Agreement works for most unique circumstances. The Preservation Steward agreement can be marketed to local media, giving depositories the opportunity to promote their collection and services. Collaborative relationships with other departments may be strengthened as the project workflow is developed and refined. The Preservation Steward program also helps move the Regional Discard Policy forward and will eventually allow Regional depositories to weed larger collections of tangible documents. Finally, and most importantly, the Preservation Steward project helps preserve our nation’s print democracy and contribute to the wider mission of the Federal Depository Library Program.

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