

# SWRK 723 – Advanced Seminar in Social Policy

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This guide features resources useful for locating policy information in government sources. In some cases, government policy is explicitly stated within a policy document. In many other cases, however, information on policy must be collected and pieced together from several sources.

If you have any questions using this guide or need further help with your research, you can contact [megan.fitzgibbons AT mcgill.ca](mailto:megan.fitzgibbons@mcgill.ca), [eamon.duffy AT mcgill.ca](mailto:eamon.duffy@mcgill.ca), or call 514-398-4737.

## I. CANADA

### A. Searchable Databases

[Canadian Government Publications on the Web](#) – Developed by the government documents librarian at Carleton University, this custom Google engine searches all Canadian federal, provincial and municipal government sites at once.

[Canadian Research Index](#) – Indexes a variety of Canadian government publications at all levels of government, including some not available online. If not available online, any document produced by a provincial government is available in the Government Information Service on microfilm. Federal documents are available in print.

[Canadian Electronic Library: Public Policy Collection](#) – A full-text collection of publications from Canadian public policy institutes, government agencies, advocacy groups, think-tanks, university research centres, and public interest groups.

[Government of Canada Publications Catalogue](#) – This search engine only covers the federal level and indexes documents distributed by the Depository Services Program.

[Publications gouvernementales du Québec en ligne](#) – Permanent full-text access to the majority of Quebec government documents published since 2001.

[Government Reports Research Guide](#) – Indexes government reports, including policy documents such as green and white papers, at the federal and provincial levels.

\*Reminder: the [McGill Library catalogue](#) can also be used to find physical documents held in the library.

## **B. Important policy-related documents**

At the federal level, most policy directions are decided in Cabinet or the Prime Minister's Office. Decisions at this level are, depending on circumstances, introduced as proposed legislation in Parliament or decreed in a statutory instrument (e.g. as a regulation or an order in council). Cabinet meetings are secret, and discussions and documents relating to meetings are sealed for 30 years. Policy decisions will, however, find their way into the public documents listed below.

Speech from the Throne – This speech, given at the beginning of each parliamentary session, outlines the government's legislative agenda for the term. It will give a broad idea of the government's plans for any major bills to be introduced. It can be found near the beginning of the Debates of the Senate for each term.

Budget – Tabled each year with a speech by the Minister of Finance, the budget details current spending priorities and will often announce new or expanded programs to be funded.

Green Papers – Though relatively rare in Canada, green papers are documents containing policy proposals and are used mainly to seek input and feedback from the public and interested parties before a final course of action is decided.

White Papers – Contrary to green papers, white papers describe policies already adopted by the government, usually with an explanation about how they will be carried out (e.g. through the introduction of a bill in Parliament).

### Legislation

Bills – Proposed legislation introduced in Parliament. Bills from 2001 to the present are available through the research tool LEGISinfo, which also contains background documents and legislative summaries.

Statutes – Laws passed by Parliament.

Regulations – Legislation made by an individual or group of individuals to whom the authority to do so has been granted by a law (i.e. without the need for parliamentary approval). Regulations narrow or specify the broad language of a statute. The types of regulations allowed to be made, and by whom, must be specified in the corresponding statute.

Debates – The debates record what was said in Parliament. The speeches made during discussions on a piece of legislation, both in the House of Commons and the Senate, as well as in any committee that considers the bill, will often reveal the government's legislative intent or "thinking" behind its introduction.

Estimates – A set of documents to support the government's spending plan for the year. Part III includes a Report on Plans and Priorities and Departmental Performance Report for each

government agency, which in some ways function as annual reports. These two documents are of note as they detail activities, programs and policies at the departmental level.

[Library of Parliament Research Publications](#) – Reports completed to provide MPs with background information on topical issues. Many of them describe government policies. Older reports are available [here](#).

### **C. Provinces**

Analogous documents are available at the provincial level and can be found by using the following guide on the Government Information Service's website:

<http://www.mcgill.ca/library/library-findinfo/govinfo/canprovterr/>

## **II. INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Searchable databases**

[IGO Search](#) – searches the websites of over 350 intergovernmental organizations

[World Bank e-library](#) – Online access to World Bank publications

[SourceOECD](#) – This database contains access to the full text of OECD documents produced since 2000. Many publications focus on the social and economic policies of its 30 member countries, sometimes in a comparative manner.

[UNBISnet](#) – Indexes United Nations documentation published since 1979, or earlier for selected major documents.

## **III. OTHER COUNTRIES**

### **A. United Kingdom**

As Canada's system of government was modeled on Great Britain's, the sources of policy information are similar.

[House of Commons Parliamentary Papers](#) – This database is a full-text collection of the Sessional Papers from 1801 to the present. It can be searched to locate a variety of policy documents, including:

- Budget
- Green Papers
- White Papers
- Bills

- Departmental Reports

To locate debates, statutes and regulations, follow the links on the library's [UK government documents guide](#).

## **B. United States**

[THOMAS](#) – A research tool from the Library of Congress which contains the following documents:

- Bills
- Debates (the *Congressional Record*), including the President's annual State of the Union address
- Statutes (the United States Code)

[Congressional Research Service Reports](#) – These reports are the result of research undertaken by a branch of the Library of Congress for members of the U.S. Congress. Many in-depth policy examinations are available.

**C.** For the policies of other countries, the following guide is helpful for locating national documents such as laws and debates online. Some countries have better sites than others, and the English pages of some sites are often merely summaries if English is not an official language.

[Law Library of Congress](#) – This guide lists several links to online government resources by country.