

Analysis and Redesign of the California State University, Stanislaus Library's Government Resources LibGuide

Lauren Hall

Background

The California State University, Stanislaus Library has been designated as a Federal Depository Library since 1964. During this time the Government Documents Collection at CSU Stanislaus has undergone massive changes, including a large weeding project prior to a complete library renovation that began in 2018, which forced the library to move to a small portable location on campus while the renovation was completed.¹ Library staff have also continually evaluated the item selection profile for federal government documents to select more electronic item numbers and move the library to an electronic suite of government publications. Given that the library has been moving toward providing greater access to government information and publications online, the library needed to redesign their Government Resources Guide to better describe its Government Documents Collection and to provide researchers with a starting point for accessing government information online. In addition, the recent GPO decision to move toward an all-digital Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) provided an even greater impetus to develop a robust Government Resources LibGuide that would be meaningful to both the campus community and the broader community, which the library serves as an FDLP Depository Library.² The University Library is also a selective repository for State of California government publications and wanted to provide better access to online resources provided by California government agencies. Therefore, in July 2022, it was determined that the University Library's Government Resources Guide would be redesigned to create a meaningful guide with links to both federal and State of California government resources that users could

access as a starting point for finding and navigating government information. The decision to redesign the guide also arose at a time when changes in staffing occurred in the Technical Services Department of the University Library, which allowed for a librarian to redesign and maintain the guide. The redesign also coincided with the re-opening of the library following the renovation and the initiative to open the space to students and reintroduce our services in response to the renovation and the COVID-19 pandemic.

This article discusses the analysis of the original guide as well as the redesign and implementation of the new Government Resources Guide utilizing Springshare's LibGuides platform. The process of analyzing the guide included assessing use, content, and navigation. Through analysis, the librarian determined that the guide needed new pages, better organization, improved navigation, and a more aesthetically pleasing design. A new design was created based on this analysis and promoted to students through an event in the university quad.

Analysis of the Original Government Resources LibGuide

Prior to July 2022, the Government Resources LibGuide, which is the gateway for providing access to government publications and information sources, was underutilized and lacked relevant resources for individuals seeking access to government information. According to internal Springshare data, over a period of three years from July 2019 through July 2022, the Government Resources LibGuide was viewed only 330 times. This lack of use was especially telling as during this time the use of electronic resources increased due to the COVID-19

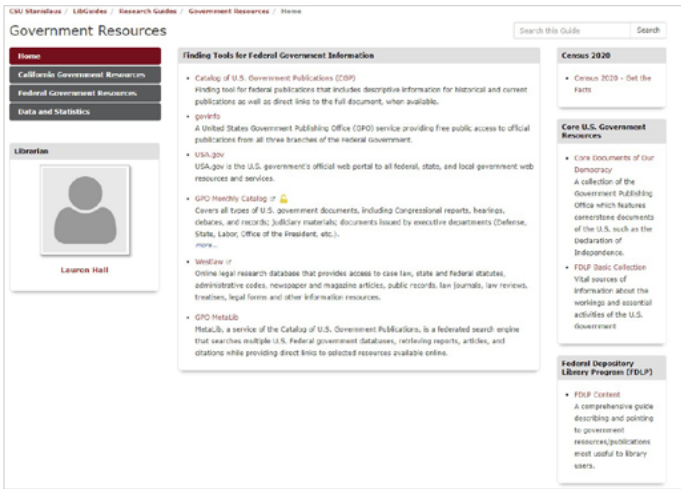


Figure 1: This image depicts the homepage of the CSU Stanislaus Library's Government Resources Guide in July 2022, prior to the redesign of the guide.

pandemic because students and faculty had to rely more heavily upon online resources. The librarian tasked with redesigning the guide first analyzed the original design to determine the issues with the guide and then developed solutions to create a more meaningful guide for the library's users. The librarian concluded that the guide only provided easily found government websites, lacked useful navigation, lacked engaging images, did not contain information about government publication collections at CSU Stanislaus, and did not have a homepage that clearly stated the purpose of the guide. The following is a brief discussion of problems that were diagnosed with the original guide.

A major problem found with the guide was the content on the homepage. As exemplified in Figure 1, the homepage lacked engaging images, had no descriptions regarding the purpose of the guide, and only provided links to federal government information sources when the purpose of the guide was to provide an access point for both federal and State of California government resources. The homepage also offered no introductory information to the government collections at CSU Stanislaus. Therefore, it did not provide an adequate introduction to a guide for both federal government and State of California government information.

In addition to problems outlined on the homepage of the guide, as exemplified in Figure 2, the California Government Resources page linked to only a few basic websites, such as the California State Senate website, which are easily accessible to the public via a simple web search. There was no information regarding various California government agencies or the different branches of government. For example, the California Government Resources page provided no information about the judicial branch in California. This page also contained links

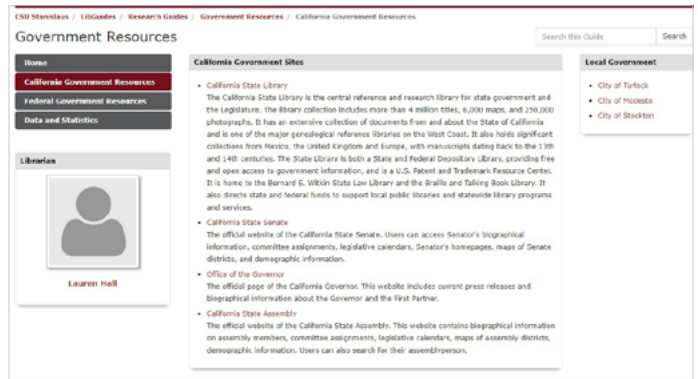


Figure 2: This image depicts the California Government Resources page in July 2022, prior to the redesign of the guide. As depicted, it links to minimal government resources.



Figure 3: This image depicts the Federal Government Resources page in July 2022, prior to the redesign of the guide. As demonstrated, it links to minimal government resources.

to three local government websites; however, CSU Stanislaus serves a six-county geographic area, so highlighting more local city and county governments was needed.

The problems found on the California Government Resources page were also mirrored on the Federal Government Resource page. As shown in Figure 3, this page only linked to basic government entities that can be easily found by a researcher and offered no substantive information. Furthermore, having the federal government information resources split between the homepage and the Federal Government Resources page was confusing and added unnecessary complexity to navigating the guide.

In terms of the Data and Statistics page, as shown in Figure 4, it was unclear whether this page presented information from federal or state government entities unless it was clicked on. The navigation did not make it clear that the page contained links to federal government resources for data and statistical information and therefore should have been a subpage of the Federal Government Resources page. While the guide did contain pertinent links to federal government websites and sources for data, it lacked useful navigation to demonstrate that this information was a subset of federal government resources.

The Government Resources LibGuide lacked helpful navigational cues, offered no information regarding the specific



Figure 4: This image depicts the Data and Statistics page in July 2022, prior to the change in navigation of the guide. As shown, the navigation does not give a clue as to whether it is federal or State of California data resources unless clicked on by the user.

government publication collections at CSU Stanislaus, had federal government information spread over three separate pages, and lacked curated information of interest to researchers. The guide provided links to only minimal sources and lacked engaging content that researchers would find both useful and appealing. It was determined that the ambiguous navigation and lack of curated content ultimately led to the guide being underutilized. Furthermore, the guide failed on basic design principles such as consistency and standards across pages. As Nielsen stated,

Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform and industry conventions. Jakob's Law states that people spend most of their time using digital products other than yours. Users' experiences with those other products set their expectations. Failing to maintain consistency may increase the users' cognitive load by forcing them to learn something new.³

The Government Resources LibGuide was not consistent with standards seen across website homepages from a variety of industries as homepages typically contain introductory information about the website and its associated company and act as a portal to access other pages on the site. While in this case it is an online research guide instead of a company website, the theory still applies that the homepage of the guide should provide basic information about the guide as well as an introduction to the government information resources available via the CSU Stanislaus Library. The homepage needed to act as a portal for the other pages on the guide. Upon conclusion of this review, it was determined that redesigning the guide's homepage and navigation menu would create consistency with user expectations for website navigation. The library also needed to establish consistency in naming standards to avoid ambiguous language on the guide.

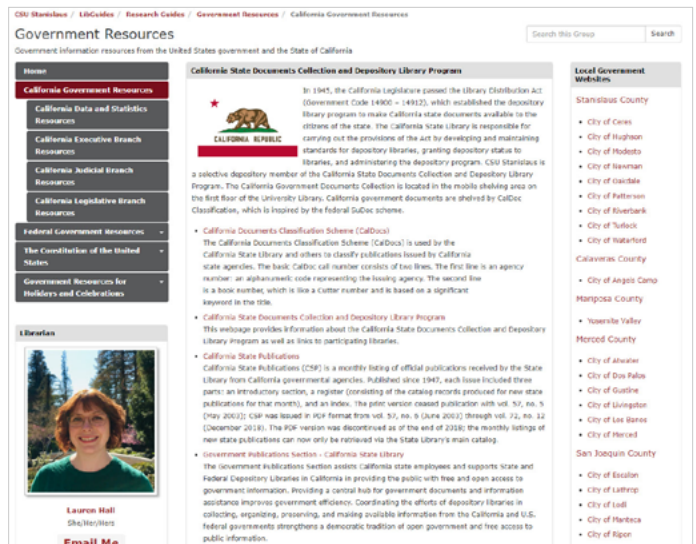


Figure 5: This image depicts the new navigation menu for the California section of the Government Resources guide. The guide now features a California Government Resources landing page with subpages for data and statistics, the executive branch, the judicial branch, and the legislative branch.

Development of the New Government Resources LibGuide

Following the analysis of the original design, the librarian worked to resolve issues and improve the usability of the guide. The librarian aimed to improve the usability of the guide by creating a logical organizational scheme through adding subpages for content and organizing these pages based on level and branch of government. The librarian also created a welcoming and aesthetically pleasing homepage, utilized friendly URLs, and added significant content to each page. The following is a brief discussion of the redesign process.

The first step in redesigning was to change the navigation of the guide. To create a logical organizational scheme, the Data and Statistics page became a subpage of the Federal Government Resources page since this dealt solely with data and statistics resources from federal government departments and agencies. Subpages for executive, judicial, and legislative branch resources were also added for both the main Federal Government Resources page and the California Government Resources page. An example of the navigation with subpages can be found in Figure 5. Subpages based on the branch of government were added to limit clutter, which is a deterrent to student use of guides. As Ouellette found, clutter was a consistently noted problem with low student use of subject guides.⁴ The library sought to balance clutter against providing useful information by creating a simplified navigation menu with subpages broken down by the specific branch of government. The addition of new subpages to further divide content allowed for more government resources to be shared

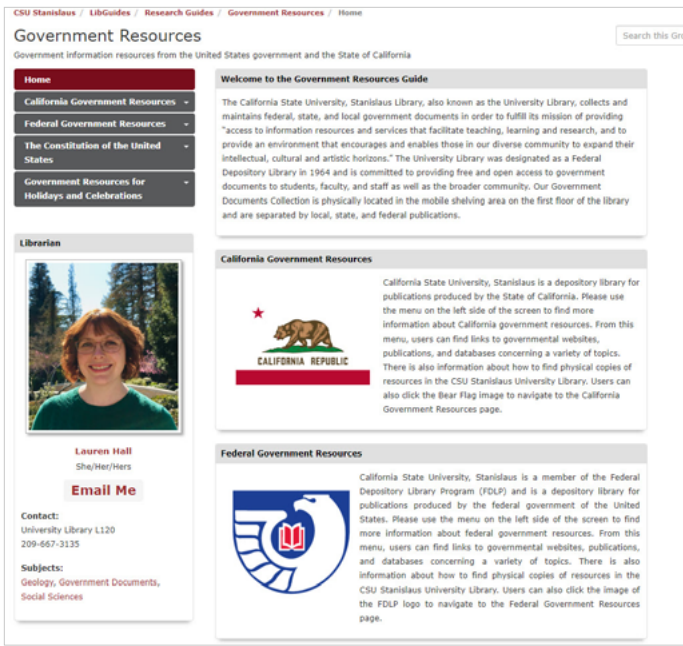


Figure 6: This image depicts the redesigned homepage of the guide. It now includes a welcome message and description of the guide as well as a description of each section of the guide with graphics that link to that section.

with users without cluttering just a few pages with myriad links. Each page was also given a descriptive name to help aid in navigation. For example, the page with information pertaining to the California legislative branch is called California Legislative Branch Resources. The use of main pages and subpages allowed for the creation of an easy to navigate menu that is similar to the organization of other websites across industries.

The next step in redesigning the guide was to make a welcoming and aesthetically pleasing homepage. To accomplish this, the original content found on the homepage was moved to the Federal Government Resources main page as this was a duplication of federal government information. A welcome message was added, as were separate sections providing a brief introduction to federal and State of California government information. Graphics for each section were also added. As exemplified in Figure 6, the FDLP logo was added for the federal government information section and an image of the California state flag was added to the California government information section. These images were hyperlinked to the Federal Government Resources and the California Government Resources main pages so students can click on the image to be taken to the main page for that section for more information. This provided another element of navigation in addition to the menu on the side of the guide.

Each major section of the guide was also given a main page or landing page. These landing pages welcome users to

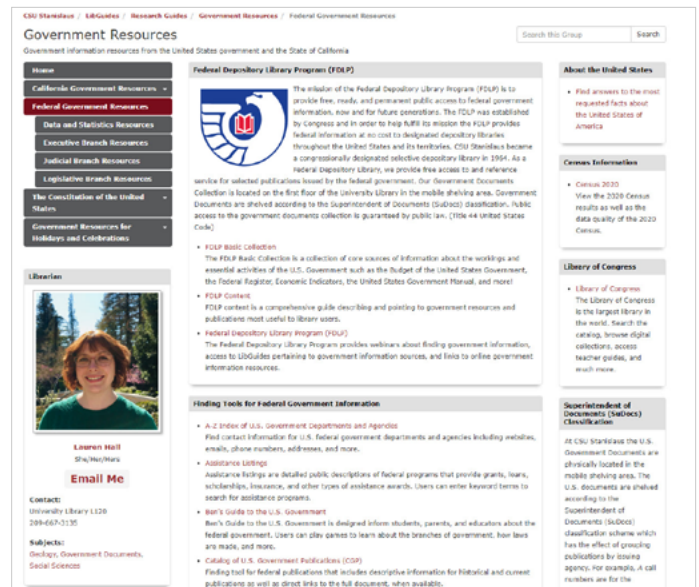


Figure 7: This image depicts the landing page for the Federal Government Resources section of the guide. It now contains more robust and useful information as well as a pleasing graphic in the form of the FDLP logo.

the section and provide information about each resource type. As shown in Figure 7, the Federal Government Resources page provides information about the Federal Depository Library Program, SuDoc Classification, links to the FDLP Basic Collection, and identifies other resources that are good general starting points for finding government information. A similar layout and explanation is used for the California Government Resources page.

The third step in redesigning the guide included creating friendly URLs for the pages in the guide so that they had short and easily identifiable URLs. For example, the URL for the California Data and Statistics Resources page is <https://library.csustan.edu/government-resources/california-data>.

The final step in redesigning the guide included adding content to each page. Government resources were added using the link feature in Springshare's LibGuides so that issues can be more easily examined using the Link Checker tool. To identify resources to add to the guides, the librarian used their knowledge of government agencies, viewed FDLP-created LibGuides and LibGuides from other libraries, and conducted Google power searches to find publications and information about specific topics. The strategy of conducting Google power searches was especially useful for finding data portals from federal and State of California government agencies.

The redesign of the Government Resources guide was completed by the beginning of September 2022 and the new design was promoted as part of the Library's Constitution Day celebration.



Figure 8: This image shows the packets of information given to students for Constitution Day in September 2022.

Promotion of the New Government Resources LibGuide

As Ouellette found, students often do not use research guides because they do not know they exist.⁵ To combat the low usage of the LibGuide and to demonstrate the new design, the guide was publicized via a promotional handout given to students in the university's quad during a weekly event that showcases organizations on campus. Every Wednesday, CSU Stanislaus has an event called "Warrior Wednesday" where organizations on campus set up booths in the quad to talk about the services they provide. The library used the Warrior Wednesday event on September 14, 2022, to celebrate Constitution Day since Constitution Day fell on a Saturday that year and the university does not have many students on campus on the weekends. To promote the guide and commemorate Constitution Day, the librarian created a giveaway packet with a pocket Constitution, candy, and information about the FDLP program (Figure 8). Included in the packet was a business card promoting the redesigned guide with a QR code linking to the guide. A graphic of the business card design can be found in Figure 9. A business card was utilized because it can easily fit in a goodie bag or be handed out on its own. They are also cost-effective to produce and are a good size for distributing a QR code link to online resources. Forty-one goodie bags were distributed during the Constitution Day promotion and the guide received 49 views on the day of the event, indicating that several students linked to the guide via the QR code handout.

Results of Redesign and Promotion

Building upon the successful initial promotion of the guide at the Warrior Wednesday event, the Government Resources



Figure 9: This graphic depicts the business card used to promote the Government Resources guide. The QR code is used so students can use a mobile device to link to the guide.

Guide has shown consistent usage. From September 2022 through September 2023, internal Springshare data shows that the government resources guide garnered a total of 1,845 views, a significant increase in usage than the three years' prior to the redesign. The design of the guide led to it being awarded the inaugural Federal Depository Library Website of the Year Award in October 2023. This award resulted in significant guide views with 1,820 views during the month of October 2023. From November 2023 through March 2024, the guide had a total of 2,062 views. The number of views received by the guide demonstrates that it is being found and utilized by not only CSU Stanislaus users, but individuals seeking government information in general.

Finally, the success and continued usage of the guide is also because of continual curating and promotion. Special topics are regularly added to the guide and promoted on the library's website and social media. For example, in November 2023, a page was created for National Aviation History Month that specifically highlighted government resources for air mail history and the history of women in aviation and aerospace. This new addition to the guide was promoted via a QR code on flyers on book and exhibit displays in the library and on the library's Instagram. The promotion of this page and the addition of the information led to a total of 817 views in November 2023. The library also plans to continue updating the guide with relevant links to websites and publications as they are found and add new pages to the guide for special interest topics in order to maintain use and interest in the guide.

The redesign of the Government Resources Guide has been a tremendous success for the CSU Stanislaus Library and its users as well as for the broader government information-seeking community. Through analyzing the guide for usability and content issues and correcting these issues through improvements in navigation and page layout, the library has been able to create

an incredibly useful portal to online government information. As the FDLP transitions to an online only program, librarians can use the CSU Stanislaus Library's Government Resources LibGuide as a model for sharing and promoting government websites and publications.

We invite you to view the CSU Stanislaus University Library's Government Resources Guide at <https://library.csustan.edu/government-resources>.

Lauren Hall (lhall1@csustan.edu), Metadata and Collection Management Librarian, California State University, Stanislaus.

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