Member Survey Response and Forum Discussions – Law and Government Information
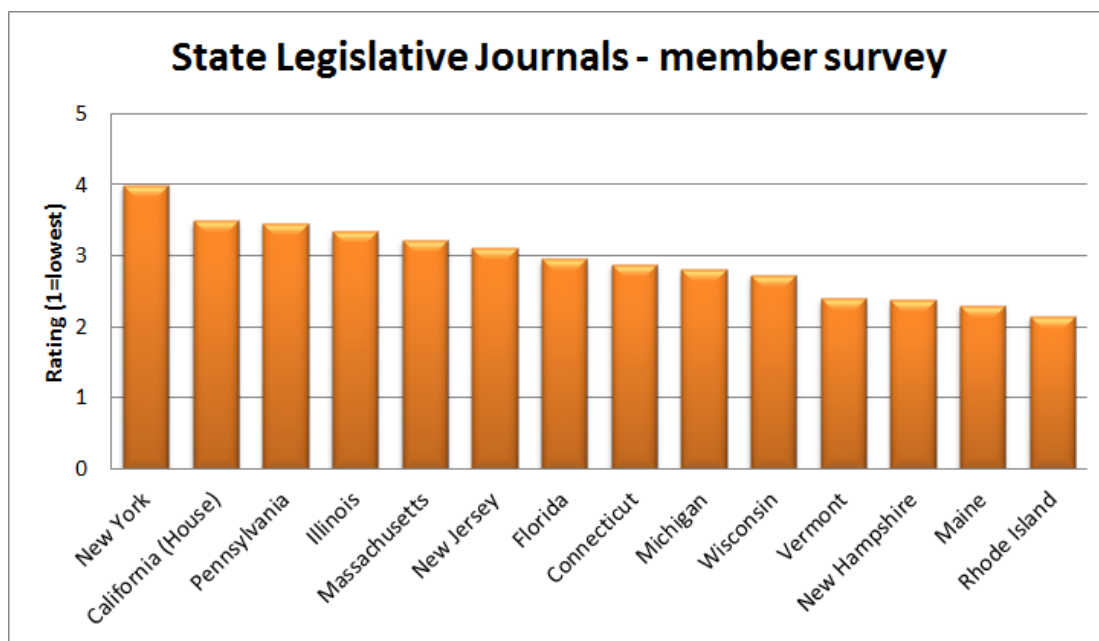
To inform the discussions at the 2015 CRL Global Resources Collections Forum: "**Shared Resources / Common Vision**," we issued a series of questionnaires aimed at measuring the importance to CRL libraries of prospective licensing, assessment, and digitization efforts. Below we summarize the responses we received between March 17 and April 20 and the conclusions we drew from the survey results and the input from participants during the Forum.

I. Survey on CRL's Global Resources Law Partnership

CRL's Global Resources Partnerships bring new expertise and resources to bear on CRL's ability to digitize and provide access to published materials in its major collecting domains. CRL and the Law Library Microform Consortium (LLMC) are working together to identify and preserve important at-risk primary legal and government publications from U.S. and other national jurisdictions. Materials include: U.S. state legislative journals, official gazettes, and legal and government publications from Africa, Latin America, South Asia, pre-Soviet Russia, and other regions.

Survey Question L-1. U.S. State Legislative Journals

For the past three years CRL and LLMC have been digitizing U.S. state legislative serials. All CRL holdings of journals from 30 states have now been scanned; six additional states are in the pipeline. To help prioritize the volume of material still awaiting conversion, we sought input on which of the not-yet-digitized states' journals would rank high rank in respondents' priorities for digital access. The level of interest was expressed on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest.

State Legislative Journals - member survey

27 responses

Responses (summarized above) show varying interest in the states targeted for digitization. In examining the individual responses, we found that preferences were influenced by the geographic locale of the

responding institution (e.g., Midwest institutions ranked Midwestern states higher in priority). However, the plurality of responses tended to favor larger states (New York, California, Pennsylvania) and states with political "sway" nationally or regionally.
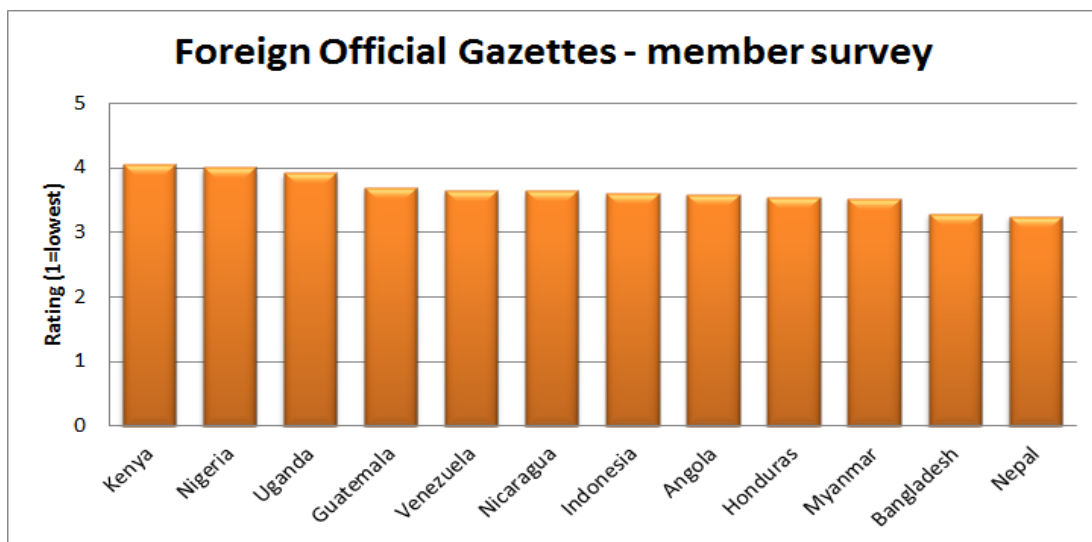
Beyond state legislative journals, members expressed interest in including other state documents (blue books, legislative manuals/rules, statistical yearbooks, and other state annual statistical compilations) and state agency reports, as well as documents published by city and municipal governments.

Given the limits on library preservation resources and the vast array of materials published at the provincial, state and local level that could potentially be digitized, it will be necessary to "triage." For one, gaps should be filled in CRL Canadian legislative journals, most notably remedying the absence of journals from provinces like Alberta. On U.S. local and state government documents, we believe that CRL should focus on areas where available print holdings coincide with proven demand. For example, CRL might build upon Project Ceres digitization of agricultural materials by digitizing water-related state publications. Significant new investment in this area, however, will require CRL to obtain greater support from land grant and other public institutions.

Survey Question L-2. Foreign Official Gazettes

An important element of the strategic agenda that emerged from CRL's April 2014 Leviathan forum was that, given the scarcity of resources available for preservation today and the overwhelming volume of documents and publications produced by governments, libraries should "focus their efforts on what is known to be at risk and what is not likely to be adequately preserved by other actors, public sector or private." With a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, CRL is now digitizing a particularly endangered class of such materials: official gazettes (FOGs) from ten African and Middle Eastern countries cited in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index as among those governed by the world's most corrupt regimes. CRL's targets currently include Algeria, Republic of Congo, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

To help prioritize additional content moving forward, we sought CRL library input on countries well represented by gazettes in CRL's collections that would be high priority for digital access.

26 responses

The responses to the FOG survey question showed remarkable consistency across all named countries, with a slight preference for gazettes from African and Latin American countries over Asian countries. Respondents suggested many other countries of interest in Latin America, Africa, Middle East, and Southeast Asia. We conclude that interest in official gazettes and other foreign government publications remains high across the board.

Based on this validation from the membership, CRL will continue to focus its foreign documents digitization and preservation efforts on materials from unstable or repressive regimes particularly from sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, and from conflict zones in all regions.
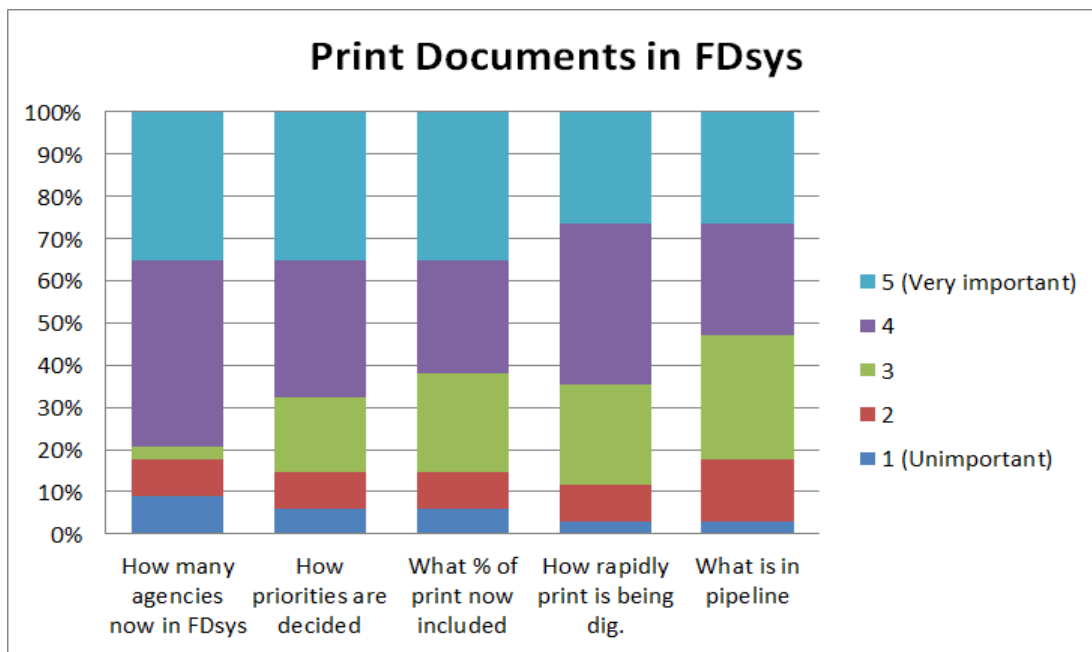
II. Survey on CRL's Assessment of FDsys

As an outcome of the 2014 Global Resources Forum, "Leviathan: Libraries and Government Information in the Age of Big Data," CRL is assessing the U.S. federal government's digital preservation capabilities. Because many CRL libraries participate in the Federal Depository Library Program, and therefore have a stake in the preservation and accessibility of federal government documents, it seems particularly appropriate to examine the GPO's FDsys system in particular. According to the GPO, "The system is a comprehensive repository of 'digitally signed' official publications from all three branches of the Federal Government."

Our survey was designed to help ascertain which aspects of FDsys are most relevant to collection-related decisions being made at CRL libraries.

Survey Question F-1: Print Documents in FDsys

The first question we asked pertained to information related to print documents digitized and ingested into FDsys. Specifically we asked how important (again, on a scale of 1 to 5) were the following five aspects of FDsys:

1. The percentage of the entire print corpus of federal government documents now included in FDsys
2. The number of federal agencies now represented in FDsys content
3. The pace at which the print document corpus is being digitized for inclusion
4. What is in the GPO pipeline for digitization
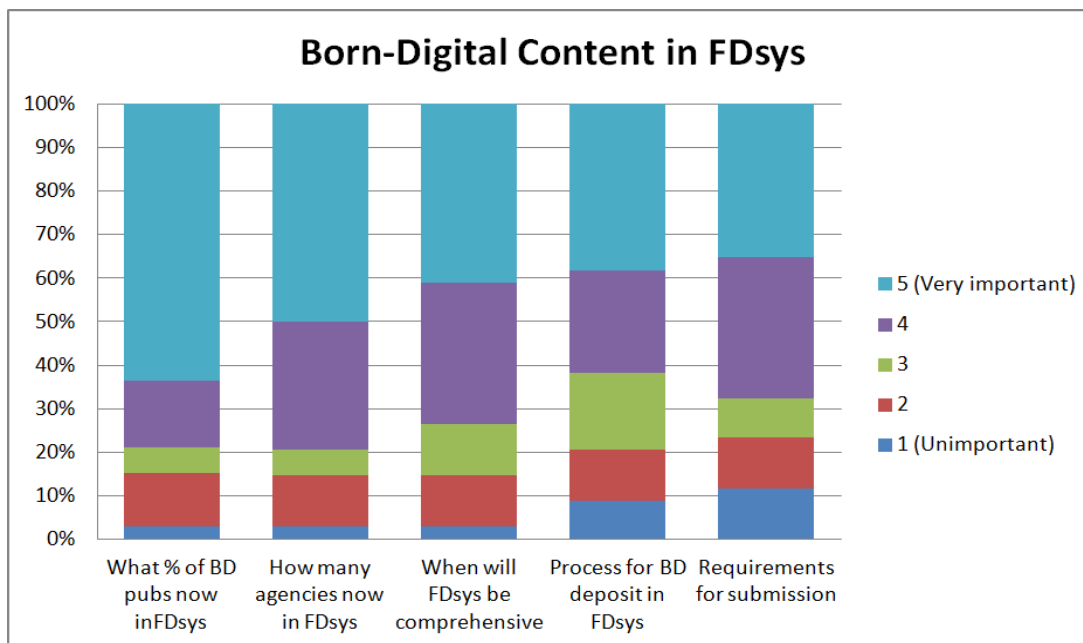5. How priorities for digitization are decided

34 responses

In general, the matter of the comprehensiveness of the digitized print content in FDsys showed strong interest across the board. Respondents wanted a better understanding the scope of content currently

contained in FDsys, including how many agencies are presently represented, and what percentage of the entire federal government print corpus has been ingested to date. Also of interest was how GPO selects and prioritizes content for ingest into FDsys, as well as the rate of ingest—in short, how much content, and what content, can one expect to see in FDsys within the foreseeable future?

Survey Question F-2: Born-Digital Content in FDsys

Our second question dealt with the born-digital content, rather than digitized print publications, in FDsys. We asked respondents to rate the importance of information on five aspects of FDsys:

1. The percentage of all existing born-digital publications of the federal government now included in FDsys
2. The number of federal agencies now represented in FDsys content
3. When FDsys will be comprehensive, at the rate born-digital agency publications are now being added
4. The process for federal agency deposit of born-digital content in FDsys
5. How stringent requirements are for federal agencies submission of content to FDsys
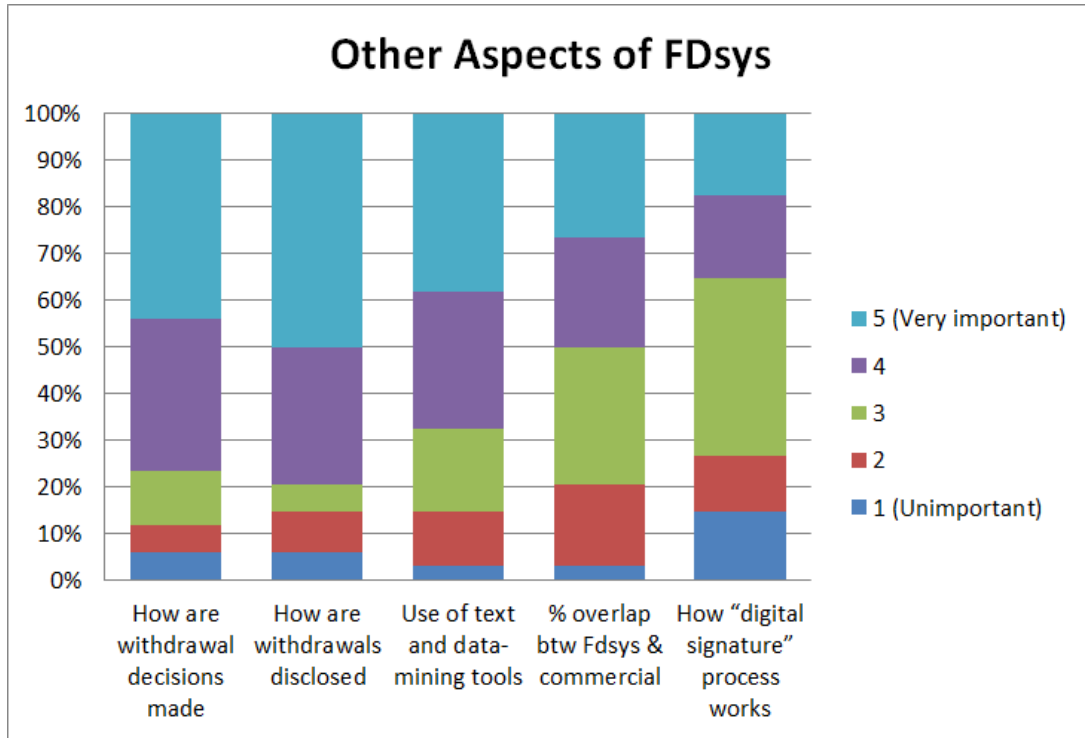

34 responses

Again, the comprehensiveness of FDsys was the primary concern. Of less concern to libraries were the mechanics of ingest and requirements for agency submission.

Survey Question F-3: Other Aspects of FDsys

Finally, we asked for input on other aspects of FDsys, namely:

1. The degree of overlap between federal government documents included in commercial databases and those in FDsys
2. The extent to which standard text and data-mining tools can be used on FDsys content

3. How the GPO's document authentication or "digital signature" process works
4. What is involved in the withdrawal of federal government content from FDsys (for example, how and by whom are withdrawal decisions made?)
5. How information about such withdrawals is disclosed

34 responses

Respondents were most concerned about the circumstances under which content might be withdrawn from FDsys. Clarity of policies and transparency of the process are significant issues for libraries that may rely on FDsys to retain government-produced content not collected by others. Respondents also wanted to know more about how usable FDsys content might be with tools for text and data mining.

Free-form comments from respondents exposed a range of concerns. Many respondents pointed out the risk of relying on a central single repository of all government-produced material in digitized and born-digital formats. Some argued for redundancy and backup systems, especially for born-digital content, to protect against data loss, whether accidental or through deliberate government action.

Other respondents expressed a desire for information about the preservation components of FDsys, discoverability and usability of content by researchers, and how FDsys might be better integrated into the scholarly research process.

The survey responses, and the comments and questions from attendees at the online Forum, suggest that the primary concern about FDsys is the GPO's ability to populate the repository with the born-digital publications of federal agencies, so that it fulfills its stated purposes as a "comprehensive repository." Respondents were less curious about the technical underpinnings of FDsys, and the processes by which agency publications are ingested. Therefore CRL will focus its assessment of FDsys primarily on factors affecting its scope and comprehensiveness.

Some respondents also expressed strong support for the idea of libraries digitizing legacy print documents. However, because several federal document digitization efforts already exist or have been announced, notably the CIC-Google program to create a comprehensive digital library of federal government documents, CRL will continue to confine its digitization efforts in this area to support of the TRAIL program for the time being.

Additional thoughts on the survey questions and CRL's findings may be sent to Bernard Reilly (breilly@crl.edu) and James Simon (jsimon@crl.edu).

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