

Information policy issues did not emerge with the Internet. Freedom of expression and the commitment to open government have been with us since the beginning of the Republic. Policy attention to information issues has been dramatically heightened, however, by the events of this past fall. Since then, our news has focused on public safety, homeland defense, counter-terrorism and related topics that generally engage only a few government agencies. With the new focus on domestic security, the mainstream activities of government -- educating kids, assuring health care, building roads, collecting taxes -- face new information policy responsibilities as well. In this security-conscious environment, how should government leaders and managers think about policies to guide information collection, management, access, and use? How can we balance inevitable conflicts among privacy, public access, and information ownership?

Information policies fall into two complementary categories: stewardship and use.

The "stewardship" principle is a conservative one that focuses on quality, integrity, security, reliability, and documenting and maintaining the public record. It treats information as a "public good" -- something that needs to be nurtured, maintained and protected on behalf of the public.

The "use" principle is an expansive one. It treats information as an asset that we use to achieve any number of public goals. It focuses on the current and the future value of information, the ability to share, integrate, and reuse information. The use principle leads us toward innovation, the development of new or better services, lower costs, and new relationships with citizens.

In the context of these two complementary ways of thinking about government information, the panel explored questions of access to information on the Web, proactive dissemination of government information, database integration, information sharing across organizational boundaries, the new emphasis on identity, and system and data security.