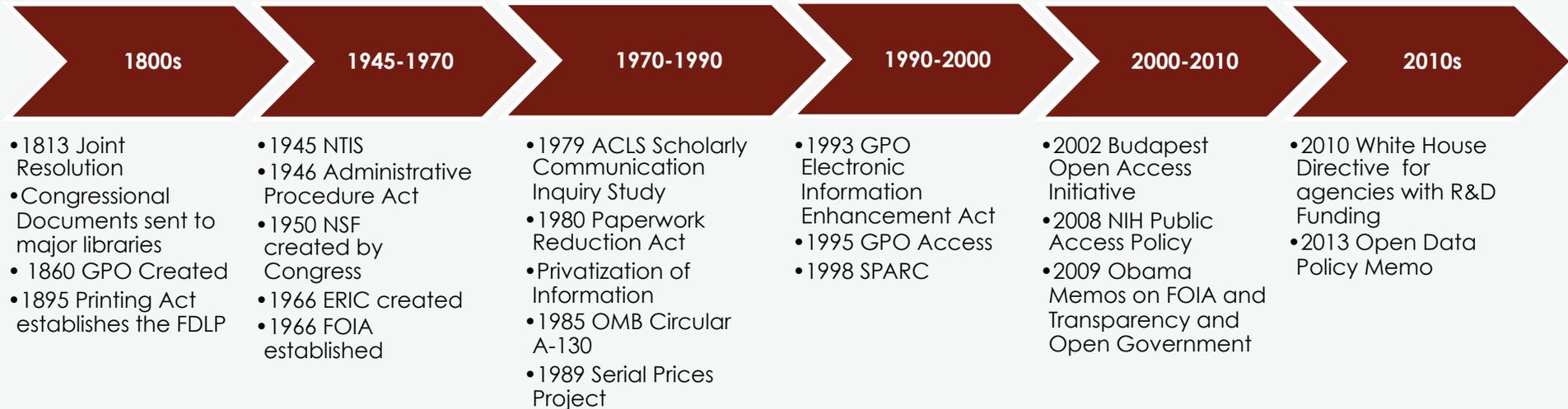


# Common Ground: A History of Public Information in the United States

Government documents and scholarly communication have much in common: notably, a shared emphasis on the open and persistent availability of high quality resources to a broader public than might concern other units in a research library and a sensitivity to actions and mandates undertaken at federal, state, and local levels of government. In this poster, we consider the entwined histories of scholarly communication and government documents, and argue for a closer engagement and awareness.



## Historical Spotlight: Shared Concerns in the 1980s

In 1985 the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) issued a statement expressing concern that "recent actions of the Federal Government either diminish or ignore" the philosophy of unrestricted access to government information "**fundamental to a democratic society**," pointing to "**restrictions on the dissemination of information** collected by federal agencies; the tendency to rely too heavily on commercial organizations to distribute government information; attempts to prevent open dissemination of the results of unclassified research at scientific meetings; and efforts to restrict participation by foreign scientists and scholars in research projects at American universities."

*\*\*Responding to restrictions on government information*

Also in 1985, Diane Smith argued that, due largely to changes in technology, and despite economic theory that framed information as a 'free good,' information had become "a popular commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace." Smith protested the creeping influence of information-as-marketplace-commodity in the realm of government information: "... the concept of selling certain types of information runs counter to the social policy of **government information as a public good**," a policy "firmly affixed in the American free educational system, in the belief in **academic freedom** and **information exchange**, in the First Amendment guarantee of free speech, and in the Freedom of Information laws, dealing with government actions."

*\*\*Countering information-as-commodity*

In 1986, ARL's Task Force on Government Information in Electronic Format noted: "Government information—its creation, dissemination, and accessibility—has rapidly become a microcosm of the elements and layers of the **new paradigm of electronic information**."

*\*\*Challenges and opportunities of electronic information*

## Shared Goals Today

*\*\*\* focus on public accessibility \*\*\* emphasis on provisioning open information to scholars and citizens \*\*\* countering a persistent digital divide \*\*\**

**Federal mandates** tied to government funding of research provide an impetus for scholarly communication and government documents units in academic libraries to formally collaborate. Over the past decade, despite a shared emphasis on public accessibility, these units have focused on different publics— **scholars and citizens**. Government funding of scholarly research forges a shared space, extending government information to encompass scholarly works; mandates enforce that this new variety of government information be made publicly accessible. Other areas of potential collaboration include **local agency** collections and collections of **grey literature**.

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