

RESEARCH HELPS – thanks to a patriot contributor!

General Good Place to Start on Government Transparency

A great resource on public information and general public records information is:

<http://sunshinereview.org>. This site is a pretty good all in one resource on public records, freedom of information requests, and elections law. The disadvantage is the same as with wikipedia—since the public is contributing content, you are going to want to double check the accuracy as there could be mistakes that are missed. When in doubt rely on the official government sites, many of which I give below.

How to Look up the Law

When a bill is passed by both houses of Congress and signed by the President it becomes a Public or Private Law. Public laws are the ones that apply to everyone and are published with an identifying number. To find a listing of all Public and Private laws passed in the United States go to:

Public and Private Laws: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/plaws/index.html>

These laws are then taken and integrated into the United States Code (U.S.C.) which is an organized tabulation of all the federal laws in effect. This is the main resource where one would go to look up the law of the land, relative to the federal government. It is organized into Titles, Chapters, Subchapters, Sections, and Subsections. For example Title 26 U.S.C. is the much dreaded, inscrutable Internal Revenue Code. For a complete listing of the United States Code go to:

United States Code (U.S.C.): <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode/browse.html>

Whenever reading any section of the code, it is important to read the “definitions” sections as these often differ from section to section, and these distinctions can be quite important (i.e. definition of “taxpayer” in context of Public Laws authorizing the income tax). These codes also need to be read in context of what is called the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR—not to be confused with Council on Foreign Relations). These represent either the interpretations of the law by the executive branch agency responsible for overseeing a particular section of the United States Code, or decisions made by such agency in cases where authority was specifically ceded to them by Congress to make such regulations. For example the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services under the Department of Health and Human Services is given the right under the U.S.C. to determine medicare reimbursements, which are published in the CFR. Please note that just because something appears in the CFR, does not make it lawful, as administrative agencies often overstep the boundaries of control established in the U.S.C. in creating such regulations (in the same manner laws codified in the U.S.C. are often outside the bounds of the authority vested to the federal government in the Constitution). To look up items in the code of regulations go to:

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR): <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>

Listing of all Titles on One page: <http://frwebgate1.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/waisgate.cgi?WAISdocID=000434433065+0+0+0&WAISaction=retrieve>

Click “Browse and/or search the CFR” below the search box in the first link. The chapters are updated each year so you want to click on the most recent version. The titles do not usually correspond to the USC Code (Title 26 being an exception). Of course, everyone should know likewise that all of these codes and regulations should conform to the Constitution, which most of you should have a copy of. If not it can be found here along with the Declaration of Independence (click on “Text” or “PDF” next to S. Doc. 105-11 under search box):

U.S. Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Interpretations:

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/constitution/index.html>

There are parallel structures of law at the level of state government. In Washington, the analog to Public Laws are called Session Laws, the analog to the United States Code is the Revised Code of Washington, and the analog to the Code of Federal Regulations is the Washington Administrative Code (WAC):

Washington State Constitution: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/LawsAndAgencyRules/Pages/constitution.aspx>

Session Laws: http://www.leg.wa.gov/CodeReviser/Pages/session_laws.aspx

Revised Code Of Washington (RCW): <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/>

Washington Administrative Code (WAC): <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/>

Local government entities like counties and cities are creations of the state and thus subject to state laws on their governance. Any local laws must thus conform to both state and national constitutions, as well as the state laws governing their conduct (assuming they do not conflict—the constitutions **should** take precedence). People who want more self government in a county usually form a municipal corporation, better known as a city covering specific boundaries within the county, which can be incorporated or disincorporated according to the laws of the state. The specifics on structure of counties and municipalities in Washington are given below:

Washington Revised Code:

Title 35 – Cities and Towns: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?Cite=35>

Title 35A – Optional Municipal Code: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?Cite=35A>

Title 36 – Counties: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?Cite=36>

At the local level, legislation enacted by a city council or county commissioners is usually referred to as an ordinance which is published in a similar manner to codes at the state and federal level. Local entities can also have their own charters, which function as a sort of constitution for a local government. An example is the City of Spokane, whose charter specifically gives citizens a right to initiative and referendum, not available in non-charter cities. For local governments without charters, the default state code governing the structure of such an entity is in effect. Here are some relevant local government links (if your municipality does not appear below do an internet search on the name of the government and 'ordinances', 'city council', 'county commission', or 'municipal code' or try <http://www.sterlingcodifiers.com/codesonline.php> or <http://www.municode.com> which has a lot of them in one place):

Spokane County Code: http://library6.municode.com/default-test/home.htm?infobase=16337&doc_action=whatsnew

Spokane County Zoning Code (maintained separately by the Division of Building and Planning) : <http://www.spokanecounty.org/bp/content.aspx?c=2336>

City of Spokane Charter: <http://www.spokanecity.org/services/documents/charter/>

City of Spokane Municipal Code: <http://www.spokanecity.org/services/documents/smc/>

Finally, I regret to inform you that the above is not all that is necessary to understand how a judge will interpret the law, although it should be. Most J.D.s prescribe to the idea or “case law” or that it is the sole right of higher courts to interpret the law, not the common people who are to follow them. If a Supreme Court judge says “1+1=3” then, most lawyers and judges will agree “1+1=3,” even if not true because it is now a “case law” precedent (even on 5-4 decisions).

My favorite example was *Wickard v. Filburn* where the Supreme Court decided a farmer using his own crops was “interstate commerce” – no joke! Until our country is turned around, it is not the law that matters, but most often what the appellate courts think (the Supreme Court RARELY grants a writ of certiorari-- in other words, agrees to review a case). The best way of researching case law is by going to a city, county, or university law library and looking up the citations under given sections of code.

Here are some other important judicial links that can help in looking up opinions, legal procedures, and individual cases:

Federal Courts: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/judicial.html>

United States Supreme Court: <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/>

United States District Court, Eastern District of Washington: <http://www.waed.uscourts.gov/>

United States District Court System, Idaho: <http://www.id.uscourts.gov/>

Washington State Courts: <http://www.courts.wa.gov/index.cfm>

Spokane County District Court: <http://www.spokanecounty.org/districtcourt/content.aspx?c=1551>

Spokane County Superior Court: <http://www.spokanecounty.org/superiorcourt/content.aspx?c=1064>

U.S. PACER Database: <http://www.pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/>

The above is a GREAT comprehensive database for looking up ANY federal court case. Get the case number and the summary records here and then call up the court clerk for the particular judge presiding the case to get the documents referenced if they can be made public (complaints, filings, etc.).

LexisNexis – The mother of all research tools. Huge searchable database of every case, publication, article, etc. imaginable. Often used by law firms, law students, and journalists. It is not cheap either. For more details: <http://www.lexisnexis.com/>. Lexis.com is targeted to lawyers, and Nexis.com is targeted to corporations.

FindLaw – For those who cannot afford Lexis or do not have time to go to the law library, this is a reasonable resource to look up selected case law precedents: <http://www.findlaw.com/>. Go to <http://lp.findlaw.com/> and register to look up cases.

You can also buy cheap boiler plate legal documents at this site (warning, not all incorporation documents are created equally!!)

Justia – another good site for looking up commonly cited precedents – <http://www.justia.com/>

Tracking Legislation

Often one will need to understand how to look up the current law to understand pending legislation, as the sections of code modified in a bill need to be taken into context with the entire section or chapter, particularly any definitions. State and local legislative bodies actually do a much better job than Congress of specifying exactly how the code is to be modified, and are often constrained by “single subject” constraints – at least that is the claim (I do not understand how many of the revenue bills coming out of Olympia now are “single subject” when they are 100+ pages effecting all sort of different methods of taxation). While exact procedures differ from legislative body to legislative body, a bill is generally introduced by a member (sponsor) with various co-sponsors and given a “First Reading” when it is introduced. It usually then goes to a Committee where hearings are held. The committee can then allow it to go back to the floor for a “Second Reading,” which basically just a reintroduction to the floor. After the “Third Reading” a vote is held. Throughout this process various amendments can be added to the bill to change provisions. After passing one house of the legislature, the bill goes to another, or different forms are enacted in both houses in which case the bills have to be “reconciled” in a committee consisting of members of both houses. The final form of the bill then gets voted on by both houses, and then potentially signed by the President/governor. In states, there usually is a period of delay before the bill becomes law to allow for referendum challenges, unless there is an “emergency” declared, allowing it to

go into effect immediately. There are some differences in procedure from the national and state governments depending on the government so the above is somewhat a generality. Local governments are even more unique, depending on the laws of the state or relevant charters. For example, in general a city council can pass ordinances without approval of the mayor, and many times there is no elected mayor (i.e. a city councilman will assume the duties of a mayor).

All bills introduced by Congress can be found at the link below. You can browse “HR” and “S” to see what is being introduced along with titles to keep real time track of what is being introduced, or “All bills for the 111th Congress to include all the resolutions, etc. If you know the name of the bill you can just type it in the search box – like “H.R. 645” or “S. 6” – be sure to use periods (.) and use “Exact Match Only” which is the default. Alternatively you could search for a term like “firearms.”

Search Bill Summary and Status: <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/111search.html>

When you click on the bill number you will get a page which lists the text of the bill, cosponsors, related bills, amendments, a summary (very useful—click “CRS Summary”), committees it was referred to, and Congressional actions. If the bill passes one or more chambers of the legislature a linked Roll number will appear next to the vote (“Roll no. 887” for example on “H.R. 3962”), although this is a bit hard to read. A cleaner version, particularly on the roll call vote, and another resource that is perhaps easier to use for most is govtrack (click on votes to get the votes):

GovTrack Federal Legislation: <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/legislation.xpd>

GovTrack.us is an INCREDIBLE site to track federal legislation, your Congress Critter in particular. You can sign up to receive updates on legislation you are particularly interested in via email updates or an RSS feed. You can even sign up for live Twitter feeds of real time legislative action! Most government agencies also have email alert features as well which you can find on their websites. Just be aware that if you sign up for all of them, even in just one agency like the FDA, your email could get deluged with information! If you cannot find the link on a site, you can always contact the agency using the information on the website and someone can tell you if such alerts exists and how to subscribe to them.

In the state of Washington - Washington State Legislature: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/pages/home.aspx>

Click “Bill Search” in the upper left section of the page. Simply type in the number of the bill and click search. You will get a complete legislative history as in Idaho. If there are any votes click on “View Roll Calls” to see how your rep voted. Click “View Original Bill” to see the original bill or “View Bill as Passed Legislature” to see the final form. Click on “Committee materials” to view detailed reports, amendments, etc. added at committee (look under the tree in the left under the bill number). This is more important these days as sometimes the legislature introduces a one page bill with a simple title with 150 pages of amendments in the Committee section, thinking I guess that most people will not think to click there to see the rest of the text. This is also a great resource in following what exactly going on in committees in general. For summaries of the legislation, scroll to the bottom and look under “Bill Reports.”

The tools to track local government are not nearly as good, and usually you have to resort to reading the agendas, council minutes, and calendars which are published online. Here are some relevant local resources (again google name of government and city council or county commission to find your local government if not listed below).

Spokane County Public Meeting Schedules:

http://www.spokanecounty.org/commissioners/public_hearings_and_agendas.aspx

List of Public Hearings:

http://www.cdaid.org/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=15&MMN_position=109:109

(“Public Hearings” to left on <http://www.cdaid.org>)

Spokane City Council Agendas:

<http://www.spokanecity.org/government/citycouncil/default.aspx#Agendas>

Click on “Current Agenda” and “Advance Agenda” for the relevant meetings and “Official Gazette” with the voting records and results of meetings of the given day (the most recent will be hyperlinked just below).

Watching your officials in action:

There are a lot of real time links to live broadcast your government officials or listings of public access feeds on TV, some of which are listed below:

C-Span: <http://www.c-span.org/>

Washington State Public Affairs TV Network: <http://www.tvw.org/index.cfm?bhjs=0>

Spokane City Cable: <http://www.spokanecity.org/services/citycable5/>

Tracking Lobbyist, PACS, and monies to Congress Critters

Candidates for office have to file detailed reports with federal or state agencies showing where their money comes from. The old adage being “follow the money” these are great resources to understand **why** officials might be voting a certain way. Candidates for federal office, and political action committees (PACs) registered with the Federal Elections Commission (FEC):

FEC Disclosure Data Search: http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/disclosure_data_search.shtml

Here you can search candidates, PACs, or individual contributors. You can go to a search box where you can type in a name and some details like state to narrow down the search. Click on the candidate name and you will be given a summary. Click on the hyperlinks for details. The contributors are linked to details for that particular contributor. The link on the far right with the number will give you the actual report the details are from.

For more details on federal election law:

Summary Publications: http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/disclosure_data_search.shtml

U.S.C. Title 2, Chapter 14 (Sec. 431-457): <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/usc.cgi?ACTION=BROWSE&TITLE=2USCC14&PDFS=YES>

CFR Title 11 (2009): http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_09/11cfrv1_09.html

State of Washington:

The public disclosure commission (PDC; <http://www.pdc.wa.gov/>) has the most ABSURD reporting requirements, perhaps of any disclosure agency in the nation. It makes the FEC (www.fec.gov) look like Mickey Mouse. If you are REALLY upset at a particular official you can actually take advantage of really absurd laws such as one that requires a candidate or PAC to hold office hours where anyone can come down and view records on appointment . . . ANYONE (say, a large number of voters coming down at different times upset about him voting to repeal I-960)! To access spending and contribution records go to:

Search the PDC Database: <http://www.pdc.wa.gov/QuerySystem/Default.aspx>

Here you can get information on candidates, political committees, party committees, caucus committees, and statewide ballot initiatives which are required to file. If you click on candidate, select the type of race (Statewide, Legislative, Judicial, Local, etc.)--the page will reload and you can select the candidate and

year in the boxes to the left side. Then click on “details” in the name to the side. You can then see details listed by cash contributions, in-kind contributions, expenditures, and independent spending. There is a similar engine for the other entities listed above.

To get details on lobbyists you can go to the following link:

Lobbyists: <http://www.pdc.wa.gov/Public/Lobbyist/Default.aspx>

Most people are not aware of this, but many politicians in this state if they represent a large enough constituency are required to fill out personal financial reports with some general details on their income and assets. If you want to see about how much the candidate is worth, what they are investing in, and generally where they make their money go to:

Personal Financial Affairs Records: <http://www.pdc.wa.gov/Public/personal/Default.aspx>

Send an email requesting information on a particular candidate or candidates to the person listed with which years you want reports for (could be “all available” to get all of them). You should get one or more pdfs with the relevant information in a rather expeditious fashion (within hours based on my experience).

For more details on Washington Public Disclosure Law go to:

Summary of filing requirements: <http://www.pdc.wa.gov/filers/buttons/filing.aspx>

Chapter 42.17 RCW: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=42.17>

Title 390 WAC: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=390>

Elections Information

In general, elections information is handled at the state level by the secretary of state and at the county level by an executive official such as the county auditor. Below are some resources on ballot initiatives, referenda, filing for office, elections calendars, and elections results:

Washington Secretary of State: <http://adm.idaho.gov/adminrules/agyindex.htm>

Spokane County Elections: <http://wei.secstate.wa.gov/spokane/Pages/Home.aspx>

Delving BEYOND Public Records – Public Records Requests

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) at the federal levels and public disclosure laws at the state level are EXTREMELY powerful tools that one can use to get any and all sorts of information. This includes information the government has on you including your IRS master file, FBI files, etc. as well as a wide variety of correspondence between public officials and private corporations. The major limit is your imagination, and various rules regarding the confidentiality of information. When in doubt, you can ask first and the agency will respond as appropriate. It is necessary to know the rules in detail if you suspect they are holding something back inappropriately, in which case you might need to write a follow-up correspondence or even file a lawsuit. If you EVER have a problem with the government, the first thing I would suggest is carefully wording a public disclosure request to get at the heart of the problem and could be used as evidence or ammunition against public officials gone mad with power.

There is no central clearing house for public records request. You are going to need to contact the relevant agency of government who will have an information officer, which will usually appear on the website of the agency. For a city government, it is likely to be the city clerk's office. For larger agencies like the Department of Ecology, they will have a public disclosure officer. You want to word the request very specifically so they know exactly what to look for, and you can submit the request in writing and/or email depending on the agency. Things to keep in mind:

- 1. Do not ask questions; ask for documents and documentation.** The information officer is not there to answer questions, but to provide documentation. Instead of asking a question you want to frame the requests such that you are looking for specific documentation which would serve to answer the questions that you wish to know the answers to.
- 2. Always specify a timeframe for the records you want.** The longer the timeframe the more inundated with records you are going to get.
- 3. List each type of record you want.** If you want emails, specify it. If you want contracts, specify it. Think of exactly what you want and any type of recorded record or log that might be produced. If you do not mention it, the information officer might not think of it. If you are looking for something in particular and happen to know the system of records that the particular agency is using (published in the Federal Register for each federal agency), you can specify the record number (example for copyright office: <http://www.copyright.gov/docs/ml651.pdf>). Similar indices are generally kept at the state level as well as mandated by law.
- 4. Decide on a strategy to get the records.** I like starting with a really broad request (see SAMPLE PRA based on what I recently submitted to the Department of Ecology to a CD with recent climate documents). This is the best way of catching your government doing something that you might not expect. It is harder to filter a request like this as well. The bad thing is you are going to get a LOT of information. You might have to dialogue with the information officer to help them narrow it down. However, if you request a CD or internet link, it makes it easier both in terms of minimizing copy fees and you can use modern search tools to search for keywords. Once you have an idea of exactly what you want, you can ask a much more specific request and perhaps get records that were missed in the first search, and you can use references in the documents from the first search to track down things left out.
- 5. Do not request copies all up front, if there are a lot.** You have a right to go into a reading room and view the records personally before deciding if you want copies. If 95% are useless to you, this is going to save you copy costs, and depending on the agency, the first 100 or so copies could even be free. If they deliver the material electronically as described above, this is less of an issue as you can peruse the records from your own computer.
- 6. Make sure to notarize any request for personal information about yourself.** Such requirements are usually specified at the public disclosure website, stating you need to get your signature notarized, so you are proving you are who you say you are (so your privacy is not violated), as well as your needing to state that you are aware of the penalties for impersonating someone to get their private records. Many times the agency will have a boiler plate form to fill out to that effect. You do not have to have the notarization on that page. To save money on notaries get a generic letter with similar wording saying you are who you say you are and you recognize the penalties using similar if not identical language to a FOIA form referenced above, and have it signed and notified. You can then make copies of this and attach it to any applicable FOIA requests (make reference to it in your written request so they know to look for it) you might make on your personal information. The notary is supposed to be valid for one year, and from what I understand, generally will be accepted much after that period.
- 7. Give them plenty of time to get the records.** Many of these departments are understaffed, and if you have a large request it takes time. In my experience, the public records officers are great advocates for you (their job is to get the information to you and stand up for you against officials who are reluctant to release records, as they are held responsible for complying with the law) and you should give them every courtesy in taking the time to get the records to you.

8. If sending the request by mail, be sure to indicate somewhere on the letter that it is a Freedom of Information or Public Records Act request to expedite processing. There is no need to send certified mail, and I prefer actually to send via email. Generally, they are going to be good about responding and there is no need to be paranoid about them conveniently losing the request.

9. Ask them to identify the records and index numbers of any records they withheld from you under an exemption. By making sure you have notice of exactly what is being withheld, you can better decide if a legal challenge is necessary. The case law surrounding public records is generally heavily on the side of the public, with courts liberally construing the law towards the public's benefit given a common law right to open government in this country. You can also ask if a document in its entirety is withheld, whether parts of it can be redacted so you can see the remainder of the document.

10. You might have to ask several different agencies to get the right request. Since each office has its own information policies, you might have to try several different locations to find what you are looking for. If you are unsure, you should send letters out to all relevant agencies or offices.

11. State in your request that you intend to pay for any copies that you request. Usually this is included in the wording of any standard public records form. If you do not intend to inspect the records personally, you should put a numeric limit on the amount you are willing to spend copies on and be aware of potential costs before sending in the request (should be posted on the website of the agency). You might even be able to dialogue with the public disclosure officer as far as what information they have so you can send generally those which may or may not be relevant. In certain instances it might be in your best interests to send several more limited requests to the same agency over a period of time (for instance, the IRS allows the first 100 copies for free per request, and if suspect information might be withheld there is also a per request fine if they do not give you the information as per law).

Good resource for getting started with public records requests:

<http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/Portal:WikiFOIA>

Freedom of Information Act:

Department of Justice FOIA page (links to other agencies FOIA sites are here!):

<http://www.justice.gov/oip/index.html>

National Security Archives FOIA Basics: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/foia/guide.html>

IRS FOIA Page (good elaboration on 9 exemptions):

<http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/foia/article/0,,id=211443,00.html>

5 U.S.C., Chapter 5, Subchapter II, Section 552 <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/usc.cgi?ACTION=BROWSE&TITLE=5USCPI&PDFS=YES>

Click on section 552. Also see 552a on personal records which deals with the Privacy Act of 1974, one of the most undervalued assets in a citizen's arsenal, particularly with regards to your rights NOT to disclose your social security number. Also note 552 (d)(2)(B)(i) on your right to **remove** information that is inaccurate or **irrelevant** (also see (e)(1)). Search for "trade secret" in this page and you will be taken down to the 9 exceptions to what shall be made available public: 552 (b)(1)-(9) (see IRS information page listed above which is a good elaboration on these). There will also be additional interpretations in the CFR for each relevant agency as far as their procedure for complying with the act (for example CFR Title 28, Part 16 for the Justice Department)

Washington Public Records Act

42.56 RCW: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=42.56>

Prewritten forms to get FBI file: <http://getmyfbifile.com>

Where is your public money going?

The following resources can be used to pull up budgets, information on the debt, prior years' financial reports, reports on the financial health of the country, etc. The U.S. Treasury is the executive agency who is generally responsible for the nation's finances and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is a separate non-partisan body which issues reports on the financial state of the United States. The General Accounting Office (GAO) is the investigative arm of Congress, while the Office of Inspector General (OIG) is the Treasury Department responsible with providing objective reviews of government policy.

United States Treasury <http://www.ustreas.gov/>

Budget : <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/management/budget/budget-documents/>

CBO Projections : <http://www.cbo.gov/>

Treasury Bulletin (summaries) : <http://www.cbo.gov/>

Inspector General Reports: <http://www.ustreas.gov/inspector-general/other-reports.shtml>

Public Debt (Up to Minute): <http://www.treasurydirect.gov/NP/BPDLogin?application=np>

Daily Treasury Statement (gov't account balances) : <http://www.fms.treas.gov/dts/index.html>

Monthly Treasury Statement: <http://www.fms.treas.gov/mts/index.html>

Social Security and Medicare Reports: http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/economic-policy/social_security.shtml

TARP Information: <http://www.financialstability.gov/>

Detailed Reports on Government Agencies – GAO : <http://www.gao.gov/index.html>

Detailed Financial Report for Fed Gov – <http://www.gao.gov/financial.html>

State information:

Washington State Budget: <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/budget/budgets.asp>

Economic Activity and Statistics

A great place to get a sense of all the economic reports available and when they are released is the general economic calendar of events:

Economic Calendars: http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/economic-policy/monitoring_economies.shtml

Federal Reserve – Money supply (H.6), bank liquidity (H.3), industrial production (G.17), flow of funds data (Z.1), consumer credit (G.19), Fed balance sheet (H.4.1), bank balance sheets (H.8), interest rates (H.15), foreign exchange rates (H.10), etc. Statistics and Historical Data:

<http://www.federalreserve.gov/econresdata/releases/statisticsdata.htm>

Bureau of Economic Analysis – GDP, personal income, consumer spending, corporate profits (non-GAAP), balance of payments, international trade, international investments, etc: <http://www.bea.gov/>

Gross Domestic Product: <http://www.bea.gov/national/index.htm#gdp>

GDP Detailed Data (Great Resource!): <http://www.bea.gov/national/nipaweb/SelectTable.asp?Selected=N>

If you run a business and want a detailed month by month view of how each specific sector of the economy is doing, including inflation statistics (GDP deflator—a better and more comprehensive measure than CPI, which is calculated for each individual industry) you are going to want to go to this site.

Bureau of Labor Statistics – Inflation, spending, employment, productivity: <http://www.bls.gov/>
“Unfudged” statistics – Shadow Stats: <http://shadowstats.com>

U.S. Census Bureau – incredible resource on variety of statistics covering United States. The census does not just do population, they also collect statistics for many other government agencies including much of the data used to compile various economic reports like GDP. You can often go here to get a more detailed look at the statistics used by the various economic agencies. <http://www.census.gov/>

Washington State Data Book (there are also other WA data centers):

<http://www.ofm.wa.gov/databook/default.asp>

Other state data centers: <http://www.census.gov/sdc/network.html>

Corporate Information

Detailed public company SEC reports: <http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/companysearch.html>

Most important reports 10-K (annual report), 10-Q (quarterly report), S-1 (offering prospectus).

Important statements: Business summary (what they do), financial statements (how they did), management's discussion and analysis (what happened to the business), risk disclosures (what investors should be concerned about), and legal actions.

Incorporation information – Secretary of State Office

Washington Company Search: http://www.sos.wa.gov/corps/corps_search.aspx

County Clerk – Can check fictitious names (dba) and if there is a business license for a company.

Company Web Site

(1) Company Description

(2) Press releases.

(3) Conference call replays on webcast! What CEOs are saying about their business to investors

(4) Call public relations person on bottom of press releases.

Better Business Bureau, including customer complaints: <http://www.bbb.org/>

Complaints, Rip Off Report: <http://www.ripoffreport.com/>

Health Resources

Food and Drug Administration – Labeling data for drugs, biologics, medical devices, and vaccines.

FDA Home Page: <http://www.fda.gov/>

Drug data: <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda/index.cfm>

At the above site you can get labels and medical review documents. Most doctors rarely read labels and virtually NEVER read the medical review documents which often contains important tidbits that are left out of the label (i.e. Bextra – **original** medical review documents posted showed risk of thromboembolic events at higher doses and concerns by FDA reviewers about this – it was approved anyway without concerns reflected in label.)

Vaccine data: <http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/Vaccines/ApprovedProducts/ucm093830.htm>

Centers for Disease Control – Tracking of illnesses, recommendations on prevention, etc.

CDC Home Page: <http://www.cdc.gov/>

CDC Flu Activity Reports: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/fluactivity.htm>

WebMD – <http://www.webmd.com>

Property information

You will **never** want to own your home in your own name (think land trust or LLC) after visiting this site. Put in the address in a parcel search, and depending on the county you can learn who owns it, how much they owe on it, the sales history for the parcel, how much taxes are owed and paid, etc. By the way, there are some tools that actually one to search by **name** to look up someone's address for many counties in this country. You can also get a breakdown of exactly which government entity is responsible for what % of the property taxes.

Spokane County Parcel Search: <http://www.spokanecounty.org/pubpadal/>

Find home values: <http://www.zillow.com>

Other Resources

Government grants (view or apply for pork first hand!): <http://www.grants.gov/>

National Archives and Records Administration: <http://www.archives.gov/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture – data on crop production, etc.: <http://www.usda.gov/>

Free Public Records Search Directory – Great free, consolidated records search engine, by state and county: <http://publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/>

Find County Records (similar to above): <http://www.findcountyrecords.com/>

Free Public Records Finder: <http://www.freeprf.com/>

General Government Resources

If you are unsure of where to go, this is a good place to start:

United States Government Resources: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>

Federal Register: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>

Access Washington: <http://access.wa.gov/>

Washington Legislature: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/pages/home.aspx>

Track Congress: <http://www.govtrack.us/users/>

Sign up for federal email alerts: <http://listserv.access.gpo.gov/>

Washington Email Update Lists: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/>

Municipal Research and Services Center of WA (county data links):

<http://www.mrsc.org/byndmrsc/counties.aspx>

Spokane County Data Downloads: <http://www.spokanecounty.org/content.aspx?c=2384>

“Power of One” Sample Project : Avista Investigative Journalism

Reason: Ask the question, “Why did Avista promote manmade climate change in November 2009 after ClimateGate emails indicated it was a scam. How are they benefiting?”

Step 1. Go to Avistacorp.com and learn more about the company and peruse press releases.

Step 2. Go to SEC.gov and download latest two 10-Ks and last 3 10-Qs.

- a. Read summary of company from latest 10-Ks.
- b. Read “Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Results” for each document.
- c. Peruse “Risks and Uncertainties” disclosures and latest legal action on latest 10-K and 10-Q.

Step 3. Listen to last three conference calls. What are the important issues the company and analysts are focused on.

Step 4. Review Revised Code of Washington for Public Utility Regulations.

- a. Title 54 RCW Public utility districts (Avista is not a PUD, but they have contracts with them)
- b. Title 80 RCW Public utilities
- c. Note numerous applicable titles under Title 80 in Notes: at the bottom. Select relevant sections.
- d. Title 480 WAC Utilities and Transportation Commission

Step 5. Check Washington PDC site to see who Avista and any connected PACs are contributing to. What about Avista lobbyist activity?

Step 6. Additional background research.

- a. Check Better Business Bureau, RipOffReport, and other internet sites with complaints directed at Avista.
- b. Interview people you know for their experiences.
- c. Do Lexis/Nexis search on news stories about Avista.
- d. Contact Avista's publicly traded competitors and get their take on the company in the context of anything you might find (researching these companies in parallel can be useful as well for a better perspective on the industry).

Step 7. Peruse Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission site (www.wutc.wa.gov)

- a. Note agency named in beginning of 80 RCW if you were not aware of who is responsible agency.
- b. Learn everything one can about how the agency works.
- c. Peruse relevant press releases.
- d. Get on email notification list (click Email notifications on left side).
- e. Peruse “Documents” available online (start with “What's Happening in a Particular Industry”). Look for reports, committee hearings, etc. which might be related to Avista.

Step 8. Public Records Request (note agency procedures under Chapter 480-04 WAC)

- a. Strategy one – big data dump – any and all communications from Avista and the UTC for a specific timeframe which are not already a part of the public record.
- b. Strategy two – once have narrowed down requests, follow-up with items you might have found in a. or Step 5 that might help you better identify certain records that might be relevant and left out.
- c. Strategy three – Also submit FOIA for other agencies you might be dealing with such as Department of Ecology

Step 9. Repeat 5 and 6 for certain counties, municipalities, or PUCs where they have significant operations.

Step 10. Based on all information gleaned so far, follow up with additional requests, interviews with the investor relations at Avista, or one or more public officials.

Step 11. As you get more information, you might have to repeat one or more of these steps with the additional information. Once you start learning information you can use that to direct the research process.

Goal – Is there some way in which Avista and the state of Washington is materially benefiting by promoting phony global warming schemes. Is there corruption that needs to be exposed? Is there bad legislation or were there inappropriate regulatory decisions made (now is time to do bill research with voting records!). Should new legislation or initiatives be introduced? What about class action lawsuits on behalf of customers? Should you right up a big expose based on facts and publish it for all to read (the internet will do if the mainstream media does not want to cover it).? How about a press conference and press release to disseminate the information?