

## **A Guide to Legal Research in Virginia, 9<sup>th</sup> edition**

Edited by Joyce Manna Janto. (2021), 234 pages, ISBN: N/A. \$90

**Subject:** State-specific legal research (Virginia)

**Useful for:** Researchers interested in Virginia-specific issues or sources

**Format:** Tabbed Chapters with an index, subject-finding guide, and appendix detailing Virginia legal information sources (libraries, publishers, government agencies, and legislative information)

### **Reviewer's Comments:**

State-specific research guides aren't the flashiest legal texts, but they are invaluable windows into the nuances of a jurisdiction's legal culture and resources. The newest edition of *A Guide to Virginia Legal Research* remains a thoughtful introduction to the state's legal materials. The changes from previous editions are generally the customary updates reflecting adjustments within digital platform interfaces, consolidation in the legal publishing industry, and new institutional contact information. However, that continuity is a feature, not a bug. The book continues to provide a capable tour through the idiosyncrasies of the Commonwealth's legal system, exploring both mainstream Virginia resources and materials that only experienced in-state researchers would think to seek.

The history of Virginia's current government stretches back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, spanning two countries' legal systems and eight different state constitutions. This can make it an especially intimidating jurisdiction for the unfamiliar, but this guide does an excellent job running through the government and judiciary's basic contours. It then dives deeper into each of the three branches, pointing out the sources of information that do exist (such as detailed Session Summaries produced by the state legislature), as well the kinds of resources you generally won't find in Virginia, like committee reports.

This guidance can get wonderfully specific, and seems purposefully designed to alleviate unforeseeable areas of confusion. My favorite nuggets of insider knowledge include:

- 1) Unlike in other states, Virginia's cities are fully independent political entities that are not considered to be part of the county where they are geographically located

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- 2) Some state statutes are never codified because they are deemed to be of a “private and local nature”;
- 3) The Virginia Administrative Code is organized into 24 titles, but these do not necessarily parallel the statutory code title numbers;
- 4) Virginia state government web addresses do not follow a consistent format.

These quirks of Virginia law demonstrate the value a book like this can offer. Unfamiliarity with any of these obscure facts could cause a researcher to spend hours attempting to locate items that don't exist, are poorly indexed, or will turn out to be irrelevant.

The guide also shines due to some less conventional features. These include advice for locating law-adjacent documents that can still have legal significance, like Attorney General opinions, Virginia Administrative Procedures Act guidance documents, and legal ethics materials. The appendices also shouldn't be overlooked, as they feature expansive lists of contact information for law libraries, publishers, and state agencies.

I would whole-heartedly recommend this book for any academic law library collection, as well as any public-facing library located near Virginia.

**Reviewed by:** Daniel Radthorne, University of Virginia School of Law, in 2022.