



The United States Government Internet Directory 2021

edited by Mary Meghan Ryan, Lanham, Maryland: Bernan Press, 2021, 559 pp., \$84.00, ISBN 978-1-64143-491-1.

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BOOK REVIEW

The United States Government Internet Directory 2021, edited by Mary Meghan Ryan, Lanham, MD: Bernan Press, 2021, 559 pp., \$84.00, ISBN 978-1-64143-491-1.

Introduction

The United States Government Internet Directory 2021 describes and offers access to the vast collection of websites maintained by the Executive, Judicial, and Legislative branches of the United States government. Since its inception in 2004, the *Directory* has undergone numerous updates, including the appointment of new editors and title changes. The 2021 edition is edited by Mary Meghan Ryan. In addition to the print edition, an e-book version is available.

The importance of online government information cannot be overstated. Still, it can be hard to find, and as the editor points out, "the offerings are diverse, decentralized, and not uniformly indexed by search engines" (xvii). With 97% of federal publications now being born digital and the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP, 2022) recently announcing plans to investigate an all-digital program, additional tools to help discover the websites and online publications of federal agencies are more important than ever.

Government agencies provide a significant amount of statistics and data. There are a variety of secondary data sources described in this book, which is especially useful to those libraries that cannot afford the costs associated with commercial data sets and statistical database subscriptions. According to their study, Trujillo and Tallman (2021) identified an imperative librarian skill: assisting students to locate data and data sets. By using this book, librarians can help students find data using free and open government resources.

Scope

Most of the websites described in this book originate from U.S. federal government agencies. As the editor notes, there are other sources included, such as "...sites from some interagency groups, international organizations, federal advisory boards and commissions, private organizations established by congressional legislation, and quasi-governmental organizations, as well as websites produced by outside organizations with federal agency sponsorship or partnerships" (xviii).

This book features twenty chapters that span a diverse range of subjects. Some of these chapters include Culture and Recreation, Business and Economics, Energy, Legislative Branch, Social Welfare, Government and Politics, Engineering and Technology, and Demographics and Sociology. Any interested reader can browse through the comprehensive list of federal government resources by topic area, taking full advantage of underutilized resources and exploring potential sources. As stated in the editor's introduction, the *Directory* is "designed to meet the information needs of citizens, consumers, businesses, librarians, teachers, scientists, students, and others" (xviii).

Organization and content

There are details on approximately 1800 government and non-government websites arranged in 20 topical chapters that provide a concise and logical structure. Additionally, the chapters are further divided into subtopics to facilitate their use.

Each entry within each subtopic is arranged alphabetically and is relatively brief, containing only a few paragraphs. A site's entry includes its name, URL, description, and critical subject terms that indicate its primary focus. The description of a website usually includes information about the sponsoring organization, the design, primary features, and notable publications. Readers may use this information to efficiently determine the site's purpose and utility.

In addition to data and statistics, government websites often feature funding and grant information, educational materials, regulatory information, consumer information, press releases, briefings, statements, projects, working groups, budgets, fact sheets, congressional hearings and testimony, speeches, laws, bills, resolutions, biographies, maps, historical documents, reports, and technical documents.

Among the *Directory's* introductory pages are a list of the most popular, widely used federal agency websites and their URLs and a helpful section on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) which includes information about how to file a FOIA request and a list of relevant FOIA government websites. Through a FOIA request, government information that is not publicly available is obtained. A separate section of the book showcases the variety of content and elements that are commonly found on agency websites.

As part of the Introduction, the editor provides information on how the *Directory* addresses government agencies' use of social media platforms, the book's scope, and organization, as well as a list of new websites added in 2021, including those related to Coronavirus. The first chapter lists government finding aids, such as the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications, USA.gov, Data.gov, and GovInfo. These finding aids represent the best starting points when searching for government information, and they can prove more effective than a general search in a search engine.

Toward the end of the book, in chapter twenty-one, titled "Beyond the Federal Web-Nongovernmental Websites," various organizations and agencies that are either privately funded or that receive significant funding from sources other than the federal government are described. The appendices contain web addresses for members of the House and Senate, standing and joint committee websites of Congress, and the websites of U.S. Embassies Abroad and foreign countries within the United States. Every site listed in the *Directory* appears in the 40-page index along with its page number.

Evaluation

The United States Government Internet Directory 2021 will undoubtedly be of considerable assistance to those who wish to become more familiar with online government sources. This extensive collection is arranged in a succinct and well-organized manner. Those interested in acquiring a deeper understanding of government information can consult a few notable books which discuss government information in greater detail (Brown, 2020; Caro, 2018; Hartnett et al., 2016).

While the editor refers to the organizational charts of cabinet-level departments and agencies as being included in this edition of the *Directory*, the reviewer observed

that they were absent. In previous editions, the charts that have been drawn from the *United States Government Manual* provided a convenient visual representation of the federal government's organizational structure. After contacting the editor regarding their absence, it was explained that the charts were removed for technical reasons.

An invaluable feature of the *Directory* is the listing of recently retired sites, such as the American FactFinder, which was retired in 2020 and replaced by data.census.gov. As a result, such entries serve as a handy reminder of the significant changes in recent years.

Libraries, academic and public, should consider *The United States Government Internet Directory* a foundational tool for their collections and as an essential reference and instructional tool. Using this book, librarians can curate links to federal government websites on subject-specific library guides. Additionally, librarians implementing OER-enabled pedagogy (Hallam et al., 2021) can use this information to integrate government resources into their library instruction sessions and large-scale OER initiatives (Simms & Johnson, 2021).

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