Legislative Resources

This page contains links to legislative resources, for researching constituencies to represent, learning how to draft a dear colleague letter, choosing a committee, drafting a bill, preparing for a legislative debate etc.

U.S. Congress

Members, their Districts, their States

- US Census – State QuickFacts - http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00
- US Census – Congressional District Finder - http://www.census.gov/mycd/#
- House and Senate member websites – typically include a constituency description

Two print political almanacs offer detailed political analyses of districts and states including their political histories.

- **Almanac of American Politics.** Michael Barone and Richard Cohen [JK1012.A44]
- **Politics in America.** Jackie Koszczuk and Amy H. Stern [JK1012.C63]

Communicating with Colleagues

- Dear Colleague Letters: Congressional Research Service Primer
- Dear Colleague Letters: Example

Legislative Process

The Legislative Process begins with the U.S. Constitution. Each chamber is also governed by formal rules as well as precedents that have developed over centuries.

- U.S. Constitution Excellent web resource from the National Archives.
- Overview of the Legislative Process – video!
- House of Representatives parliamentary procedures
- House procedure – Pocket Rules
- Senate Parliamentary procedure and enactment of a law
- Links to House and Senate Committees and their jurisdictions

Legislative Activity

- Resume of Congressional Activity – summarizes congressional activities going back to 1947, such as the number of bills introduced or passed.
- Sponsorship and cosponsorship activity – detailed information about the bills each member sponsors or cosponsors. Nice insights into differences in activities as well as the issue portfolios of members
- Congress.gov – created by Congress to enable the public to search and track legislation.

- [Congressional Bills Project](#) – the 'Trends' page offers some interesting information about patterns of legislative activity.

Drafting Legislation

Where do lawmakers come up with their legislative ideas? How are ideas converted into workable legislation?

- [Bills versus Resolutions](#) – what's the difference?
- [Introducing a Bill or Resolution](#) – Congressional Research Service primer for Members of Congress contains useful tips for students as well.
- [How our Laws Are Made: A Ghost Writer's View](#) – staff including legal experts at the Legislative Counsel, play a central role in converting policy ideas to legislation. This article provides insights into that process.
- [Naming Post Offices through Legislation](#) – a little obscure but many of the small number of bills that become law involve minor credit claiming activities, such as naming federal buildings.

Researching Legislative Issues

- **[Congress.gov](#)** and **[OpenStates.org](#)** – Both sites can be searched for previous bills sponsored by members of Congress and state legislators. Lawmakers (and staff) often base new bills on previously developed legislation.
- **[CQ Researcher Online](#)** – This resource provides overviews of different policy topics, often including legislative histories of important federal policy issues. Complete access to the on-line version may be available through your library. Another option is the printed **Congressional Quarterly Almanac** [JK1.C66] which can also be searched by subject.
- **[USA.gov](#)** – the federal government's clearinghouse for government information. It's overwhelming but what you are looking for is probably there somewhere.
- [Public Agenda Online](#) – A non-profit that develops very nice policy briefs on a range of topics (such as immigration). Try the advanced search tool under Our Library
- [The Green Book](#) – This resource was created to help bring members of Congress up to speed on the important social policy areas under the jurisdiction of the House Ways and Means Committee. Searchable by topic.
- **Congressional Research Service** reports – CRS produces reports at the request of members of Congress. These reports are often excellent, but CRS does not make them available to the public. Nevertheless, try searching the internet for "CRS" and the topic of interest, you may find something.
- **The World Wide Web –** Members of Congress often work with non-governmental organizations to develop legislative proposals. Indeed, it is common for interest groups to propose 'model legislation,' 'model legislative language,' or 'model policies' at the national and state levels. Try searching with these terms and your policy area.

The Federal Budget

- [Budget Challenge](#) – from the non-partisan Concord Coalition – learn by doing!

- [Federal Budget of the United States](#) - details about federal government revenues and expenditures, and projections.
- [Policy Agendas Project](#) – Budgetary trends by program over the past 50 years.
- [Congressional Budget Office](#) - estimated costs of proposed legislation on various topics