

## Access Washington search tool now locates city and county services



Ask George, the plain-language search tool prominently displayed on *Access Washington* ([access.wa.gov](http://access.wa.gov)) can now help citizens locate government information on city and county Web sites. The service is packed with thousands of pre-determined questions that take users directly to government information, as well as tourist and business information for local communities across the state. Ask George also combs through Web sites produced by state agencies to locate specific information available from Washington government. The search service points to information for all 39 counties in Washington state and more than 200 cities and towns.

In production since mid-February, 2001, Ask George is now receiving about 110,000 queries a month. Until recently George was "trained" to search mainly the Web sites of Washington state government at the state agency level. On Aug. 7, the state Department of Information Services (DIS) launched an enhanced version of Ask George that expands its search match capabilities to 23 topics covered by city and county governments. That means that whether you want to find out about building codes in Bellingham, public works in Pasco or perhaps a good park in which to walk in Walla Walla, just Ask George. George will return a closely matched question, that, when selected, will jump you to a local web page containing more information about your topic of choice.

Q. Why did DIS enhance Ask George with city and county information?

A. Soon after launching Ask George in February, DIS realized the service was getting thousands of requests for local government information as well as state government information. Now Ask George meets that demand for citizen information.

Q. Who manages Ask George?

A. Both *Access Washington* and *Ask George* are managed by the DIS Interactive Technologies group. The search service was built and is hosted by a vendor under direction of DIS.

Q. Did city and county personnel have the opportunity to participate in this project?

A. The Washington Department of Information Services would like to acknowledge the participation of Association of County/City Information Services (ACCIS) to plan the extension of Ask George. Several members of this organization provided much input in topic and URL selection.

Q. Does Ask George "spider," or index, the Web pages of city and county web sites?

A. No, the city and county portion of Ask George is merely a URL pointing service. An editorial team selected the appropriate links by topic, and the links are built into the question set. The database contains more than 4,350 separate URLs that point directly to city and county services.

Q. Is any special coding or meta tagging required at the city and county level?

A. No. We would ask that you keep us informed of any Web site changes or additions that would effect the list of topics below. If you can provide a couple of days' notice of a change, we will be able to update our database prior to your change going live. You can either send an email to [briand@dis.wa.gov](mailto:briand@dis.wa.gov) or to the Access Washington customer support site at [aws@dis.wa.gov](mailto:aws@dis.wa.gov).

Q. Does Ask George cover all cities and counties in Washington?

A. No. Jurisdictions that are not covered include those with no "official" Web sites, have only Web sites built by third parties that are highly commercial in nature, or have a site that could not be added for technical reasons. New entities will be added as new Web sites are built.

Q. What city and county topics were selected?

**County-only topics**

assessor	auditor	elections
environmental services and permitting	health services	sheriff
treasurer	zoning	

**City-only topics**

fire department  
police

**Topics for cities AND counties**

arts	building codes and permits	court information
doing business	elected officials	employment opportunities
laws and regulations	parks and recreation	planning and development
public works	Social and human services	utilities
visitor information		

In addition to these topics, there is a "general services" question that points users to home pages or directory pages.

Q. Can I link our Web site to Access Washington or to Ask George?

A. Yes! If you would like to add a link to Ask George or Access Washington from your site, you have our full permission and encouragement to do so. More about linking and the Ask George search engine can be found at: <http://www.wa.gov/dis/interactive/styleguide/searchguide.htm>. In addition, the Access Washington Style Guide is at: <http://www.wa.gov/dis/interactive/styleguide/>

Please give the enhanced Ask George a try! We hope you agree that it is about the most tightly integrated search engine covering services at all levels of state and local government that you have seen. This is one more step toward achieving the goal of "one face of government" for Washington constituents.

*For more information:*

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