

An aerial photograph of the Denver skyline, showing numerous skyscrapers and a dense urban area. In the background, a range of mountains with significant snow cover is visible under a clear sky. The text "Guide to Researching Colorado Issues" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Guide to Researching Colorado Issues

Guide to Researching Colorado Issues

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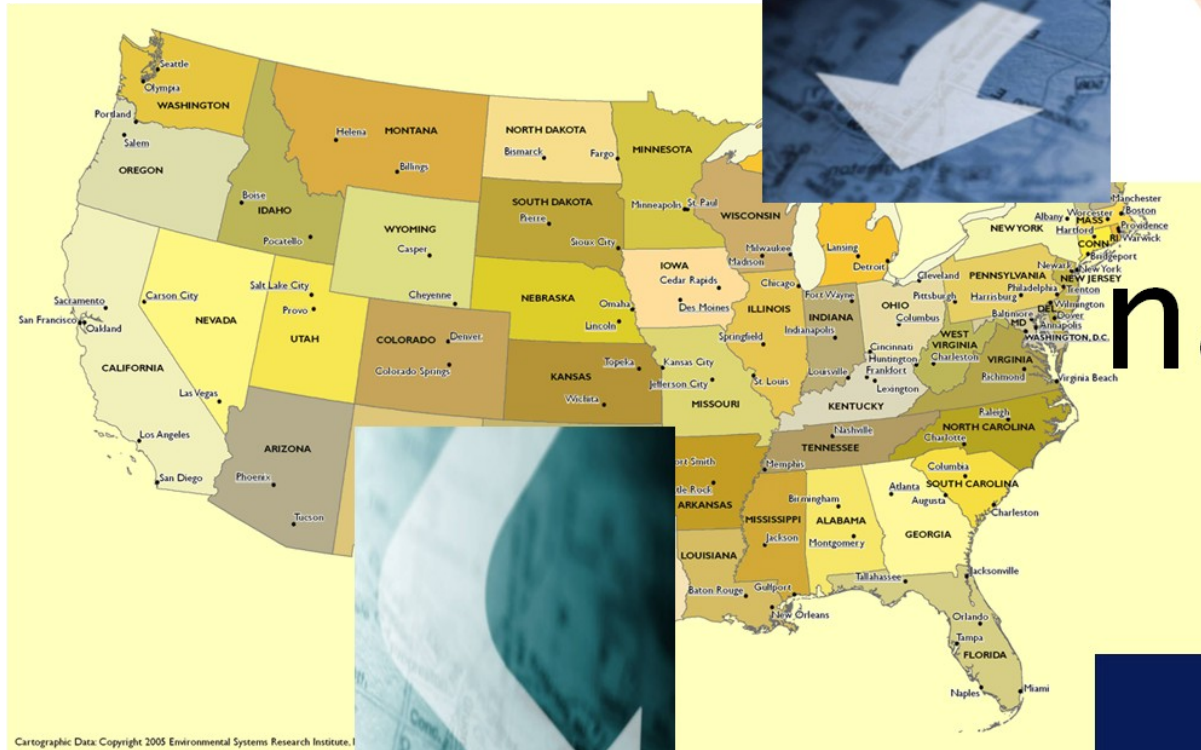
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global



national



local



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RESEARCHING
&
WRITING



Why local issues?

- greater real-world relevancy
- empowers civic engagement
- enhances career skills



**“LOCAL
ISSUES
INFORMATION
LITERACY”**

ISSUES: Introduction and Overview

Who needs or wants to research local issues, and why?

The Colorado Issues Digest website on its opening page prominently displays a listing of the audience the site is intended for— basically all types of people, comprised of the following: citizens, activists, students, educators, journalists, bloggers, government officials, candidates. These are the people who would need or want to be able to research, or just find out and be informed, about Colorado issues.

The website explains the matter of information about issues as follows: Most of us learn about political and election issues in an often superficial, haphazard way: from scattered talk shows, short news stories, editorials, blogs, and occasional candidate debates. Sometimes we read books on certain issues and problems or view an in-depth TV program

or documentary. We get impressions of issues and form judgments and usually make voting decisions on spotty and incomplete information, at best.

Certainly, all the aforementioned sources have their place and value and, taken together, can provide a fair amount of information--especially if sought out in a systematic way, which, with the Internet, is relatively easy to do. Simply by taking some time googling an issue or using library databases you can, with varying levels of success, find information on a wide range of issues. With information literacy, one can maximize one's ability to find information on local issues, or any kind of information, for that matter.

Local issues information literacy

Information literacy is the ability to find and use quality information. Information literacy is indispensable for academic, personal, and career success. It is a learning and survival skill, a skill for personal self-development and

for societal advancement in the information age.

Finding quality information on local issues is a task that can confront everyone: students doing research papers; policy paper researchers for government and industry; journalists and writers; government officials and candidates; and ordinary citizens on behalf of organizations or for themselves.

Information literacy is a political and civic engagement tool. Having information literacy skills empowers people to act responsibly and make informed decisions in all aspects of their lives, including informed political choices at the ballot box.

Local issues information, often elusive and hidden away in myriad resources, can be found using local and national resources. These resources include, most obviously, the Internet, as well as proprietary databases available in libraries. Knowing how to find and evaluate relevant information is a key part of information literacy.

What are “issues”?

An issue, as used here, is a problem or matter that goes beyond an individual to a broader community and societal scope and level. All individual human beings have personal problems and life situations that can be tied to broader community and societal issues. These are social, economic, political issues that impact everyone in one way or another.

Under the broad heading of social, economic, and political issues are a myriad of specific and more narrowly-defined issues (see the issue links to databases and websites in this publication for listings of various issues, both national and local. These issue topics resources are especially useful for students needing to select topics for research papers).

Many issues are addressed as political issues, because political action or inaction is tied to the causes and solutions of issues. Public policy—legislation and allocation of public monies and resources—is central to perceived causations and solutions of problems and issues. In fact, “issues” often is a short-hand term for public policy issues.

Local, national, and world issues

Issues and problems span from microcosmic to macrocosmic levels-- ranging from the most local (individuals, neighborhoods, cities, states), to national and world in scope. Issues can have aspects that are unique to a particular locale, but share similarities with all locales nationally and globally. Thus issues and problems have a universal quality that cut across all communities, states, and countries, as well as differences marked by specific conditions, characteristics, and situations and circumstances.

Local issues can be more difficult to research because of their narrower focus and concomitant difficulty of finding adequate resources on the topics. The usual search strategies and resources that work for national issues will not work as easily for local topics. This guide provides ways to uncover local information not readily apparent to the casual researcher.

Online resources for Colorado local issues

Local issues are often a microcosm of national and global issues. Local issues are often a par-

allel counterpart of national issues, but can also be uniquely different. Identifying and familiarizing oneself with national issues can aid in the identification and understanding of the same types of issues on a state and local level as well as in the discovery of unique, individualistic problems that can set a local community apart from the larger national picture.

Why local issues?

When the relevancy, usefulness, and practicality of education is an issue itself, the value of local issues as a research topic in schools and colleges has merit. Three values are associated with the study of local issues: real-world relevancy, civic engagement, and career enhancement.

Real-world relevancy: it can be argued that education is too “academic” and theoretical and not sufficiently practical and relevant to the real world. This deficiency is especially telling in difficult economic times with high unemployment. The study of local issues brings a closer relevancy to the student’s learning experience by focusing on events and

situations in the student's backyard, as opposed to a more amorphous "out there" nationally and worldwide. Local issues bring attention to situations that may impact the student personally, or the significance of issues is made more clear and meaningful, as opposed to having to interpret and extrapolate meanings in a personal context from more distant vantage points.

Civic engagement: It can be argued that there is too much apathy and lack of civic and political involvement by the citizenry. A democratic society is benefitted by greater civic engagement, by a more informed and active electorate. Civic engagement starts with an interest in and understanding of local issues. Education can play a large role in fostering an interest and involvement in local issues and promoting participatory democracy. The study of local issues can be a key component of this educational process.

Career enhancement: It can be argued that someone who is civically engaged, who is involved, informed and interested in local and national issues is more desirable and attrac-

tive as a prospective employee than someone who is apathetic and uninformed. It can be argued that a civically engaged employee may be more motivated and conscientious as an employee to learn and grow within an occupation or profession and be a more dynamic contributor to the well-being of his or her organization. In short, a civically engaged and informed person may be a better employee.



RESEARCHING ISSUES: Types of resources in general

Types of information and resources and steps in the research process

In brief, an organized research process in the writing of a research paper consists of the following steps: (1) select topic; (2) find background information and overviews; (3) find scholarly information, if possible, on the focused topic, and any other information, such as primary sources.

Knowing which research tools/resources to use during this research process makes it easier to complete the research paper, as certain types of resources are most useful and appropriate at the various stages of the research process.

Issues research resources

National vs. local resources

Local publications and websites are often the most preferable resources for information on local issues, because of the variety of topics and in-depth treatment of local topics that may not be found in national resources, although certain specific topics may be hard to locate.

National resources are useful because of the broad overview and background information they provide of an important topic, helping establish a national and global perspective or context from which to pursue a local aspect of that topic. A national story about an issue may or may not include mention or coverage of your state or city, but it can nevertheless be

a starting point for you to explore the local angle to the issue.

Proprietary database versus free websites

Library subscription databases: In general, subscription databases should be the first, or one of the first, resources used for research for a number of reasons.

One reason library databases are a first choice is the easy availability of peer-reviewed, scholarly articles from academic journals in these library databases (although peer-reviewed articles are also available in free open access journals on the Web). The content, organization and design of library databases meets high quality control standards; the amount of information in databases has large depth, breadth, comprehensiveness, both in terms of general, multidisciplinary coverage and specialized subject focus; navigation, search, and retrieval are optimized for ease and effectiveness with sophisticated fea-

tures and controlled vocabularies.

Various databases are listed below along with Internet sites. For a comprehensive listing of databases available at public libraries in Colorado, go to the Online Journals 24/7 site at oj24x7.quipugroup.com

Internet websites: While proprietary databases may provide information not found freely in websites, the reverse is true also, in that websites may contain certain types of information not found in the proprietary databases, especially narrowly-focused topics and local information.

In addition, not all researchers will have access to all the databases available. The Web's free content, unlike subscription databases, is very uneven in quality and reliability and has to be used cautiously, keeping in mind the purposes, biases and credentials of the site creators and authors.



RESEARCHING ISSUES: Types of Information and their resources

National resources for topic ideas useful for local issues

National and international media sometimes will have a story that focuses on a local community in the United States, but that is a “few and far between” exception for an issue that stands out in remarkable fashion. More frequently, though, a national story may include mention of a local community as an illustrative example of broad problems and issues. Most often, the mention of a state or city in a broader national context is usually nonexistent, and a researcher trying to mine information from national sources will be sorely disappointed and discouraged.

But it is good to know there is an abundance of local resources for social and political issues; it is just a matter of knowing where to find them and which ones are the most useful, a task that Colorado Issues Digest has

taken on to fulfill.

Yet national resources can still be reasonably useful if one knows how to tap into them and locate the nuggets of information they hold regarding local communities. With the Internet and online search methods, this task is made much easier than the earlier days of exclusively print resources. Of course, using national resources for local information are usually just a starting point or incidental tool, yet still valuable nevertheless and should not be overlooked.

National sources are also useful for writers who want to use a “top-down” approach of finding a problem or issue to focus on locally. By “top-down,” it is meant that a problem or issue is identified on a national or global level, then one drills down to a local level to find counterparts and parallels, similarities and contrasts.

Issues topic resources: websites and library databases

These are specially-designed resources—Internet sites and proprietary databases avail-

able in libraries—to provide listings of issues, including pro and con arguments. Besides providing alphabetically listed or categorized listings of issues, they often provide introductory, background information and links to additional resources on the topics, so they also serve as reference sources.

Issues Internet directories and sites: Web directories are databases of websites and information organized by subject and topic headings. These sites have excellent lists of topic ideas, includes links to articles, government sites, and organizations.

Yahoo! Issues and Causes

[dir.yahoo.com/Society and Culture/Issues and Causes](http://dir.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Issues_and_Causes)

DMOZ (Open Directory Project) Issues

dmoz.org/Society/Issues

ProCon.org ProCon.org (pro and con positions)

Almanac of Policy Issues policyalmanac.org

IDEA Database idebate.org (pro and con positions)

Colorado issues

Colorado Issues Digest

coloradoissues.homestead.com

Proprietary databases (subscription databases available at libraries):

Facts on File Issues and Controversies, CQ Researcher, Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center: listings of issues alphabetically and by category, current hot topics, pro/con, searchable by keyword.

Background information reference resources: websites and library databases

Background information, overviews, and useful factual information about topics are introductory starting points for research on a topic. By familiarizing oneself with a topic one can select an aspect for a research paper with a narrowed focus.

Encyclopedias, general and specialized, are the best-known type of reference resources for introductory background information and overviews. Often included are statistics, charts, graphs, images, and links to related re-

sources.

In addition to encyclopedias, there are reference sites on specific topics by universities (.edu), government agencies (.gov), publishers (.com, .net), and individuals (.com) providing a wide range of useful information not designed to promote a particular viewpoint. These sites may offer original content, background information, articles, and reports written by site contributors. These sites may also contain useful organized and annotated links to related information.

Library databases for books: Library catalogs can be searched for print and online books (e-books). In addition to the regular library catalog (or OPAC – Online Public Access Catalog), libraries subscribe to e-book databases such as ebrary, EBL (Ebook Library), and EBSCOhost eBook Collection. Searches in these databases can be specified to include policy issues, either public policy in general, or topic-specific policies. Subject and keyword searches can include the following: policies, policy, policy analysis. The policy keywords can also be combined with specific topics such as environ-

ment, healthcare, etc.

Library databases for encyclopedic information: Encyclopedic articles and background information and overviews are found in these library databases: Credo Reference; Britannica Online; World Book Online; CQ Researcher; Facts on File Issues and Controversies; Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center.

Encyclopedias on the Internet: Encyclopedias on the Internet: Free, collaboratively-produced encyclopedias on the Internet, most famously Wikipedia, are mistrusted and discounted by many academics, because of the lack of editorial control, where it is possible for anyone, regardless of credentials, to contribute writing, and also alter the existing content. Interestingly, a study by the journal *Nature* found that the number of errors in Wikipedia was not significantly different from that of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. A respected publication with academic contributors, *Information Today*, has pronounced Wikipedia as a trustworthy, reliable resource for information. Students are nevertheless cautioned not to

cite Wikipedia as a source, but can be very useful for its references that point to scholarly and primary sources.

There are, however, peer-reviewed, refereed, and editorially controlled encyclopedias on the Internet that include multidisciplinary and specialized encyclopedias from commercial sites as well as nonprofit organizations, government, and universities: Encyclopedia.com, InfoPlease.com/encyclopedia, Scholarpedia, Citizendium, MedlinePlus, Encyclopedia of Earth, Encyclopedia of Life, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. A list of bookmarked encyclopedias: delicious.com/acclibrary/encyclopedias.

Scholarly works

Scholarly studies, reports and statistical data add in-depth analysis and support to an issue or topic. Scholarly literature is characterized by footnotes and references to information gathered by the writer of the scholarly work. This information is found in scholarly journals in proprietary databases provided by libraries, in open access journal sites on the Web,

as well as on government, university, think tank and advocacy sites.

This type of information contrasts with what is found in the popular media of magazines, newspapers, blogs, news, etc. These popular sources may be useful, however, in their mentions of studies and experts, pointing you to scholarly sources.

Peer-reviewed articles: Studies in scholarly journals are usually written by academics with university affiliations, often peer-reviewed (also called refereed), adhering to strict standards of scholarship screened and accepted by a peer-review process of experts in a discipline—in fact, peer-reviewed research is considered to be the gold standard of academic literature.

Peer-reviewed articles are easily searchable in library article databases, and also found on the Internet in open access journal sites, as well as in government sites such as ERIC and PubMed. Be aware that not all scholarly articles on these sites are necessarily peer-reviewed.

Non-peer reviewed reports, studies, issue briefs: Reports and studies provided by think tanks, research institutes, advocacy groups, government agencies, and individuals may not carry the scholarly weight and caliber of peer-reviewed published research found in scholarly journals, but fill a gap for information not always provided by peer-reviewed scholarship. Public policy issue briefs often provide timely, narrow focuses not available elsewhere, and offer a real-world, practical problem-solution approach, in contrast to conventional research papers that are more academically knowledge-centered and theoretical.

Think tanks, policy centers, research institutes: There are hundreds of independent think tanks and university-connected research institutes that look at important global, national, and local issues, providing free online publications providing political perspectives. Think tanks may be national or state-based, liberal, conservative, or nonpartisan, taking persuasive or neutral stands on issues. Think tanks were initially created by

conservatives to counter a perceived liberal bias in the mainstream media that championed a proactive-government moral imperative to expand the rights of women and ethnic and racial minorities.

Proprietary resources—subscription databases: Subscription databases and services, available in libraries, provide scholarly, peer-reviewed articles (in addition to popular magazines): Academic OneFile, EBSCOhost's Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, CINAHLplus, PsycInfo, JSTOR, ProQuest.

Internet resources—open access journals: Open access scholarly journals covering all disciplines are freely available on the Web. Open access journal portals are bookmarked at delicious.com/acclibrary/open.access.journals

Internet resources—government databases: Two government sites provide huge collections of scholarly articles: ERIC and PubMed. ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) eric.ed.gov is the world's largest database for education scholarly articles, while Pub-

Med ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed is the world's largest database for medical articles.

Web search engines: Web search engines such as Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) are also useful for locating scholarly articles. Other search engines are Scirus for science articles (scirus.com), ESE (ese.rfe.org) for economics, and PsychSpider for psychology.

Statistics: Statistics and quantitative data are part of scholarly articles, often generated by the researchers/authors of the articles themselves, included in the research studies published in the academic journals or policy issue briefs.

In the non-scholarly media—popular magazines, newspapers, books, and websites—statistics may be spouted without necessarily providing the authoritative sources of such data. One should always “trust, but verify” and corroborate any factual information that does not cite authoritative sources.

Some statistics are gathered by non-profit organizations and business, and found on their websites, but the largest provider of statistics

is the United States government.

The US [Statistical Abstract](#) is a good starting point for many statistics, with categorized topic and government agency links. Another major government site for statistics, [Fed-Stats.gov](#), has statistical links to government agencies and departments by topic. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Statistical Resources on the Internet (www4.uwm.edu/libraries/govinfo/stats.cfm) is a comprehensive portal of links to statistics sites, categorized by subject.

ShadowStats.com is a site that purports to provide the “true” data that are not fudged and misrepresented by the federal government.

A quick way to find statistics is to combine the word *statistics* with a topic. Adding *site:.gov* will yield government sites.

Non-scholarly works information

News/current events

News sites: Important issues are often identified and brought to the attention of the public

through the news media. News sites and databases help explain and analyze why an issue is relevant, current legislation, and real world applications of the issue. News stories bring the latest events related to certain topics, updating what is previously known.

Although news reporting is seen as being largely routine, superficial, and un-academic, with little or limited value for scholarly research, certain types of journalism, enterprise and accountability reporting, particularly have important value. These types of reporting via original investigation “by definition bring new information to light, can grow into society-changing work not so dissimilar from academic research that makes original contributions to knowledge in history and the social sciences.” (McChesney). One of the first distinguished critics of journalism, Walter Lippmann, wrote in the 1920s, that journalism was an instrument of public purpose, an effort “to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality on which men can act.”

Despite the lofty goals and aspirations of jour-

nalism, important issues are frequently not adequately covered by the news media, and overlooked or negligently mishandled. This is reflected by increasingly low levels of trust and confidence in the media by the public.

Bookmarked news sites at delicious.com/acclibrary/news. Colorado news sites: delicious.com/acclibrary/Colo.>news

Law and legislation

Legislative, law sites: Legislative and law sites, databases, and guides explain the current law regarding a topic. Included are statutes and court cases. Debates prior to a law being enacted provide perspectives on pros and cons of the issue. Does the issue fall within a legal, legislative or administrative context? Do the issue ideas support pending legislation or entail changing current laws? Bookmarked sites at delicious.com/acclibrary/law Colorado law sites: delicious.com/acclibrary/Colo.>law

Advocacy and Opinion

Advocacy groups: The opinions and arguments of others help formulate your opinions and positions or contrasting arguments on issues. Advocacy group websites (often have the domain name .org) and opinion magazines are useful to help understand a point of view different than your own.

Many advocacy groups provide a clear mission statement for their organization on their websites. Some advocacy sites are national, with local chapters, or they may be grassroots local groups.

Keep in mind their purpose and bias, often enumerated in the About Us or FAQ section of their website. These sites often include fact sheets, position papers, and research studies.

Some advocacy sites provide links to current legislation and track how politicians have supported their efforts and positions, as well as links to like-minded organizations.

Opinion magazines: Opinion magazines (*The Atlantic Monthly*, *Newsweek*, and *Salon* are

examples) provide commentary and analysis of current events from liberal, conservative, or nonpartisan vantage points, with either persuasive or neutral perspectives.

Bookmarked sites at

delicious.com/acclibrary/magazines.

Blogs: Blogs are an increasingly important resource for first-hand information not readily found elsewhere, as well as analysis, and opinion, especially blogs written by experts and academics in a field.

Blogs have shown they can be a powerful force able to shape and influence public policy and political actions by bringing attention to little-known and under-reported issues, by uncovering untruths, scandals, and failures of accountability.

Such a development had its beginnings when a liberal blogosphere was born (with conservatives following suit) to bypass large media institutions to conduct conversations within like-minded communities on the Web, a collaboration relying on voluntary research and well-timed information leaks from readers.

Some of this has been referred to--often disparagingly by the established news professionals--as "citizen journalism," undertaken by a mixture of untrained amateurs and independent journalists lacking experience and expertise, resulting in information whose reliability and authority is liable to question.

Blogger Arianna Huffington of The Huffington Post, whose journalistic credentials have been viewed as questionable, was one of the first to leverage the knowledge of readers to challenge a mainstream media. Another pioneering blog, Talking Points Memo, started by a liberal freelance journalist, is credited with eye-opening revelations about national affairs and has played a lead role in inflicting damage to Republican politics--for example, was credited for almost single-handedly bringing the fired US attorneys scandal to a boil with the resulting resignation of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. TPM gained the respect and admiration of journalism academia and became the first blog to receive a George Polk Award. On the other end of the political spectrum, conservative bloggers helped bring down Dan Rather as a CBS news anchor after

he broadcast dubious documents about President George W. Bush's military record.

Many topic-specific sites have a blog section. See bookmarked sites at delicious.com/acclibrary/politics. Blog directories are useful for finding blogs, such as Yahoo! (dir.yahoo.com/news_and_media/blogs)

One can search blogs in Google by using Google Blogs (google.com/blogsearch). One can also do a Google search by combining blogs and topic name.

Forums: Advocacy positions and opinions can also be gotten from discussion groups and forums found on various sites. A general discussion group covering all imaginable topics is Google Groups (groups.google.com).

Op-eds: Op-ed pieces (newspaper editorials and letters to the editor), blog postings and reader comments also help identify opposing opinions and arguments to a topic. The library database NewsBank is useful for locating articles and op-ed pieces from Colorado and national newspapers. The Colorado Issues Digest

links page has listings of Colorado news sites and blogs (coloradoissues.homestead.com/Links.html). Bookmarked sites: delicious.com/acclibrary/politics. Colorado bookmarked sites: delicious.com/acclibrary/Colo.>issues

Media interviews: Audio and video interviews with experts, advocates, newsmakers, and others are available on sites such as YouTube and radio station sites. Broadcast transcripts of interviews are available in databases such as NewsBank. Transcripts of interviews in general are found in periodical databases such as ProQuest and EBSCOhost.

Self-initiated interviews: Personal interviews initiated by the student researcher, by phone or in-person, is yet another way to obtain valuable information and opinions on issues. One can interview key individuals in specific organizations such as advocacy groups and think tanks, as well as legislators and journalists specializing in a particular issue area for valuable input, insights, and perspectives on a topic in the research process. Sometimes you will unearth new information this way, espe-

cially helpful for a narrow topic with limited existing information in the normal resources of databases and websites.

Search strategies/tips for Colorado issues

Selecting a topic

Unless a topic has been assigned, selecting a topic is the necessary first step of writing a paper or preparing a speech. There are a number of ways one can arrive at a Colorado topic to write about.

Serendipity: A casual discovery or awareness of a topic--is there a Colorado issue that has gotten your attention from the local or national talk shows, news media, websites, or your own discussions with others? You catch a national media story that focuses on Colorado or mentions Colorado in a wider context.

Top-down research from national sources: You research or browse for a topic from a na-

tional and global perspective covered by the media, websites, print books and articles. What are the implications and ramifications for your state and community? You find a national problem, issue that interests you—what are the counterparts and parallels in your community and state?

Background information

Looking at background information is part of the initial exploratory process of selecting and settling on a topic. (The next step, after the topic has been selected and background information found, is to find credible, reliable information from authoritative sources, and properly crediting/citing them in the research paper.)

- Background information consists of overviews and introductions to topics found in the above topic guides, encyclopedias, as well as readings in the popular and scholarly publications and media.

- A general search in a database or search en-

gine using a single search term (or keyword or subject heading) will be useful for background information and overviews, as well as for exploring for topic ideas and aspects of topic.

- Background information can also be gleaned from in-depth treatments in books and articles. Background reading is useful to “get a handle” on a selected topic or aspect of a topic, to become familiar enough with the problem or issue in order to write intelligently about it.

- Background reading provides the jargon, specialized terminology of a topic for use as keywords, concepts, and search terms in using databases and the Web in order to properly target the topic.

- Background reading is also useful for selecting or narrowing down a topic, as familiarity with an issue opens up various facets to focus on.

Statistics: National statistics resources are good places to find Colorado statistics because often national statistics are broken

down by state. (See the statistical sites on page 10).

For certain types of statistics, local organizations and governmental agencies may be the best resources.

A listing of Colorado statistical resources has been created by the University of Colorado-Boulder librarians, (Google search: Colorado by the Numbers). The Colorado State Library has prepared listings of Colorado state agencies and resources for statistics and background information on various topics (Google search: Colorado research topics).

Selecting from national topic lists to apply locally: Online and print topic guides provide topics alphabetically and by category. Library databases: CQ Researcher, Facts on File, Opposing Viewpoints. Websites: Almanac of Policy Issues (PolicyAlmanac.org); DMOZ (Open Directory Project) Issues (dmoz.org/Society/Issues/); IDEA Database (idebate.org); Pro-Con.org (ProCon.org); Yahoo! Issues and Causes (dir.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Issues_and_Causes/).

Print topic guides available in libraries include *At Issue*, *Contemporary World Issues*, *Current Controversies*, *Opposing Viewpoints*, *Taking Sides*.

Selecting from local topic lists: Local issues are listed alphabetically and by category on the Colorado Issues Digest site (ColoradoIssues.homestead.com).

Selecting from reference resources such as encyclopedias: Topics covered in reference publications such as general and specialized encyclopedias provide ideas for local application.

Library reference databases include Britannica Online, Credo Reference, Gale Virtual Reference Library, World Book Online.

Websites: Internet peer-reviewed and refereed encyclopedias include multidisciplinary and specialized encyclopedias from nonprofit organizations and universities, such as Scholarpedia, Citizendium, Encyclopedia of

Earth, Encyclopedia of Life, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

A list of bookmarked encyclopedias: delicious.com/acclibrary/encyclopedias.

Colorado topic strategies for specific tools/resources

The tools and resources for research consist of search engines, databases, and websites. Knowing how and what to search, using search terms consisting of keywords and subject headings, increases chances of success.

Using keywords: A general search in a database or search engine will be useful for certain kinds of information, such as exploring for topic ideas and aspects of topics, as well as background information and overviews. Adding search terms (keywords and subject headings) to the search adds specificity. General: *obesity*. More specific: *Obesity and Colorado*. Even more specific: *Obesity and Colorado and children*.

Boolean searching: with databases, use the Boolean operator “and” to specify searches combining Colorado with topics. For example, *Colorado and obesity*. Search engines such as Google do not require the *and* operator (*and* is implied), e.g., *Colorado obesity*. Use the “or” operator to widen results with similar or related terms. The “not” and “and not” operator excludes unwanted results associated with certain keywords. Desired results are not always obtained with the first search. Experiment with different similar and related keywords, and with different combination of words to maximize search success.

Policy issue briefs and research reports: To further specify and target results, look for research reports policy issue briefs (which are more scholarly than ordinary articles found in magazines, newspapers and websites) on topics with information that is scarce or that may not be found elsewhere. Scholarly journal articles are few or non-existent on many local topics. Research reports and issue briefs are prepared by university research institutes and departments, government and think tanks,

and advocacy organizations. Issue briefs add a “real-world” focus that academic and scholarly journals articles may lack. Search example: *Colorado gun control issue brief*.

Issue briefs may be hidden and not always easily found using search engines and databases. Colorado issue briefs may be found on websites of think tanks and advocacy groups. (A good list of such organizations can be found at the Center for Policy Entrepreneurship links page under Public Policy, Research, and Advocacy at c-pe.org/links.html.) Such sites may have an issues link or links to briefs or particular issues, or a section for archived publications. Another way to find issue briefs on such websites is to use their internal search engine or a Google site-specific search, which combines a domain name with a topic, as in this example: *site:.cclponline.org elderly issue brief*.

A good way to size up an issue is to read or prepare an issue brief. The structure of a policy brief lends itself to an analysis of political issues. First, let’s define a public policy issue:

a public policy issue is one on which government action (legislative, judicial, or executive) or government monies should (or should not) be spent to help resolve a perceived problem.

Policy issue briefs help fill the voids of information on issues, are a resource utilized by business, government, and journalists, often overlooked or undiscovered by the public and neglected in school curricula.

These are reports done by/for business, government, academicians, and think tanks, to provide useful information on complex issues to decision-makers and those with influence, but usually are not accessed by the public, even though much of these papers and briefs are publicly accessible.

Policy papers and issue briefs are by no means in-depth and comprehensive answers to everything that needs to be known about an issue, but they are valuable tools to help provide knowledge to those who are not experts.

A good summary of a policy issue brief is provided by PolicyOptions.org:

The issue brief is typically a short, neutral summary of what is known about a particular issue or problem (although it may take another form to advocate a particular position). It is widely used in government and industry. A policy issue brief is about a public problem, one that may or already does affect, or is affected by, government. Analysts prepare such briefs for educated generalists (e.g., legislators, managers), who may know little or nothing about the topic, but need to have a general background, quickly.

The issue brief distills or synthesizes a large amount of complex detail, so the reader can easily understand the heart of the issue, its background, the players ("stakeholders") and any recommendations, or even educated guesses about the future of the issue. It may have tables and graphs; it usually has a short list of references, so the reader knows something about the sources on which it is based, and where to go for more information. Often, the brief has its own "brief"--a one page "executive summary," allowing the reader to

quickly grasp the essence of the report.

Thus an issue brief is a written report that seeks to answer fundamental questions related to a public policy issue:

- *What is the nature and extent of the problem: past, current, and future?*
- *What's been tried in the past to address it?*
- *What's being done now?*
- *What are the distinctly different approaches to addressing this issue?*

Colorado issues on national sites: National websites for news, policy, advocacy may not on the surface show content about Colorado, but using their internal search engines or using a Google site-specific search can yield archived articles and reports about Colorado issues (*site:domain.com Colorado*).