



Don't Overlook this Open Source of Information! Open Government Data

By Jacqueline Howell Nash

Affiliation: Librarian, Postgraduate Learning Commons,
University of the West Indies, Mona Campus

Abstract:

We fool ourselves if we think that our students are conducting searches only on our official library platforms. No they are not. They like open sources. When we hear “open source” we often consider scholarly articles and books but this paper seeks to increase awareness amongst information professionals of the existence of “open data” resources on the internet. These can strengthen an academic paper, enhance democracy and the viewer need not register nor identify themselves in order to access the information. They are free to use, useful for decision-making and can be analysed and tailored for other purposes. For the academic and even the average citizen “open data” is relevant. In fact in the social sciences empirical data is essential for action-oriented research and policy design.

Formerly, in Jamaica we awaited the annual publication of the *Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica*. Statistics were also available from *The Statistical Institute of Jamaica* and the *Bank of Jamaica*. Alternatively requests for data can also be made under the *Access to Information Act* which became operational fourteen years ago. However in 2016 a government open data portal was launched as a freely accessible resource which exposes government data sets to public scrutiny and re-use. This is not the first attempt at open government data for Jamaica.

At least three websites will be examined, two in the public sector and the other a private sector website. Both contain open data but will these enhance democracy?