

Government Information and Outreach

Since government information is free and in the public domain, it makes an ideal resource for affordable learning efforts. Further, educational outreach by government agencies provides a wealth of free learning materials that ready to use. Most educational outreach is, naturally, targeted toward K-12 settings, but the primary sources which they are based on can be incorporated in post-secondary classrooms as well.

Outreach falls into five major categories, as shown in the illustration:

- **Primary Source Sets** (collections of related historic materials)
- **Multimedia**
- **Legal Material** (documents from the Supreme Court or Congress)
- **Data**
- **Research**

These resources cover a wide variety of subjects, from history to science to medicine to civics.

Suggested “Starter” Websites:

There are so many learning materials available, but the following are good places to start.

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| • USA.gov | • Smithsonian Institute |
| • GovInfo | • National Archives (DocsTeach) |
| • US Courts | • Library of Congress (Teachers) |
| • Supreme Court | • National Parks Service |
| • Congress.gov | • NASA |
| • Bureau of Justice Statistics | • Science.gov |
| • Bureau of Labor Statistics | • DOE ScienceCinema |
| • Census.gov | • USGS |
| • ERIC | • PubMed & PubChem |
| • Congressional Research Service | |
| • Ben's Guide to Government | |

Types of Learning Resources



Among the benefits of using government information in affordable learning projects, a significant one is the nearly unparalleled diverse collection of voices. For example, students can learn about history from a variety of perspectives, including those that are not often represented in traditional history textbooks, by using materials from the Smithsonian Institute, Library of Congress, and other cultural heritage organizations.

Imagine teaching students to work with data using datasets collected by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, or to study environmental topics using reports from the U.S. Geological Survey, or to learn about Native American history from indigenous voices from the National Museum of the American Indian. In fact, all of this is possible, if educators know what is available.

Benefits

High Quality Materials

- Reliable information
- High-resolution scans of primary source material
- Production value for multimedia sources
- Good metadata for locating and identifying items

Digital Format

- Meets a generation of digital natives where they are
- Flexibility for remote and hybrid instruction
- Easily incorporated to OER

Promotes Civic Literacy

- Familiarity with branches of government and agencies
- Awareness of what government agencies do

Supports Equity

- Affordability
- Higher degree of representation

Accessible

- More likely to meet ADA standards

Open Access and OER

Government information, since it is in the public domain, can be used in OER with attribution that links back to the original document. For example, Smithsonian Open Access makes select digitized items available for the purpose of creating open materials.

OER is just one branch of a much larger affordability movement, but the Smithsonian Institute has already made an effort to contribute to the creation of knowledge, as well as promote the invaluable inclusion of underrepresented voices in these resources.