

The American Association of Law Libraries' 2005-2010 Strategic Directions identifies five core values for AALL. Three of these core values – the role of the law librarian in a democratic society, equitable and permanent access to legal information, and continuous improvement in the quality of justice – are reflected in the “Principles and Core Values Concerning Public Information on Government Web Sites,” developed by AALL’s Access to Electronic Legal Information Committee (AELIC).

Equitable and permanent public access to legal information is the heart of law librarianship. Without equitable and permanent public access to legal information, law librarians cannot continue to improve the quality of justice in our free and democratic society. Changes in the way legal information is recorded, disseminated, and authenticated are significantly impacting permanent public access to official government pronouncements of current and past statutes, court decisions, administrative actions, and even organic documents, such as constitutions. Previously, a printed book was the gold standard of accurate representation of law as it was made; now law is often captured only in fragile media. Additionally, changes in technology, such as on demand book printing, make it possible for anyone to alter the “letter of the law” relatively inexpensively and easily, thereby subverting the will of the people and our governing bodies. It is more important than ever that law librarians participate actively with our governments to develop and implement necessary processes to ensure that our laws are freely and accurately made available for us all now and in the future.



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Access to Electronic Legal
Information Committee

American Association
of Law Libraries

Principles and Core Values

Concerning Public Information

on Government Web Sites



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The AALL Executive Board adopted in March 2007 the following “Core Values Concerning Public Information on Government Web Sites”:

Accessibility

Information on government Web sites must be accessible to all people.

- * Information must be available without charge.
- * Information must be accessible to those with disabilities.
- * Government Web sites that provide access to primary legal information should provide guidance documents to ensure that users of primary legal information understand the context for the document and the relevance and interdependence of legal materials.*
- * Web site navigation should be intuitive and easy to follow.
- * Content on government Web sites should be easily searchable, and there should be clear instructions, including examples, about developing effective searches.
- * Information on government Web sites should be available to all people within the community that they serve, and it is recommended, therefore, that government Web sites should provide translation services to ensure that non-English speaking residents can use the legal information posted on the Web site.

Reliability

Information published on government Web sites must be trustworthy and reliable.

- * Appropriate safeguards should be established to protect the integrity and authenticity of materials published in all formats – electronic and print.
- * Government Web sites must provide users with sufficient information to make assessments about the accuracy and currency of legal information published on the Web site.
- * Persistent URLs (PURLs) should be developed for essential information.

Official Status

If an electronic version of legal information is official, it should be designated as such by statute or rule.

- * A certifying mark on each item must be used to designate official information.
- * Government entities must establish and maintain a clear chain of custody for all electronic information published on its Web site.
- * If the electronic version of legal information is not official, the government Web site should name the official version and tell the user how to obtain the official version.

Comprehensiveness

Information published on government Web sites should be comprehensive.

- * Information should be in full text, or, at a minimum, instructions should be provided on how to obtain full text.
- * Information should be complete. For example, statutory and regulatory Web sites must include all statutes or regulations currently in force. If for some legitimate reason portions of a code cannot be made available online, such as image-based information accompanying zoning regulations, that omission must be clearly stated.

Preservation

Information on government Web sites must be preserved by the entity, such as a state library, an archives division, or other agency, within the issuing government that is charged with preservation of government information.

- * Government entities must ensure continued access to all their legal information.
- * Archives of government information must be comprehensive, including all supplements.
- * Snapshots of the complete underlying database content of dynamic Web sites should be taken regularly and archived in order to have a permanent record of all additions, changes, and deletions to the underlying data.
- * Governments must plan effective methods and procedures to migrate information to newer technologies.

**AELIC will develop a sample guidance document that government Web managers can adapt and use as the Web sites' explanatory guide.*

