

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

Traditionally, government information available in libraries and on the Internet has been an important resource on the nature of our society, the debates impacting social and economic policy and the development of political priorities for the citizenry. Such material is as varied as statistical studies, hearings on government policy and studies of the impact of past policy decisions, to name a few areas of documentation.

However, in the years following the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, there has been increased debate over what information should be freely provided. Attempts have been made to limit access to information on the basis of claims that such information may be of use to terrorists. The American Library Association's [Government Documents Roundtable](#) (GODORT) has been active in this debate.

There is widespread concern about the new administration of 2017 removing and restricting access to publicly available governmental information. Shortly after the 2017 inauguration, multiple federal agencies were restricted from communicating with the public via methods such as social media and news releases. Agencies tasked with scientific and environmental policy (such as the EPA) seemed to have been targeted. More recently, the EPA's educational website on climate change (<https://epa.gov/climatechange>) has been taken down. An attempt to visit the URL of the above site results in a redirect to a page that states, "We are currently updating our website to reflect EPA's priorities under the leadership of President Trump and Administrator Pruitt."

A danger exists for the government to overstate the risks involved in the provision of such information and the temptation is to avoid disclosing information that may reflect negatively on past and present policy decisions. It is the position of the MLA Intellectual Freedom Panel (IFP) that all government information should be accessible to the maximum degree possible and that access should be limited only based on obvious security, privacy or similar reasons. Attempts to overly restrict access to government information must be resisted.

Librarians must also recognize that the tendency toward restricting government information occurs not only on the federal level, but also within state and local governments. It is the responsibility of librarians to encourage the maximum flow of information at all levels of government. At the local level, Maryland Library Association's [Government Information Interest Group](#) (GIIG) conducts programs and activities toward maximizing this flow of information. GIIG also monitors developments at the federal level and makes appropriate information and recommendations available on how to respond to such restrictions.



Works Cited in this article:

[Government Documents Round Table](#). *American Library Association*, 13 Dec. 2006, <http://www.ala.org/godort>. Accessed 23 Jun. 2017.

[Government Information Interest Group](#). *Maryland Library Association*, 12 Aug. 2014, <http://www.mdlib.org/content.asp?contentid=255>. Accessed 23 Jun. 2017.