

A Brave New World of Gov Docs

By Larry McCallum.

Government information is increasingly dispersed among a myriad of departmental websites. It's also backing away from print depository distribution. And yet a number of portals have emerged to facilitate access, and digitization is yielding an unprecedented wealth of documents, according to specialist librarians at a government documents forum on September 29th, 2011.

"It's not like the old days of CODOC," the University of Victoria's Caron Rollins told the forum. "You can't walk into any library now and know that even five percent of what's available is there."

The forum, titled .gc and .bc: New Ways of Accessing Government Information, was hosted by Vancouver Island University Libraries and the BCLA Vancouver Island Interest Group. It also heard from Legislative Library of B.C. librarians about two projects: the digitization of historical royal commission reports; and a MARC records batch service allowing libraries to make their catalogues a destination for B.C. government documents.

As comprehensive as anything can be

Today's environment is "multiple sources, multiple platforms, multiple places," said Rollins, UVic's librarian for government publications and political science. And though Publishing & Depository Services' catalogue has 180,000 records, fully 70,000 are electronic only. The 2011 Census release will be purely electronic.

Even so, the PDS catalogue, started in 1992, now stands at 85% compliance, versus only 27% at one point, making it "a great way to get publications," she added. "It's as comprehensive as anything can be for federal government information."

Rollins ran through several government portals, such as StatsCan Library's catalogue with its links to various formats and downloadable MARC.

She valued Statistics Canada Library's digitization of "everything since 1886" and its intention to digitize more. "This is huge," she said. "I can throw out rotting materials and free up shelf space."

Other troves include the Treasury Board's departmental performance reports, and Parliament

of Canada's LEGISinfo, where you can check the progress of any bill or read reconstituted debates from the 1860s and '70s. Previously, "you needed an entire law library to do this work," Rollins said.

While praising the APLIC portal, where Canadian governments share MARC records, she lamented that the federal government lacks a comprehensive discovery service like the U.S. GPO's MetaLib: "I want this for Canada."

Library catalogues as gov doc portals

Public and academic libraries themselves can be portals to government information by uploading records to their catalogues from the new MARC Records Batch Service, said Iona Reid, Acquisition & Serials Librarian at the Legislative Library.

"If you participate in the service, you make your library an access point to government documents," Reid said.

One purpose for launching the service was to comb through B.C. Government websites to identify documents, obtain duplicate permissions, and create permanent links to them. "It all shuffles every time there's a change of government, so we're essentially providing an archival service," she said, while noting that print is fading: "We used to get dozens of boxes monthly from the Queen's Printer, and now we're lucky if we get two a month."

UVic Library cataloguers "neutralize" the records for common use, and ELN hosts the MARC Record Download Site. Participating libraries simply go to <http://www.eln.B.C..ca/view.php?id=1876> where the files are listed.

Marjorie Holmes and the royal commissions

Meanwhile, the Legislative Library has been digitizing historical collections with research value, including B.C.'s royal commissions from 1872 to 1980 concerning subjects ranging from the coal-mine riots to milk supply and "mental hygiene". Costs for scanning the royal commissions were \$6,600, or 22 cents per page.

The project includes Marjorie Holmes' 1872-1942 checklist, "the bible of early B.C. government

documents," said Marilyn Carr-Harris, B.C. government documents librarian at the Legislative Library. It also benefits from Judy Bennett's 1943-1981 sequel.

A portal to the commissions is now in the works, Carr-Harris said, though they're available at <http://www.lB.C..leg.B.C..ca/public/lB.C.doc/commissionschecklist.htm>.

[ssionschecklist.htm](http://www.lB.C..leg.B.C..ca/public/lB.C.doc/commissionschecklist.htm). The project involved Commonwealth Imaging, though "quality control is always harder with an outside vendor," she noted.

Other projects earmarked by the B.C. Research Libraries task group include the B.C. Gazette (1863-present), B.C. Sessional Papers (1876-1977), and B.C. Newspaper Index (1900-2007).