



State Printing Expenditures Have Decreased, But Additional Steps Could Produce More Savings

at a glance

Due to increased electronic document production and distribution, statewide printing costs have fallen by about 25% over the past decade, with agencies spending \$20.7 million to print hard copy documents in Fiscal Year 2004-05. However, existing statutory provisions should be strengthened to better control these costs and speed the transition to electronic document distribution. The Legislature should consider establishing a statewide policy for electronic document distribution and improving existing accountability mechanisms.

Scope

As requested by the Legislature, this report examines the production and distribution of public documents by state agencies. Our review addressed two questions.

- How much are agencies spending to produce and distribute public documents?
- Are existing statutory provisions effective in managing these costs?

Background

State agencies perform many activities that involve providing information to the public. These include such efforts as distributing

information on health care risks and available services, notifying the public and affected groups about changes in regulatory standards such as building codes, announcing the availability of grants and funding opportunities, and releasing data and annual reports. This communication helps ensure that the public is informed of what government is doing and the services that are available.

State agencies historically have communicated this information largely through printed documents. Florida law defines a public document as "...any document, report, directory, bibliography, rule, newsletter, pamphlet, brochure, periodical, or other publication, whether in print or non-print format, that is paid for in whole or in part by funds appropriated by the Legislature and may be subject to distribution to the public. The term excludes publications for internal use by an executive agency."¹ It is costly to print and distribute such hard copy documents. However, in recent years, advances in information technology have created new ways to communicate with the public through electronic media such as websites, e-mail, and electronic newsletters. This provides the opportunity to the state to reduce substantially its printing and distribution costs while making information more readily accessible to the public.

¹ As defined in s. 257.05, F.S.

Questions and Answers —

How much are agencies spending to produce public documents?

State agencies spent approximately \$20.7 million to print documents in Fiscal Year 2004-05. These costs have fallen by almost 25% over the past decade, due primarily to increased use of electronic media.

Statewide printing expenditures have decreased. Over the past eight years, statewide printing expenditures have been reduced by about 25%. Fiscal data from the Florida Accounting Information Resource (FLAIR) shows that enterprise-wide printing costs have decreased from \$27.9 million in Fiscal Year 1997-98 to \$20.7 million in Fiscal Year 2004-05 (see Exhibit 1).² Most of these expenditures (80%) were funded from various trust funds and federal grants; however, the remaining 20% (\$4.05 million) were supported from general revenue.

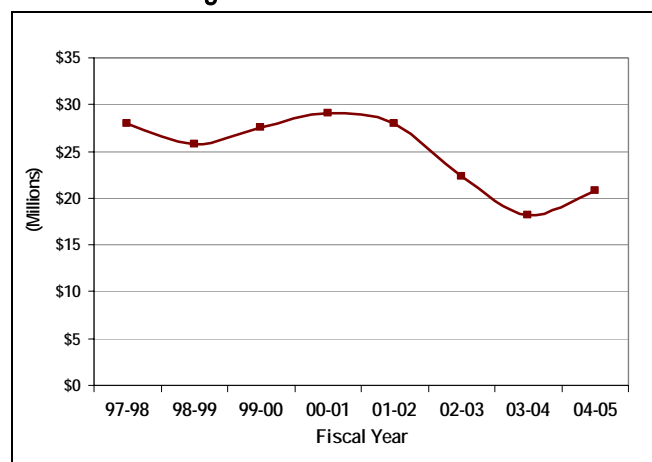
Our survey of agencies showed that these expenditures include both internal documents (e.g., stationery, training materials, and administrative forms), as well as external documents designed to communicate with the public such as reports, newsletters, and brochures.³ However, the printing expenditures also cover specialty products such as registration decals for motor vehicles—the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles reported spending approximately \$2.6 million printing these decals in Fiscal Year 2004-05.⁴

The decline in printing costs over recent years can be attributed to the increased use of electronic document distribution. Agencies have diversified their communication strategies to include distributing information via e-mail, fax, and the

Internet. For example, all agencies provide public information via the “MyFlorida.com” state web portal, which provides access to a wide range of agency data, documents, and reports.

While the use of printed documents will likely continue to decline as Internet access expands and citizens become more accustomed to electronic documents, it should be noted that printed materials will remain an important means for government to communicate with its citizens. While over half (55.7%) of all Florida households had Internet access in October 2003, some populations, including low-income persons, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, are difficult to reach through electronic means. Also, federal rules and regulations require that the state provide some information in printed form. For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requires the state to provide chronic disease grant reports in both hard copy and electronic form. Nonetheless, the state should continue to explore options to move to electronic document distribution to realize additional savings.

Exhibit 1
State Printing Costs Have Fallen by 25% Over the Past Eight Years



Source: OPPAGA analysis of FLAIR data.

² Adjusted for inflation.

³ We sent a questionnaire to 25 executive agencies and received 19 responses. We asked for several pieces of information, including compliance with existing accountability mechanisms, document production and distribution policies, and electronic availability of agency public documents.

⁴ FLAIR does not facilitate the separation of expenditures for public documents from expenditures for other printed products. Therefore, we were unable to determine the percentage of printing costs associated only with production and dissemination of public documents.

Are existing statutory provisions effective in limiting production and distribution of hard copy publications?

To help ensure that public documents are produced and distributed in cost-effective ways, the Legislature created three statutory

accountability mechanisms that require agencies to: (1) justify publications with production costs exceeding \$50,000; (2) biennially purge their mailing lists; and (3) file public documents with the Department of State's Division of Library and Information Services (State Library). However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is limited due to differing interpretations of these requirements by agencies, inadequate monitoring, and limited agency compliance.

Agencies are not consistently justifying publications exceeding the statutory cost threshold. Section 283.31, *Florida Statutes*, requires executive branch agencies to maintain records for every agency publication with production costs exceeding \$50,000. Specifically, agencies are to document the purpose and justification for these publications and the sources of funding used for their production, and they are to compare the costs of different printing methods and justify the decision to print the documents in-house, by another agency, or by the private sector.

However, the effectiveness of this control on agency printing is limited for several reasons. Our survey of executive agencies showed that they are not consistently complying with the statutory requirements in practice. The statute does not define the term "publication," and agencies have interpreted this term differently. For example, the Department of Revenue reported that some of its tax forms exceed the statutory cost threshold, but the agency does not prepare a justification for these documents because these forms are required by statute for the administration of tax law and because it does not consider these forms to be publications. Similarly, the Department of State reported that it does not prepare a justification for documents that it is statutorily required to produce such as instruction materials for voters, although these costs may exceed \$50,000, because it believes that the justification requirement does not apply to statutorily required documents.

In addition, the statute does not provide a mechanism for monitoring compliance with the documentation requirement. While agencies are to maintain records of their publications, they are not required to submit these justifications to

a central agency, and no entity routinely verifies that the required documentation and analyses have been produced.

Mailing list maintenance requirements do not encourage electronic distribution of public documents. Section 283.55, *Florida Statutes*, requires agencies to biennially survey addressees on agency publication mailing lists to determine whether they wish to continue receiving publications. Addressees must respond to continue receiving publications by mail and thus to remain on the agency mailing list.

The intent of the statute is to control unsolicited distribution of public documents by mailing such publications only to those who have expressed an explicit desire to receive them. If implemented effectively, the statute should reduce agency distribution expenses (i.e., mailing costs) by removing uninterested parties from the list and allowing for address verification, which prevents delivery to incorrect addresses.

It appears that this accountability mechanism does not encourage electronic distribution of publications, though most agencies have the capability to provide documents via the Internet or e-mail and do so on a regular basis. Specifically, our questionnaire results revealed that most agencies conduct purges of their mailing lists. However, publication recipients are not asked whether they would prefer an electronic version of an agency publication, as the statute does not provide for this alternative. Moreover, we found that all of the surveyed agencies make some of their public documents available on their websites, as the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has done with a number of its research reports. Survey results also showed that less than half of the documents reported to us are distributed through a mailing list. Instead, these documents are made available to the public via other methods geared towards the needs of their target populations. For example, per federal law the Department of Children and Families distributes many public documents to its clients as printed brochures in public agencies or libraries.

Because it does not require agencies to ask publication recipients if they prefer electronic rather than hard copy documents, the mailing list statute may not be effectively reducing the mailing costs associated with distributing public documents. Considering that many agencies distribute their publications through means other than mailing lists, this statutory control mechanism only applies to a selection of publications. Currently, the state is lacking an accountability mechanism for its other distribution methods.

Agencies are not submitting all public documents to the State Library. Section 257.05, *Florida Statutes*, requires agencies to submit copies of their public documents to the State Library, which in turn disseminates copies to 24 depository libraries across the state. This requirement is intended to facilitate ready public access to state publications.

However, agencies are not consistently complying with this statute. While agencies responding to our survey identified at least 650 publications that they produced in 2004, the State Library reported receiving only 249 agency publications during the year.⁵ State Library staff identified several reasons why agencies failed to comply with this law, including a lack of knowledge among agency staff about the statutory requirement, differing interpretations regarding what documents need to be submitted, and the State Library's lack of authority to monitor and enforce compliance. To address this problem, the State Library plans to inform agencies about their statutory obligations through its regular meetings with

agency staff as well as covering the topic in its public records management seminars, which are held several times a year.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Legislature consider updating Chs. 257 and 283, *Florida Statutes*, to clarify statewide policy regarding public documents. An updated policy should require agencies to use electronic document distribution to the maximum extent practicable. Additionally, the policy should require agencies to submit an annual list of all published documents meeting the definition in s. 257.05, *Florida Statutes*, to the State Library. This would aid the State Library in ensuring that it received copies of all public documents for transmittal to depository libraries throughout the state. The policy also should require agencies, in conducting biennial mailing list purges, to ask recipients if they would prefer to receive publications electronically in lieu of hard copies; this will likely increase electronic distribution, thereby decreasing agency printing and distribution expenditures.

Furthermore, the policy should clarify what types of documents are subject to the written justification requirement for publications with costs exceeding \$50,000, and agencies should be required to report these justifications annually in their legislative budget requests. This justification also should include whether the document was made available electronically, the reason for hard copy distribution, and the number of printed copies that were produced and distributed. This would provide for adequate oversight of this requirement.

⁵ The number of reportable documents is likely to be higher since not all agencies surveyed responded.

OPPAGA supports the Florida Legislature by providing evaluative research and objective analyses to promote government accountability and the efficient and effective use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475). Cover photo by Mark Foley.

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