Beyond Google: Quality Research for Policy Decisions

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Between Now and Session

* Help to fill in the details for BDRs already submitted
* Statistics to support your issue
* Historical context-what has been tried in the past
* Policy questions that may arise
  * This helps to frame your issue so you can better explain the potential solutions to the problem
During the Legislative Session

- Assistance with bill introduction remarks
- Policy options
- Ideas (concepts) for amendments
- Technical data

Our purpose is to provide you with objective, unbiased information – both (or all) sides of an issue; lobbyists and advocates tend to have a point of view.
Time is not on Your Side
Reliance on Other Sources

“Red-faced People's Daily editor speaks out after falling for 'Sexiest Man' Onion spoof”

An editor on China's Communist Party online newspaper, which fell for a report in the satirical website The Onion, naming Kim Jong-un, the North Korean dictator as the 'Sexiest Man Alive', has said he hoped the incident would not draw too much attention. [Excerpt from London Telegraph]
Avoiding a Train Wreck

- Quick and dirty web Searches are often dated or inaccurate;
- Most open sites do not target significant policy matters; and
- Authority and objectivity may be unknown at best or suspect at worst.
What's Important?
**Limitations of Google**

* **Scope Issues** – Surface Web versus Deep Web
  - Google only searches the Surface Web or Open Web.
  - Deep (or invisible) Web is 500 times larger than the surface web.
  - Deep Web cannot be searched by Google or other common search engines.
  - Most of the Deep Web is located in library databases, publisher sites, password protected sites, fee-based sites, etc.
* Technical Considerations
  o Paid sites listed first; and
  o Word order matters.

* Search Terms
  o Use of the right search terms to obtain the desired results.
  o Controlled vocabulary versus free text.
Lemon laws for cars

* Google produces 23.3 million results for “lemon laws.”
* State lemon law web site—network of attorneys, conveniently leave out certain statutes; referral to attorneys taking such cases.
* The BBB has a site—but Nevada summary is dated 2004 & significant changes were made in 2005.
* Adding “cars” to the search narrowed that to 4.9 million hits;
* Or wild horses;
* Or motorcycle helmet laws.
* We can provide information directly related to policy decisions made by legislators

* Take the motorcycle helmet law—NCSL’s Transportation Review: Motorcycle Safety report (January 2012), describes recent State actions for helmet laws; safety education; licensing; child passenger laws; and the latest state requirements and NTSB data.
Evaluating Sources

* Our Library and policy analysts over time have evaluated sources for:
  * Currency
  * Reliability
  * Authority
  * Purpose/Point of View
There is a faster approach

Time is not on Your Side
Subject experts know who to talk to, we talk to–

* NCSL, Education Commission of the States;
* Experts in the field;
* Heritage and Brookings Institute;
* Agency heads and staff;
* We can find the last time this topic came up; and
* Inquiries are confidential.
Help is Available

Don’t hesitate to ask for help
Our job is to make you look good

If there is something you need to know, we will tell you