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On-line Research for Public Administration

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This paper presents an overview of on-line research tools for public-sector practitioners and researchers. Sections cover generic searching on the World Wide Web, common governmental website destinations, academic Web sites in public administration, non-governmental organization Web sites, public policy Web sites, data-related Web sites, the exploration of data from the U. S. Census, legislative and legal research on-line, news research online, on-line geographic data, public-sector labor research, researching bibliography online, and keeping up with the changing online environment.

Today it is increasingly recognized that developing competencies in on-line research is a requirement for the training of professionals (Barry, 1997). Nowhere is this more true than in public administration research because the federal and other levels of government have taken the lead in on-line access to public records (Taylor, 1991; Stowers, 1996; Milward and Snyder, 1996; Reschenthaler and Thompson, 1996). As Roberta Balstad Miller has observed, information technology is providing unprecedented access to data as well as to the ability to analyze it (Miller, 1995). Traditional modes of data collection are destined to be replaced by electronic access to metadata and databases. Researchers will spend less time on data collection itself and will spend more time on analysis and interpretation. As electronic access reduces the cost of research, the scope of research is expanding, as is on-line research collaboration.

In fact, so swift has been the rise in the significance of online research and the volume of use that by the mid-1990s, significant problems had arisen related to the scalability of existing research discovery tools. The Internet Research Task Force was established to study problems associated with the continued growth of data volume and data diversity. The Task Force has recommended ways to improve data retrieval, improve data servers, and upgrade searching algorithms (Bowman et al., 1994). Several government and corporate initiatives, including the National Information Infrastructure (NII) and Internet II, are now directed at assuring the viability of on-line access as a research tool. It is no exaggeration to say that national corporate and political leaders now see massive investment in the infrastructure for on-line research as the key to American research, development, and productivity competitiveness in the twenty-first century.

Generic Searching on the Web

GPO (Government Printing Office) access is available through many libraries (ex., <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/stacks/gpo/>), providing on-line access to a wide variety of government documents, including but not limited to:

- Blue Book (Overview and Compilation of U.S. Trade Statutes)
- Budget of the United States
- Code of Federal Regulations
- Commerce Business Daily
- Congressional Bills
- Congressional Directory
- Congressional Documents
- Congressional Record
- Congressional Record Index
- Congressional Reports
- Department of the Interior Inspector General Reports
- Economic Indicators
- Economic Report of the President
- Federal Register
- General Accounting Office (GAO) Reports
- General Accounting Office (GAO) Comptroller General Decisions
- History of Bills and Resolutions
- Public Laws
- Supreme Court Decisions
- U.S. Government Manual
- United States Code
- Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents

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