

Legislation would bring greater access to research and data

Academic libraries are on the frontlines of innovation and job creation, supporting education for tomorrow's workforce and research that will create new technologies. By advocating for improved access to information, libraries can support those missions. Several bills pending in Congress would improve the public's access to research and data produced with public funding. If enacted, these bills would expand the information resources that academic libraries could offer to their faculty and students.

OPEN Government Data Act

The OPEN Government Data Act would improve public access to valuable government data. The bill would direct federal agencies to make more of their data freely available online, in machine-readable formats, and discoverable through a data catalog. These changes would make it easier for libraries to collect, curate, preserve, and provide services using government data assets.

ALA has supported the OPEN Act since it was first introduced in 2016. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed the bill in late 2017, albeit in different formats. Both chambers have to pass the bill in identical form in order to send it to the president's desk. Advocates hope that Congress will soon do so, perhaps as part of the delayed deal for the fiscal year 2018 budget.


Congressional Research Service reports

Congress is similarly poised to provide

public access to reports by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS is a federal agency, housed within the Library of Congress, that prepares public policy research for members of Congress, including non-confidential reports about a range of policy topics. These reports have not been routinely published, but both houses of Congress have recently taken steps to change this. As part of the current budget process, both House and Senate appropriators approved language to provide free, online public access to CRS reports. Both houses will need to reconcile their approaches and include a public access requirement for CRS when Congress passes a final budget. Such a provision would enable libraries to provide their users with free, authentic copies of these useful public policy reports. ALA has long advocated for public access to CRS reports, dating back to a Council resolution adopted in 1998.

Fair access to Science and Technology Research Act

The Fair Access to Science and Technology Research Act (FASTR) would ensure that, when taxpayers fund scientific research, they are able to freely access the results of that research. FASTR would build on a 2008 law that required the scientists funded by the National Institutes of Health to upload their research into the agency's free public repository. FASTR would expand that policy to all federal agencies that fund significant amounts of research. The bill was introduced in both the House and the Senate in 2017, and is pending committee consideration in both houses.

For updates on the status of these bills and issues related to government information, follow the Washington Office blog DistrictDispatch.org. 

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