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Local Government Documents: A Checklist for Tennessee Public Libraries

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Local Government Documents

A Checklist for Tennessee Public Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

One of the major services a public library provides for its communities is access to information generated by local government. This service benefits local governments as well as the community they both serve.

Each public library in Tennessee should contain copies of important city and/or county documents of use and interest to the residents of the community. With their weekend and evening hours, when city and county offices are closed, the public library provides access to local government documents for those who can not get to city and county offices during regular business hours.

A good way to stay abreast of new local government documents is by reading the local newspaper(s). The city council and county commission meetings are covered by local reporters in large and small communities. By reading what action was taken, you'll often discover what documents will be published as a result.

One topic not covered here is the historical significance of selected local government publications. If the public library is the archival unit for its area, it will want to get these documents and perhaps more. Also, any recommended retention periods mentioned here are not relevant to archival collections. The authors are not qualified to address the topic of historical records. The staff at the Tennessee State Library and Archives can give assistance. Before discarding any local government documents, the library director should contact the staff at the closest historical or archival collection.

TITLES LIST

Below is a list of city and county documents that would be useful to have in the collections of Tennessee public libraries. **The most recent edition of these documents should go into the reference collection.** Past editions can go into an archival or circulating collection.

ANNUAL BUDGET

The library should have the most current annual budget for its county and all cities in the service area. Previous year's budgets don't need to be kept for more than the past five years in the circulating collection.

FINANCIAL AUDIT

All cities and counties must be audited annually. A copy of these reports should be obtained and kept for up to five years.

MUNICIPAL CODE

Most cities have a municipal code of ordinances, which includes a copy of the municipal charter. Each public library should have a copy of the current municipal code and be sure they are on the mailing list to receive any and all updates. Discard past codes or transfer them to the historical collection to avoid confusion. You don't want a citizen preparing a presentation to make to city council based on old municipal laws!

MUNICIPAL CHARTER

If the library does not have a copy of the current municipal code with an updated municipal charter, then it should get these as separate documents. Charters are available in the *Tennessee Code Annotated*, *Tennessee Public Acts*, or the *Tennessee Private Acts*, depending on the type of charter your cities have. The MTAS library can provide some, but not all, of the Tennessee city charters.

SAMPLE LETTER FOR USE WITH COUNTY GOVERNMENTS

Hometown Public Library
500 Main Street
Hometown, Tennessee 33333

February 14, 1994

Ms. Jane Doe
County Executive
Hometown County
410 Main Street
Hometown, Tennessee 33333

Dear Ms. Jane Doe:

We would like to receive copies of important county documents for our public library collection. These documents will help us serve the community, as well as provide Hometown County with a useful service. By locating these documents in the public library, you can refer many of your requests to see these documents to us, freeing up some of your valuable time. The residents of Hometown County will have another place to access information published by the county government.

Below is a list of documents we would like to add to the collection:
(Please forward this letter to other county offices that can provide any of these documents)

Latest county budget.

Updated county private acts.

Latest county audit.

(Etc..., include whatever documents you decide to collect.)

Thank you for your help! If Hometown Public Library can ever be of service to you, please let us know. Here is a copy of our latest *(brochure, annual report, or whatever you have to offer)* for your information.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith, Director
Hometown Public Library

SAMPLE LETTER FOR USE WITH CITY GOVERNMENTS

Hometown Public Library
500 Main Street
Hometown, Tennessee 33333

February 14, 1994

Ms. Jane Doe
City Recorder
City of Hometown
410 Main Street
Hometown, Tennessee 33333

Dear Ms. Doe:

We would like to receive copies of important city documents for our public library collection. These documents will help us serve the community, as well as provide the City of Hometown with a useful service. By locating these documents in the public library, you can refer many of your requests for these documents to us, freeing up some of your valuable time. And the residents of Hometown will have another place to access information published by the city government.

Below is a list of documents we would like to add to our collection:

Latest city budget.

Updated city code.

A copy of the city charter.

(Etc..., include whatever documents you decide to collect.)

We would appreciate copies of any of the titles that you can provide. We will be glad to come down to city hall to pick them up at your convenience.

Thank you for your help! If the Hometown Public Library can ever be of service to you, please let us know. Here is a copy of our latest *(brochure, annual report, or whatever you have of offer)* for your information.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith, Director
Hometown Public Library

COUNTY PRIVATE ACTS

Similar to a code and charter for a city, these publications are a compilation of laws the state legislature has passed relative to a particular county. These are published by CTAS and can be provided to public libraries from the CTAS Library.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Usually this is part of another document such as the budget. These graphic representations of local governments organization can be very helpful to a citizen trying to locate just where to take an issue or problem for action or resolution.

PERSONNEL MANUAL

Most cities and counties have written personnel manuals or handbooks listing the policies and procedures that their employees must follow. These would be useful additions to a local government collection.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Library Directors should make it a point to meet and get to know the planning staff of the cities and counties in their service area and ask to be put on the mailing list for any of their publications, such as the comprehensive plan, if there is one.

ZONING ORDINANCES

These are usually not included in city codes since they change so frequently. Public libraries should be sure to have the latest edition of the zoning regulations for their cities and counties, and be on the list to receive updates.

SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

Many local governments are spelling out in detail how new residential areas can be developed and what developers must provide. The latest edition and all updates should be in the library.

PURCHASING MANUAL

Most cities and counties have written policies and procedures that govern how they purchase goods, materials and services. This could help local business people know if they are likely to be able to sell their wares to the cities or counties in the library's service area.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS

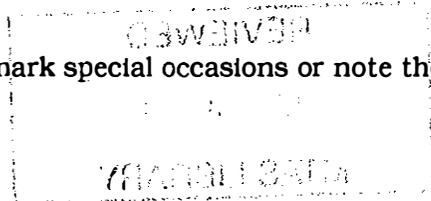
Copies of current agreements between cities and counties, cities and neighboring cities, cities and utility districts, etc. are helpful documents to have on file in the library. Again, currency is important to the usefulness of these documents.

HONORARY RESOLUTIONS

These are resolutions passed by cities and counties to mark special occasions or note the accomplishments of a local citizen.

TENNESSEE CODE ANNOTATED

Although not a publication issued by a city or county government, it has much information that is relevant to both levels of government. If the local library does not own a set, we suggest getting one and keeping it up to date. If that is not possible, then at least one set should be available in one library in each county.



SUMMARY

Public library directors should develop a good working relationship with all city and county officials, elected and appointed. It is generally the appointed officials, such as the city recorder and various department heads or secretaries, who can be counted on to provide the documents needed for a local government collection.

If city or county government officials are at first cool to the idea of the library as a depository of local government documents, don't give up. Continuously look for ways to provide them with needed or desired information for their job or personal interests.

For instance, if there is a magazine article on the new cable television regulations passed by the federal government, send it to the city manager. Every city is pulling their hair out on that issue.

Pick a time of year to call or write to check on updates to any documents or to ask for new titles. That way, city and county officials are contacted only once a year. Be sure to be sensitive to their busy times of year, such as just before elections and during the budget preparation process, and pick another time to ask for publications.

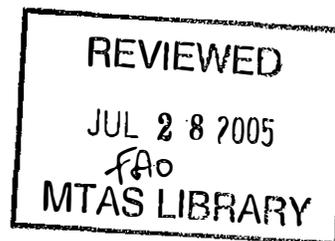
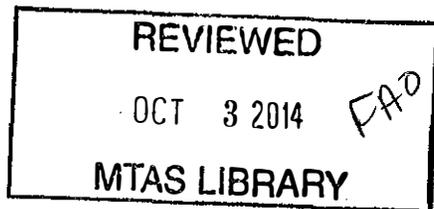
Remember to point out the benefits to the local governments of depositing publications in the library: they can refer some of the people bugging them about certain documents to the library, the added hours of access to documents, and other benefits you recognize for them and your community. Two sample letters are included for use as a guide, but you should personalize these letters or phone calls as much as possible.

Once you've collected the major documents published by your city and county governments and feel comfortable with that collection, you can branch out and begin to collect similar documents published by local school systems, utilities, colleges and universities, and any other public institutions in your community.

MTAS and CTAS publish quite a few documents each year on city and county government issues. You might want to receive these publications for use by the residents in your service area, as well as the local government officials. If you are interested in our publications, see the contact information below.

Publications
Municipal Technical Assistance Service
University of Tennessee
600 Henley Street, Suite 120
Knoxville, TN 37996-4105
1-615-974-0411

Publications
County Technical Assistance Service
University of Tennessee
Suite 400, Capitol Blvd. Building
Nashville, TN 37219-1804
1-615-242-0358



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