

# Doc Soup: Dealing with Documents in Small Non-Depository Libraries

Lisa K. Dalton

I suspect that every depository librarian in the United States would contend that government documents are underutilized. Generally, this concept is justified, as the process of acquiring, processing, and especially using government publications has gained a pea soup image of confusion and struggle.

This article, however, is not for depository librarians; its purpose is to convince librarians in small public libraries and school media centers—notorious underutilizers—that collecting government publications at the federal and state levels is both achievable and desirable.

When I agreed to write this article I was a depository librarian. Federal depositories receive hundreds of documents weekly; and since I had been saturated in this environment for several years, I wanted to explain how easy it is to put government publications to use in all libraries. I wanted to demonstrate that the Government Printing Office is just another publisher like Gale or Oryx, and that responsible collection development demands reviewing GPO catalogs and studying published bibliographies of useful titles.

Now that I work in a small public library, I am beginning to understand that identifying and obtaining documents is not necessarily a simple matter; and the GPO, with its bureaucratic practices, is not just another publisher. The fact that GPO requires advance payment, for example, makes ordering from this agency unpopular in many school media centers and local governments that pay only for items actually received.

Nevertheless, government information must be an essential part of a library's resources as documents are frequently a unique source of information, and sometimes they are the only place to go for an official, definitive answer. What can substitute for the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance*<sup>1</sup> when an eager young couple comes in wanting to know about financial aid for starting a small business? How do librarians who are budgeting their time as well as their finances go about

selecting, acquiring, and organizing government publications?

## Selection

Sales and marketing are an important part of GPO's mission, and several free catalogs, described below, are available by writing the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402-9325.

*U.S. Government Books* is attractive, annotated, and illustrated. Listing approximately one thousand titles for sale in each issue, the catalog highlights recent releases in a separate section. Although GPO will send as many copies of this catalog as are requested, it does not maintain a mailing list for this title. Those who order from the catalog will receive the next one automatically. Otherwise each update must be requested individually. It is a simple matter to type up a stack of postcards requesting the latest issue of *U.S. Government Books* and mail them out two or three times a year.

*New Books* is designed to appeal to professionals, and lists more titles than *U.S. Government Books*, but it includes no annotations. A nice feature in this catalog is the list of government Best Sellers in the back, a quick checklist. A mailing list is maintained for this title.

Librarians who want to concentrate on specific subject specialties should request a copy of the *Subject Bibliography Index*. Each Subject Bibliography (SB) is a list of popular sales items. *Space, Rockets, and Satellites*; *National Defense and Security*; and *Drug Abuse* are three examples of the more than two hundred titles in this series. If a library collects heavily in one of the subject areas, a good promotional device is to request an extra hundred copies of the relevant SB for distribution to patrons.

A final selection aid available from the Superintendent of Documents is *Government Periodicals and Subscription Services*, popularly known as *Price List 36*. As the title indicates, this catalog lists government serial publications. Most of the Wilson indexes, even *Reader's Guide to Periodical*

Lisa K. Dalton is Reference Librarian at Rockingham County Public Library, Eden, North Carolina.

Literature, include a few documents among the titles they index, and more scholarly guides like *PAIS Bulletin* include many.

All of the titles listed above include only government publications that are for sale. The single widely available catalog that advertises free documents is the *Consumer Information Catalog*, which is available quarterly from Consumer Information Center, P.O. Box 100, Pueblo, Colorado 81002. The Consumer Information Center will add customers to their mailing list who will accept at least twenty-five extra copies of the catalog to distribute.

The most comprehensive list of North Carolina state publications is the *Checklist of Official North Carolina State Publications*.<sup>2</sup> A bimonthly compilation of cataloging records, the *Checklist* is available at no charge to librarians who request it from Division of State Library, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2807.

As a beginning step, reviewing catalogs is an easy and efficient way to select government documents. However, as agencies are identified which are most likely to have useful publications for specific collections, it is appropriate to contact these agencies directly and ask to be put on mailing lists for their publication announcements. The U.S. Bureau of the Census, for example, maintains a mailing list for its *Monthly Product Announcement*.<sup>3</sup> Upon the completion of the 1990 decennial census, these announcements will be of particular interest for the next two to four years.

---

## ... the process of acquiring, processing, and especially using government publications has gained a pea soup image of confusion and struggle.

---

Two commercial publications which will be useful for identifying appropriate agencies and which provide addresses and phone numbers are Carol Smallwood's *A Guide to Selected Federal Agency Programs and Publications for Librarians and Teachers*<sup>4</sup> and Michael Spencer's *Free Publications from U.S. Government Agencies, A Guide*.<sup>5</sup> These two books will both be of continuing usefulness for this purpose because they are less concerned with itemizing specific titles than with explaining agency functions and discussing types of publications available. The *United States Government Manual*<sup>6</sup> is the official directory of fed-

eral agencies and is therefore essential for finding addresses and telephone numbers. The *Government Manual* also lists agency name changes and defunct offices.

The *Directory of the State and County Officials of North Carolina*<sup>7</sup> provides mailing information for state agencies. In addition, the *Checklist of Official North Carolina State Publications* lists addresses for agencies whose publications it includes in individual issues. Another State Library product, "Core Collection of North Carolina State Documents,"<sup>8</sup> is a valuable basic selection tool. (See end of article.) Just three pages long, this list notes eighteen state publications—several are available to libraries at no charge—which should be included in all North Carolina libraries, as well as recommending titles for more comprehensive collections. Ordering information is included for each title.

When requesting publication lists from state agencies, the Institute of Government's (IOG) catalog should be included (Publications Office, Institute of Government, CB# 3330, Knapp Building, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-3330). The IOG does not participate fully in the state depository program, but its publications explain state and local government activities and should not be overlooked.

The previous paragraphs identify steps interested librarians can take in order to stay actively informed of new government publications. Another important step involves scanning library literature for announcements and reviews. Several library journals, including *RQ* and *Booklist*, have regular features highlighting government documents. *Vertical File Index* is a good source for inexpensive pamphlets issued by various agencies.

## Acquisition

Having made the effort to collect catalogs and establish a place on agency mailing lists, and then of course to select appropriate titles from these tools, librarians must decide how to order them or, more accurately, how to pay for them. In the catalogs mentioned above are order blanks and accurate bibliographical information.

The Government Printing Office accepts checks, money orders, and credit cards, and has a deposit account plan, described in *U.S. Government Books*, which is very convenient. For most libraries these mechanisms will be sufficient. The catch is that GPO will not bill, and many libraries, especially school libraries, cannot pay for an item until it has been delivered and an invoice has been

sent. One high school media coordinator told me that she had not ordered the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* for years because there had been no way to pay for it.

GPO tries to be accommodating. If a library will submit a purchase order, upon request GPO will prepare a pro forma invoice, in as many copies as desired, and will return it with the purchase order to the customer agency for the issuance of a check. When the purchase order and check are sent to GPO, the document will be delivered.

Alternative arrangements can sometimes be made. Frequently an issuing agency will have copies of its publications that it can distribute at no charge; GPO must always charge. A form letter that reads, "If available at no charge, please send [number] copies of [leave space for multiple titles] to [name and address]. If there is a charge for these publications, please send only ordering information. Thank you." is a simple device. Sometimes agencies will be very cooperative; at other times they will refer inquiries back to GPO.

A second option for acquiring government publications is to go through a jobber who can send out invoices. Baker and Taylor has a "Continuation Service" list of U.S. government serials which it will supply; individual titles can be requested as well. In its promotional literature, the Book House claims to supply government publications at local, state, and federal levels upon request. Susan L. Dow has prepared a list of jobbers who will acquire government publications, and identifies their pricing practices as well as whether they supply municipal, state, federal, or international titles.<sup>9</sup> The disadvantages of using these services are that they may not be able to fill all requests, and that they almost certainly will charge more for the documents than the publishing agency would.

Federal documents are not copyrighted, and sometimes commercial publishers will reprint a

tion of government documents to their collections. For non-depository librarians, commercial reprints or reissues can be helpful if they cost less than the original version or if they have been modified so that there is added value. A good index, for example, adds value. Taking several publications and combining them into reference compilations can be another method of increasing usefulness.

---

## **If government documents are underutilized, much of the blame lies in the way they are organized:**

---

GPO gives a twenty-five percent discount to designated bookdealers and educational bookstores, or to anyone ordering one hundred or more copies of a single publication or subscription. So it is feasible for a commercial publisher to sell popular government titles for less than the price announced in *U.S. Government Books. A Basic Guide to Exporting*, originally listed by GPO at \$8.50, was advertised in an NTC (National Textbook Company) Business Books catalog at \$7.95. However, there is a much higher probability that the commercial publisher will count on a consumer's unfamiliarity with government publications and elevate the price considerably.

Sometimes there is no way to avoid ordering directly from GPO and paying in advance. In such cases, school librarians have used available funds from lost book fines, PTA donations, or other gifts to meet the government's requirements.<sup>11</sup>

Information concerning the acquisition of state publications is more limited than for federal titles. In North Carolina, the *Checklist* provides instructions for ordering the documents it lists. Paper copies should be ordered from the issuing agency, but microfiche copies may be requested through Interlibrary Loan from the State Library for the cost of duplicating the fiche. Copies may also be borrowed or reproduced from state depository collections.

### **Organization**

If government documents are underutilized, much of the blame lies in the way they are organized:

It is essential to address the question of accessibility in determining whether to add particular items to your collection. It does little good to have material on library shelves if library patrons cannot make use of them... If there is no existing access point to a publication, or your

---

## **... government information must be an essential part of a library's resources ...**

---

publication. The government encourages this practice; specifically, the Office of Management and Budget requires "maximum feasible reliance on the private sector for the dissemination of products or services."<sup>10</sup> Depository librarians become terribly offended with this policy because it constitutes a threat to the concept of free distribu-



library cannot afford the only one available, it would generally be a mistake to select the item.<sup>12</sup>

That is, if documents are not cataloged, they become harder to find. It is wise to consider, before selection if possible, how to make government publications as logical a product of a patron's search as any other library materials.

With many documents, cataloging is an obvious choice. If a library has spent eighty-two dollars on the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-1989*, full cataloging is to be expected. However, *General Information Concerning Patents*, a forty-five page booklet available for two dollars, or the brochure, *Comparing Contraceptives*, may not warrant full cataloging records. Where does the item belong? If the library maintains a *working* vertical file collection, many documents fit in well there. The Rockingham County Public Library adds short records to its online catalog as vertical file materials are circulated. This is particularly effective when keyword searching is available.

In his article, "Dead End for Documents—Alternatives to the Vertical File," Frank Lee suggests placing ephemeral materials in pamphlet files in the stacks.<sup>13</sup> Government periodicals should be filed with other periodicals, especially when they are included in commercial indexes.

Whatever the choice, separate documents collections should be avoided in small libraries because they tend to be relegated to obscure corners and forgotten. Integration will promote

---

### **... separate documents collections should be avoided in small libraries because they tend to be relegated to obscure corners and forgotten.**

---

the use of the documents in the collection simply because of the browsing factor.

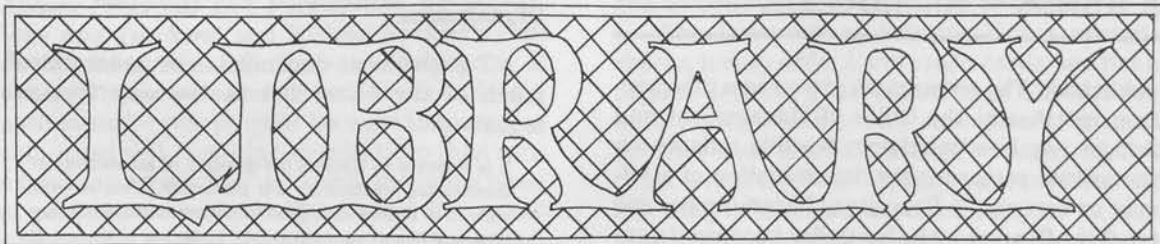
### **Conclusion**

There are no simple recipes for collecting government documents. To be done well, selection procedures should be followed on a continuing basis. A system should be worked out that will allow a successor to know which documents have been ordered in the past and what should be requested on a recurring basis. Once documents are in the collection, they should be as easy to find as any comparable library materials.

Collecting government publications is hardly as easy as duck soup, but it is a responsible practice that will add spice and balance to library collections.

### **References**

1. U.S. Office of Management and Budget. *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance*. Annual, looseleaf with updates. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).
2. *Checklist of Official North Carolina State Publications*. Bi-monthly. (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of State Library).
3. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Monthly Product Announcement*. (Washington, D.C.: User Publications Section, Bureau of the Census). To subscribe, contact Customer Services, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20233; (301) 763-4100.
4. Carol Smallwood, *A Guide to Selected Federal Agency Programs and Publications for Librarians and Teachers*. (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1986).
5. Michael G. Spencer, *Free Publications from U.S. Government Agencies: A Guide*. (Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1989).
6. U.S. Office of the Federal Register. *U.S. Government Manual*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989), 52.
7. *Directory of the State and County Officials of North Carolina*, compiled by John L. Cheney, Jr. (Raleigh, NC: Secretary of State, 1989).
8. The "Core Collection of North Carolina State Documents" is excerpted from *North Carolina State Documents Depository System: Handbook for Depository Libraries* (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State Publications Clearinghouse, 1989).
9. Susan L. Dow, "A Selective Directory of Government Document Dealers, Jobbers and Subscription Agents," *Serials Librarian* 14 (1988): 157-186.
10. *Federal Register*, 24 December 1985, p. 52736.
11. "What's Up, Docs? Documents in the Schools," presented by the North Carolina Library Association Documents Section at the NCLA Biennial Conference, October 13, 1989, in Charlotte, North Carolina.
12. "Collection Development Policy," *Federal Depository Library Manual*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1984), 4.
13. Frank Lee, "Dead End for Documents—Alternatives to the Vertical File," *Public Library Quarterly* 6 (Fall 1985): 51-55.



## Core Collection of North Carolina State Documents

*Editor's Note: The Core Collection of North Carolina State Documents is a list of thirty-seven titles that was drafted by Michael Cotter for the Depository System Committee of the Documents Section of the North Carolina Library Association in 1986. This Core list was included in materials used by the Committee for background information for the North Carolina State Documents Depository System and is part of the Handbook for Depository Libraries, available from the North Carolina State Publications Clearinghouse.*

**Level 1:** For basic collections in all North Carolina libraries.

**Level 2:** For intermediate collections in metropolitan libraries.

**Level 3:** For comprehensive collections in research libraries.

All North Carolina libraries should have publications marked Level 1. Level 2 collections should have all publications marked 1 or 2. Level 3 collections should have all publications marked 1, 2, or 3.

<sup>1</sup>**Checklist of official North Carolina state publications** (bimonthly).

Division of State Library, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh, NC 27601.

Free to all libraries; not distributed to individuals.

<sup>3</sup>**County government in North Carolina** (1989 latest).

Publications Office, Institute of Government, Knapp Bldg. CB#3330, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3330.

1 free copy to libraries, additional copies \$18.50 plus 5% tax.

<sup>2</sup>**Crime in North Carolina (Uniform crime reports)** (annual).

Division of Criminal Information, Department of Justice, 407 N. Blount St., Raleigh, NC 27601-1009.

Free to State Government libraries. \$15.00 to all other libraries.

<sup>3</sup>**Daily Bulletin of the General Assembly** (during legislative sessions).

Robert P. Joyce, Publications Office, Institute of Government, Knapp Bldg. CB#3330, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3330.

Price varies. Governmental rate for libraries: \$30.00-\$60.00 first class, \$15.00-\$30.00 third class; \$150.00-\$300.00 for Bulletin Service and copies of bills introduced.

<sup>1</sup>**Directory of manufacturing firms in North Carolina** (biennial).

Industrial Development Division, North Carolina Department of Commerce, Department D, P.O. Box 25249, Raleigh, NC 27611. \$52.50 to all libraries.

<sup>1</sup>**Directory of the state and county officials of North Carolina** (annual).

Secretary of State, Room 302, Legislative Office Building, 300 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC 27603-5905.

\$2.00.

<sup>1</sup>**Directory of trade and professional associations.**

School of Business and Economics, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27412-5001.

\$14.75.

<sup>2</sup>**The General Assembly of North Carolina: a handbook for legislators** (1985 latest).

Publications Office, Institute of Government, Knapp Bldg., CB#3330, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill 27599-3330.

\$7.50.

<sup>1</sup>**General statutes of North Carolina.**

Michie Company, P.O. Box 7587, Charlottesville, VA 22906-7587.

\$700.00 set; yearly price varies according to the extent of revisions needed; approximately \$400.00 per year.

<sup>2</sup>**Guide to research materials in the North Carolina State Archives, section b: county records** (1990 latest).

Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 109 E. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27601.

\$10.00; 10% discount to libraries; \$2.00 postage; order from Historical Publications Section, same address.

<sup>2</sup>**Municipal government in North Carolina.**

Publications Office, Institute of Government, Knapp Bldg. CB#3330, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3330.

1 free copy to all libraries, additional copies \$15.00 plus 5% tax.

<sup>3</sup>**North Carolina administrative code.**

Office of Administrative Hearings, P.O. Drawer 11566, Raleigh, NC 27604.

\$750.00 first year; \$350.00 renewal; prices for individual volumes available.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina agricultural statistics** (annual).

North Carolina Department of Agriculture, 1 W. Edenton St., P.O. Box 27767, Raleigh, NC 27611.

Free.

<sup>2</sup>**North Carolina building code** (irregular).

Code Council Section, North Carolina Department of Insurance, P.O. Box 26387, Raleigh, NC 27611.

\$103.00 for 8 volumes; individual prices available.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina education directory** (annual).

Publications Division, Department of Public Instruction, Room 101, Education Building, Raleigh, NC 27603-1712.

\$5.00 if picked up; \$6.00 with tax and postage.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina General Assembly, House of Representatives, rules—directory** (biennial).

Office of the Clerk, North Carolina House of Representatives, Room 2319, State Legislative Building, Raleigh, NC 27611.

Free.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina General Assembly, Senate, rules—directory** (biennial).

Office of the Clerk, North Carolina Senate, Room 2020, State Legislative Building, Raleigh, NC 27611.

Free.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina government, 1585-1979.**

Secretary of State, Room 302, Legislative Office Building, 300 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC 27603-5905.

\$31.35.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina highway map** (annual).

North Carolina Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 25201, Raleigh, NC 27611.

Free; also may be obtained from local office.

<sup>2</sup>**North Carolina legislation** (annual).

Publications Office, Institute of Government, Knapp Bldg., CB#3330, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3330.

Price varies: 1989 ed., \$20.00. Short sessions, \$10.00-\$12.00.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina manual** (biennial).

Secretary of State, Room 302, Legislative Office Building, 300 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC 27603-5905.

Free to NC public and school libraries on inquiry; \$12.00 mailed in-state, or \$15.00 mailed out-of-state.

<sup>2</sup>**North Carolina municipal population** (annual).

Library, Research and Planning Services, Office of State Budget and Management, 116 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27603.

Free.

<sup>3</sup>**North Carolina register** (twice a month).

Office of Administrative Hearings, P.O. Drawer 11666, Raleigh, NC 27604.

\$105.00 per year.

<sup>3</sup>**North Carolina reports and North Carolina Court of Appeals reports** (continuing).

Administrative Office of the Courts, P.O. Box 2448, Raleigh, NC 27602.

Prices vary for bound volumes; advance sheets, \$66.11 per year.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina state capitol telephone directory** (annual).

Facility Management Division, Department of Administration, 431 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC 27611.

Free to state employees on the State Centrex System; sold to all others for \$3.00 per copy.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina state government statistical abstract** (irregular, 1984 latest).

Library, Research and Planning Services, Office of State Budget and Management, 116 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27603.

\$4.00 plus tax.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina statistical register.**

Library, Research and Planning Services, Office of State Budget and Management, 116 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27603.

Free to State Depository Libraries. \$5.00 plus tax to all others.

<sup>1</sup>**North Carolina vital statistics, vols. 1 and 2** (annual).

Division of Statistics and Information Services, Dept. of Human Resources, Cotten Building, Box 27687, Raleigh, NC 27611-7687.

Free.

<sup>1</sup>**Popular government** (quarterly).

Publications Office, Institute of Government, Knapp Bldg., CB#3330, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3330.

\$8.00 per year.

<sup>1</sup>**Profile, North Carolina counties** (1986 ed. latest, with 1987 update).

Library, Research and Planning Services, Office of State Budget and Management, 116 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27603.

\$10.00 plus tax; update \$5.00 plus tax.

<sup>2</sup>**Salary plan, State of North Carolina** (1988 latest).

Office of State Personnel, 116 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27603.

Free to libraries.

<sup>2</sup>**Session laws** (annual).

Secretary of State, Room 302, Legislative Office Building, 300 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC 27603-5905.

Price varies.

<sup>2</sup>**Statistical abstract of higher education in North Carolina** (annual).  
General Administration, University of North Carolina, P.O. Box 2688, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2688.  
Free.

<sup>2</sup>**Statistical profile of North Carolina public schools** (annual).  
Publications Division, Department of Public Instruction, Room 101, Education Building, Raleigh, NC 27603-1712.  
Price varies; approximately \$15.00 plus tax and postage.

<sup>3</sup>**Statistics of taxation** (biennial).  
Tax Research Division, North Carolina Department of Revenue, P.O. Box 25000, Raleigh, NC 27640.  
Free to all libraries.

<sup>2</sup>**Summary of the recommended state budget** (biennial with annual updates).  
Office of State Budget and Management, 116 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27603-8005.  
Free to all libraries.

<sup>1</sup>**Tax guide** (biennial).  
Library, Research and Planning Services, Office of State Budget and Management, 116 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27603.  
\$5.00 plus tax.



## When it comes to service, EBSCO believes in "being there."

EBSCO has Sales Representatives who, through the years, have traveled hundreds of thousands of miles and worn out scores of shoes just to "be there" for our customers. That's because we feel that *to offer truly professional service we must offer truly personal service.*

At EBSCO, we think *librarians should be served by experienced serials professionals who will "be there" for them.* Isn't that what you expect from a professional subscription agency?



8000 Forbes Place, Suite 204 • Springfield, VA 22151  
703-321-9630 (Tel) • 800-368-3290 (Outside VA) • 703-321-9159 (Fax)