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Government Information on the Internet: the Tip of the Iceberg

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The amount of government information available on the Internet continues to grow at an astounding rate. As a result, many of the standard publications documenting the work of government are now freely available to all libraries, not just to those participating in the Federal Depository Library Program or the Oregon Documents Depository Program.

Below is a list of just a few of the many government Web sites providing information previously only

available in paper format. These sites provide not only the same information found in the traditional paper publications, but in most cases also offer much more. Usually, the information is presented in a more timely and flexible manner. However, the degree of user friendliness for these and most government Web sites is dependent on using the appropriate technology. Many sites require the use of computers and printers that can handle large files in PDF format.

For more information

about the level of technology recommended, see the Government Printing Office's "Recommended Specifications for Public Access Work Stations in Federal Depository Libraries," available at www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/dpos/mintech.html.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

1990 Census Lookup
venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup

In order to access detailed census data for all regions of the United States, libraries have previously had to maintain large sets of reports such as the General Population Characteristics and Social and Economic Characteristics series, or a large collection of Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File CD-ROMs. These reports and CD-ROMs provide standardized data tables. The CD-ROMs generally do not provide much flexibility for retrieving the data unless additional extraction software is used. The interactive Web site now provided by the Census Bureau allows users to extract data files more easily. Users follow a series of forms to designate the geographic level and data elements desired and then are offered options to retrieve the data in HTML, tab-delimited (spreadsheet), and CODATA formats. Census data can now be easily accessed in a format that allows flexibility and customization to the particular needs of users.

Bureau of Labor Statistics Selective Data Access
stats.bls.gov/sahome.html

The various statistical bulletins from this government agency provide the basic data used to evaluate the state of the U.S. economy. Among the more popular are the *CPI Detailed Report*, *PPI Detailed Report*, *Employment and Earnings*, and *Compensation and Working Conditions*. The BLS Web site provides the same data, but also offers an interactive service that allows users to build their own statistical tables. The major categories of data available include Employment and Unemployment, Price and Living Conditions, Compensation and Working Conditions, and Productivity and Technology.

Central Intelligence Agency's Electronic Document Release Center
www.foia.ucia.gov

While the information provided at this Web site was not previously available in paper format, this site provides an excellent example of how government information is now more widely available as a result of dissemination via the Internet. Previously, individuals or groups could request declassified documents from agencies based on guidelines provided by the Freedom of Information Act. Unless the individual requesters published the documents privately, this information was generally not distributed to Federal Depository Libraries. Now, as the CIA releases documents for requests, they are made available through this Web site. Documents released to the public since November 1996 are available. Documents can be located with a search engine that provides searching by full text, title, abstract, date created, date released, document number, and keyword. A "Popular Documents Collection" includes collections of documents on issues of large public interest, including UFO's, the U-2 spy program, and the Bay of Pigs.

GPO Access
www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/dbsearch.html

Federal Depository Library Gateways
www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aaces004.html

GPO's Web site provides access to approximately 70 different files containing the information from core publications such as the *Federal Register*, *Congressional Record*, and *Commerce Business Daily*. One of the many useful files is Congressional Bills. It contains information that had been previously difficult for libraries to collect: the full text of each version of a bill as it makes its way through the legislative process. The GPO Access files are also available from multiple "gateway" sites, which provide alternative search forms and additional helpful hints for navigating the files.

IRS Forms and Publications

www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/forms_pubs/index.html

LSU Tax Forms

www.lib.lsu.edu/govdocs/taxes.html

Each year as the April 15 deadline approaches, libraries are bombarded with requests for tax forms. Previously, libraries have relied on publications like *Reproducible Federal Tax Forms for Use in Libraries* to fill the demand. Providing access to out-of-state forms and information has been difficult, if not impossible, for most libraries. The IRS web site now provides access to federal forms and instructions by number as well as by keyword. The forms are available in multiple formats, including PDF, PCL, Postscript, and SGML. The LSU Tax Forms site is one of several sites providing links to the many states that now have forms and tax information on the Web. One word of warning, though. These sites get extremely busy as the deadline approaches, which may prevent ready access to the information required. Libraries with large demand for tax forms will most likely need to continue to also rely on paper sources for forms and publications.

U.S. Department of State Official Web Site

www.state.gov/

The State Department has traditionally provided a number of very useful publications documenting the foreign relations activities of the federal government. From the *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, a monthly record of major speeches and congressional testimony of State Department officials, to *Background Notes*, which provides current information about the countries of the world, State Department publications are standards in most library collections. The Web site provides these publications, plus additional information traditionally more difficult to track down. As is the case with many federal executive agencies, the State Department provides current speeches, press briefings, and position papers through its Web site in a more timely fashion than the published paper versions. Another useful resource on this site is the "Travel Warnings and Consular Information Sheets." It provides the most current information for travelers to the countries throughout world.

OREGON GOVERNMENT

Oregon. Coastal Salmon Restoration Initiative. The Oregon Plan.

www.oregon-plan.org/

Because of its large size, only a few libraries were able to receive the print version of this important series of reports on the state's plans to restore salmon and trout resources. However, it is freely available to all libraries through this Web site. The final plan, draft steelhead supplement, peer review

comments on the draft plan, and a children's version of the report are available.

Oregon Health Division. Center for Health Statistics (and Vital Records)

www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/cdpe/chs/welcome.htm

Statistics relating to the birth and death of Oregonians are frequently requested in libraries. The Oregon Vital Statistics Annual Report has traditionally provided this information, but it is always published several years late. Through its Web site, the Center for Health Statistics is able to release preliminary data for current years more quickly. In addition, a fun resource on this site is the list of Oregon's baby names for the last several years, including rankings of the names most frequently used in Oregon.

Oregon Secretary of State. Elections Division

www.sos.state.or.us/elections/elechp.htm

While election results continue to be found in paper publications like the Official Abstract of Votes, timely access to official results has been greatly improved by the posting of this information on the Secretary of State's Web site. The site provides results from elections by county back to 1996, as well as voter's pamphlet information, voter participation statistics, candidate lists, and ballot measure information.

Oregon State Legislature

www.leg.state.or.us/

The Legislature's Web site provides access to the core legislative publications such as the *Final Legislative Calendar*, *Oregon Legislative Guide*, *Summary of Major Legislation*, and the *Oregon Revised Statutes*. While these publications are part of most Oregon libraries' core collection, the full text of legislative measures was previously difficult for libraries to collect. On the Web site, users have the ability to search, either by keyword or bill number, for legislative measures from the 1995 and 1997 legislative sessions. The text of a bill at each stage of the legislative process is made available. Also of interest are the staff-prepared summaries, known as Staff Measure Summaries, prepared for bills reported out of committee. Summaries outline the effects of a measure, the issues discussed at committee meetings and hearings and the effect of any amendments adopted by a committee. Up-to-date schedules and directory information are additional features that help to make this site an essential resource for libraries in the state of Oregon. 