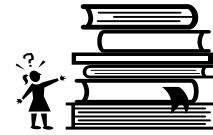# INTRODUCTION TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION RESOURCES

by Lori L. Smith
Government Information Librarian
Sims Memorial Library
Southeastern Louisiana University

WHAT DO GOVERNMENTS PUBLISH, AND WHY?

Information is the life-blood of any political entity. In order to govern effectively, policy makers must know a great deal about the citizenry and the problems they are facing. Are there more senior citizens than babies? Are those who are looking for work able to find jobs? Are the people well educated? Is the water clean? Is crime rampant? These are the sorts of questions that governments must answer if they wish to establish appropriate laws, policies, and services.

Because statistical analysis is an excellent method of answering the questions posed above, much of the information gathered and published by governing bodies is statistical in nature. However, many government publications offer instructions, rules, or advice on various topics.   From directions on how to grow vegetables, to information about how to avoid insurance fraud, to comic books on bicycle safety, to compilations of regulations and laws, governments produce a wealth of information that can be very useful to the average citizen.

This gathering and publishing of data occurs at all levels of government: local, state, national, and international.

WHERE CAN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION BE FOUND?

In order to make their publications widely available, many governments have established networks of libraries at which they deposit copies of their documents. The libraries in the network, known collectively as **depository libraries**, often receive the publications and training free of charge in exchange for agreeing to provide space for the collection and personnel to assist the public in using the materials. The publications on deposit at these libraries most often continue to belong to the government entity which published them. As a result, the circulation policies for government documents may differ from those of other items in the library's collections.

An increasing amount of government information, from all levels of government, is also available on the **World Wide Web**. Often, the most recent information is *only* available online. Most depository libraries provide public access to the computer equipment, software, and search assistance necessary to find government information on the Web.

LOCAL, FOREIGN, AND INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

Depository arrangements for the publications of city, county/parish, or regional governments are not common. Most often these entities must be contacted directly for the information and publications they produce. However, some libraries do make an effort to contact individual agencies and acquire these publications through donation or purchase.

Just as the U. S. government gathers, analyzes, and publishes a vast amount of data, so do the national governments of other countries. The publications of foreign governments are not commonly deposited in U.S. libraries; however, many research libraries do actively collect these documents. Be aware that most often these publications will be printed in the native

language of the country in which they were produced.

The publications of international organizations such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organization are sometimes placed on deposit at large, research libraries. Other libraries may regularly purchase international documents.

If a search of the library's catalog does not reveal holdings of local, foreign, or international documents, librarians should be able to assist a researcher in finding phone numbers or Internet addresses for appropriate government agencies.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

Across the country there are over 1200 depository libraries that house collections of United States government publications. These libraries receive their publications from the United States Government Printing Office, or **GPO**. The person at GPO who is responsible for administering the depository program is the **Superintendent of Documents**. The system of call numbers that is commonly used to arrange collections of U.S. documents, the **SuDoc** system, is named after the Superintendent of Documents.

SuDoc numbers are assigned to each publication by GPO based on the agency that issued the item. For instance, publications from the Department of Agriculture will have SuDoc numbers that begin with "A," and those from the Department of Defense with "D," etc. The SuDoc system therefore arranges documents into sections by publishing agency, rather than by subject. Unlike other common call number systems, SuDoc numbers always contain a colon. Another difference is that all the numeric portions of SuDoc numbers should be read as whole numbers rather than decimal numbers. Following are a few SuDoc numbers printed in order to demonstrate how the system works:

> A 98.2:G 54
> A 98.15:995
> A 98.15:996
> A 98.20:3/4
> A 101.2:A 67/992
> A 101.19:B 44
> A 101.19:D 63
> A 101.27:996

Not all depository libraries use SuDoc numbers to arrange their U.S. documents, and not all maintain their documents as a separate collection. Some depositories assign Library of Congress or Dewey Decimal call numbers to the documents and interfile them with their main collections.

Types of Federal Depositories

If a Federal Depository Library has asked GPO to send them a copy of every publication distributed through the depository program, that library is known as a **"full"** or **"complete"** depository. If the Library has requested only specific titles or types of documents, that library is known as a **"selective"** or **"partial"** depository.

One or two full depositories in nearly every state have agreed to keep indefinitely the documents they receive. They have also agreed to monitor and assist other depository libraries in the state to ensure that GPO's rules are followed. These libraries are known as **"regional depositories."**

> The Sims Library at Southeastern Louisiana University is a selective depository which receives about 30% of the items distributed through the federal depository program. The Middleton Library at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge is both a full depository and a regional depository.

Formats

U.S. government documents are issued in a wide variety of formats. These include paper, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, compact disk, DVD, and online via the Internet. Paper materials range in size from small pamphlets to huge hardback books. The federal government also issues maps, posters, and other graphic materials.

Over the last several years, the U.S. government has decreased dramatically the number of physical publications it produces and has focused on providing its information on the Web. This has made the information easily accessible to anyone who has the necessary computer equipment and software. A multitude of government Web sites have been established and are used millions of times each week. Listed below are the addresses of a representative selection of federal Web sites.

Government Printing Office - http://www.gpo.gov/

White House - http://www.whitehouse.gov

House of Representatives - http://www.house.gov/

Senate - http://www.senate.gov/

Census Bureau - http://www.census.gov/

Consumer Product Safety Commission - http://www.cpsc.gov/

Indexes and Search Engines

Many depository libraries have included information about their documents collections in their online catalogs.

> Sims Library's catalog includes records for federal documents published from 1976 to date and for Louisiana documents issued from 1999 to date. There are a number of indexes that can be used to find documents published prior to those dates and to identify documents not held by Sims Library.

The official index to U.S. federal documents was, for many years, the *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications* (SuDoc # GP 3.8:). The *Monthly Catalog*, sometimes referred to as the *MoCat*, included information about each physical publication that was distributed through the depository program and about some publications that were published on the Web. The *MoCat* ceased to be issued in print in 2004 and was replaced by the online *Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* (CGP) at http://catalog.gpo.gov/F.

There are commercial versions of the *MoCat/CGP* to which some libraries subscribe. In the past, electronic versions of the *MoCat/CGP* only indexed materials published from 1976 forward. GPO was not able to begin producing electronic catalog records until 1976 and most indexes are created from the records produced by GPO. In 2006 GPO began to retrospectively catalog materials published prior to 1976, so electronic versions of the *MoCat*, including the

CGP, now include an increasing number of older records.

Another commercially published index that may be searched to locate government documents is the *Government Periodicals Index* from ProQuest.

When searching one of these general indexes, it is important to remember that the library you are in may not hold all of the titles listed. Likely you will need to check the library's collection in order to see if the title you want is available. However, many of the records in these commercial indexes include links to full-text online editions of the titles referenced.

If you wish to do a general search for government information on the Web, the best place to begin is with *USA.gov* – http://www.usa.gov. This is the federal government's official Web portal.

If you wish to search or browse the full text of the *Federal Register*, *U.S. Code*, *Code of Federal Regulations*, and many other major publications, go to the Government Printing Office's *FDsys* page - http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/.

Bibliographic Records

Prior to October 2008 it was GPO's policy to create comprehensive bibliographic records that reflected all available versions of a specific publication. So, if a title was available both in print and online, one record would include both a SuDoc number for the print version and a URL for the online edition. Since October 2008, it has been GPO's policy to create a separate bibliographic record for each format in which the publication was issued. So, please be aware that newer records in catalogs and indexes will likely include only a SuDoc number or a URL, not both.

Important Titles

The federal government produces many excellent publications. A few of the most widely used titles are listed below:

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (SuDoc # PREX 2.20:)
http://www.cfda.gov/
This is a comprehensive annual listing, by agency, of grants and loans that are available from the federal government. Details about qualifying and applying for the grants/loans are included.

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) (SuDoc # AE 2.106/3:)
http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionCfr.action?collectionCode=CFR
This series compiles all federal regulations that currently are in effect. The series is separated into fifty subject-specific "titles." Most titles are updated annually.

Congressional Directory (SuDoc # Y 4.P 93/1:1)
http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=CDIR
Issued biennially, this publication provides information about the members and committees of Congress. It also includes listings of individuals in the press corps, foreign officials, and other types of information that would be of use to the members of Congress.

Federal Register (FR) (SuDoc # AE 2.106:)
http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=FR
Issued daily during the week, this source includes proposed regulations being published for public comment and final regulations that will eventually be included in the *CFR*. Other types of

information and announcements also commonly appear in the *FR*.

Occupational Outlook Handbook (SuDoc # L 2.3/4:)
http://www.bls.gov/ooh/
This biennial source, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, provides descriptions of the typical duties and average salaries of persons in specific occupations. It also gives estimates of future demand for persons in those occupations. This source is very useful for those attempting to select a career.

Statistical Abstract of the United States (SuDoc # C 3.134:)
http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/
Issued by the Census Bureau through 2012, then continued as a commercial publication by ProQuest/Bernan, this annual publication compiles into one handy book statistics on a wide variety of topics. The statistics are gathered from Census Bureau files, from other federal agencies, and sometimes from commercial or unpublished sources. A note at the bottom of each table of statistics tells the original source of the information.

United States Code (USC) (SuDoc # Y 1.2/5:)
http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionUScode.action?collectionCode=USCODE
This source compiles all federal laws that currently are in effect. Like the regulations in the *CFR*, the laws in the *Code* are separated into subject specific "titles." A new set of volumes is issued every 6 years and annual updates are published in the interim.

United States Government Manual (SuDoc # AE 2.108/2:)
http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=GOVMAN
This annual publication is a guide to the legal foundation and current structure of the federal government. A listing for each agency gives the names of administrative personnel, a public information phone number, and a short description of the agency's history and purpose.

STATE GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

Many, but not all, states around the nation have established networks of depository libraries for publications issued by state agencies. Though methods and procedures vary from state to state, depository programs at this level are often administered by the state library.

In Louisiana, the depository program is administered by the State Library of Louisiana's **Recorder of Documents**. This person collects publications from the state agencies, assigns Louisiana Documents (**LaDocs**) call numbers to them, and distributes them to the depository libraries. The traditional LaDocs numbering system is based upon the SuDoc system and the call numbers are very similar. However, a new numbering scheme which arranges materials by topic is being devised and its use on Louisiana documents will begin in the near future.

Types of Depositories

Most Louisiana state depositories are selectives, and therefore receive less than 100% of the state publications available.

There are three **complete historical depositories** in the state: Louisiana State University's Hill Memorial Library, the State Library of Louisiana, and the Prescott Memorial Library at Louisiana Tech. All three libraries receive and maintain at least one copy of each state publication distributed through the depository program.

Formats

Publications from state governments may be issued in paper, microform, or electronic formats. Like the federal government, many state governments are adopting the Web as a vital conduit for delivering information to the people they serve.

Although state agencies are making a great deal of information available on the Web, they don't usually keep that information there indefinitely. Older publications are often removed from agency Web sites when newer editions are issued. So, the State Library has begun to capture and preserve electronic copies of some important state publications using the Digital Archive service from a company called OCLC. These documents are stored on a computer at the State Library and can be accessed through links in the State Library's online catalog. See the State Library's Web site for additional information - http://www.state.lib.la.us/.

Another way to access Louisiana's electronic information is via the state's home page, *Louisiana.gov* - http://www.louisiana.gov.   A Web site for most state agencies, boards, and commissions may be reached through *Louisiana.gov*.

Indexes

As with the administration of state depository programs, the indexing available for state documents will vary.

In Louisiana there are two paper indexes that may be used to locate older state publications. These are *Public Documents* and *Official Publications*.   *Public Documents* was, for many years, issued by the Recorder of Documents every six months. After five or six years, the contents of all the issues were compiled into an issue of *Official Publications*.

In 2007 the Recorder of Documents announced that neither of these indexes would be issued again because all newly published state documents can now be located by searching the State Library's online catalog. It can be searched at http://ipac.state.lib.la.us/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=sll#focus.

Important Titles

The titles and contents of state publications are, of course, different in each state. Following are some of the more popular titles issued by Louisiana government agencies:

Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for Fiscal Year... (LaDocs # Go 100.6/1:)
http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osrAP/CAFR-2.htm
Issued by the Office of Statewide Accounting in the Division of Administration, this publication provides detailed information on the income and expenses of the state.

Louisiana Administrative Code (LaDocs # Go 5.5:)
http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/lac/lac.htm
This series compiles all state regulations that are currently in force.

Louisiana Health Report Card (LaDocs # H 1.1:RC)
http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/newsroom/detail/2202
This annual publication provides statistics on births, deaths, and incidents of specific diseases within the state. It also includes information about Louisiana's health care system.

Louisiana Register (LaDocs # Go 50.7:)
http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/reg/register.htm
This monthly publication includes the text of proposed and final state regulations, agency rules, executive orders, and other types of legal notices.

Resume: Acts, Resolutions, Study Requests, and Vetoed Bills (LaDocs # LL 1.8a:)
http://www.legis.state.la.us/ (similar information is available online from this site)
Published annually, this is a summary listing of all the measures which were passed or vetoed during the legislative session.

Roster of Officials (LaDocs # S 1.9:)
http://www.sos.la.gov/ElectionsAndVoting/FindPublicOfficials/Pages/ElectedOfficialsSearch.aspx (similar information is available online from this site)
This is a directory of elected and appointed office-holders in various levels of government from all around the state. This title is published roughly every four years.

COMMERCIAL PUBLISHERS

Many commercial publishers issue titles that report on the activities of various government entities. These too can be useful in a search for government information.

For instance, *CQ Weekly* (formerly titled *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*) reports on the activities of the U.S. Congress. It provides biographical information about new members of Congress and summarizes action taken on pending legislation. *CQ Weekly* is issued by CQ Roll Call (http://corporate.cqrollcall.com/wmspage.cfm?parm1=52). This publisher produces many other titles relating to various aspects of the U.S. government.

There are commercial publishers who produce titles dealing with state government as well. For instance, a company called Louisiana Governmental Studies, Inc. (http://www.louisianagovernmentalstudies.com/) publishes the *Grass-Roots Guide* which provides information about the members of the Legislature and the political structure of the state. The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana (http://www.parlouisiana.org/) publishes a number of different titles related to state government.

CONCLUSION

Government information is useful and important. Despite its wide availability in depository libraries and online, it can still be very difficult to find. Therefore, the most important resource in most depository libraries is the librarian. Please ask for assistance whenever you feel you need it.

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