

USAID: The United States Agency for International Development. *Access:* <http://www.usaid.gov>.

USAID is "an independent agency that provides economic development and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States." With headquarters in Washington, D.C., USAID has field offices around the world



and works in partnership with private voluntary organizations, indigenous organizations, universities, businesses, international agencies, and the like. According to its Web site, USAID has working relationships with more than 3,500 American companies and more than 300 U.S.-based private voluntary organizations. It is no wonder that the multitude of reports and features can overwhelm the first-time viewer.

The opening screen presents information organized by means of a who, what, where, and how format. The "Featured" and "New and Noteworthy" categories provide regularly updated links based on current press briefings, reports, celebrations, and administrative news. At the time of this review, the agency had prominent features on the Afghan Humanitarian Assistance, the USAID response to the drought in Central America, and the fight against HIV/AIDS. Succeeding pages rely on a navigation banner located at the top and bottom of every page, offering links to contact information, news updates, and a search engine. In addition to searching the USAID Public Web, users can access the Development Experience Clearinghouse, an online resource for USAID-funded documentation, containing more than 110,000 technical and program documents, with more than 8,000 reports available for download.

USAID provides assistance in four regions of the world and has a corresponding Web

site for each region: Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Near East, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and Eurasia. These regional pages include timely, news-related links, background information, country and regional profiles, and access to statistical data.

Some minor inconsistencies exist with overall navigation, but time and patience eliminate any major flaws. Given the staggering volume and variety of material, it is a site that requires some basic orientation to locate specific content. The search options are extensive, and results can be sorted by date or relevance. All levels of users will appreciate the currency of information.

This site is essential for students (high school and above), educators, and anyone interested in the government's foreign policy issues and activities. Food aid, access to basic education and healthcare, and postwar reconstruction are just a few of the missions and programs the agency is involved with. Given the current state of world affairs, the available fact sheets, briefings, situation reports, and recommended links are essential finds.—*Gail Golderman, Union College, goldermg@union.edu*

National Consumers League. *Access:* <http://www.nclnet.org>.

The National Consumers League (NCL) brings its brand of consumer activism to the Internet by providing information on various consumer issues, such as telemarketing, child slavery, and dietary supplements, on its Web site. Users with varying levels of information needs from personal health and finance to politically oriented information will find much of use at NCL. The information on diet pills will help consumers in their personal lives while the information on chocolate being produced by child slaves in the cocoa fields

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in Ivory Coast, Africa, will help consumers make purchasing decisions that effect political change.

The site is put together well with careful organization, including sections on news, archives of press releases, telemarketing (and how to avoid it), general online privacy, NCL background, publications, and projects, among others. A commitment to consumer concerns is shown by the site's coverage of such issues as phone slamming, fraud, and over-the-counter medications.

The one technical complaint is that although the main page intelligently uses black text on a white background, many of the secondary and tertiary pages use black text on a beige background, making the site more difficult to read. However, the Web designer has certainly made a fast-loading site that also appeals visually to the user, making it a site that represents consumer concerns while being consumer-friendly.

Furthermore, the simplistic style of the site is one that can be held up as a model to those hypnotized into believing mouse rollovers and java applets are integral to modern Web sites. Undoubtedly, many of the users of the NCL site will appreciate its simplicity of navigation and speed of loading.

Overall, this site serves a purpose, serves it well, and does it without interference from the design of the site itself. To see a site relying on information rather than format is completely refreshing. NCL lives up to its consumer focus through its Web site. Nicely done.—*Danny Kissane, SUNY College at Oneonta, kissandf@snynoneva.cc.oneonta.edu*

The Knowledge Loom: What Works in Teaching and Learning. *Access:* <http://knowledgeloom.org/>.

The Knowledge Loom is an ongoing masterpiece managed by the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (the LAB). The LAB began the site in 1998 when the United States Department of Education provided funding for the creation of a database of best practices in education. The Knowledge Loom now has an extensive list of partner organizations from universities, government, and the private sector that provide content. It also integrates examples and research from school districts, individual schools, and teachers. The site uses

modern technology to provide teachers with tested, real-life practices in education with a forum for discussion and participation.

Teachers, administrators, and professors of education can serve their students well by assimilating the wealth of content available on The Knowledge Loom. This Web site has rightfully won awards ranging from the Association of Educational Publishers to the Internet Scout Project. Dedicated to the sharing of practical, workable methods for fostering student learning, the site invites conversation among participants. Anyone can register to receive the full benefits of communicating what works in education.



The site's opening page provides the necessary links and directions to begin searching immediately. One can view the "Spotlight Library"—which features resource materials on a particular topic, highlighting the newest additions—or one can choose to search the entire database by clicking on "Search the Collection." A variety of search options with clear instructions on how to begin is presented. Theme searching is recommended first, followed by five ways to limit search results. Keyword and full-text searching are also available. Results are displayed in a predesigned format, showing Spotlight articles first, followed by Practices, Success Stories, and Resources. The LAB openly states the site is a work-in-progress; stipulating that the "Refine Your Search" feature will expand in the future.

Some technical points need mentioning. Both Internet Explorer and Netscape work fine on this site, but the text displays slightly better using Internet Explorer. Also, downloading software, such as QuickTime, may be necessary to take full advantage of the audio files that are incorporated in the featured items and resources. Although there is no singular indication of the last update, the content and discussion dates show activity in the last quarter of 2001.

The Knowledge Loom is a valuable research tool for educators and should be included in the education resources of all universities with a School of Education.—*Janice M. Krueger, University of the Pacific, jkrueger@uop.edu* ■