

ERIC Through the Decades

ERIC, the Education Resources Information Center digital library of the [U.S. Department of Education](#), celebrated its 60th birthday in 2024. ERIC was founded in 1964 as a way for the Office of Education, the predecessor to the U.S. Department of Education, to collect and share education research.

Leading the Way. ERIC laid a foundation for continuous evolution and improvement through regularly expanding content and developing new features. ERIC became a vibrant resource for researchers, educators, students, policymakers, administrators, and the public. It is known and respected worldwide. Along the way, decisions were made to

- **Capture “fugitive” or grey literature** being produced and shelved in offices and in danger of being forgotten and inaccessible.
 - Today, approximately 40 percent of the current collection is considered grey literature. It includes reports, papers, studies, white papers, fact sheets, and books that are produced by government agencies at all levels, campus-based institutes, nonprofit organizations, international entities, and other sources.
- **Adopt “coordinate indexing”** to build a controlled vocabulary of education terms.
 - The [Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors](#) has served as a model for the British and Australian thesauri and the [American National Standards Institutes Z39](#) guidelines for information retrieval. The current version, published in 2023, has 4,578 descriptors and 7,165 synonyms and will be updated again in 2025.
- **Build a public–private partnership model** of government acquisition and cataloging and for-profit reproduction and dissemination that increased the library’s reach across the U.S. and beyond.
 - This partnership ended in 2004, and now ERIC directly shares all its metadata and the Thesaurus [free of charge](#) to vendors and the public.
 - ERIC’s website features a recently developed application programming interface ([API](#)) with search results downloadable into three formats.
- **Utilize cutting-edge dissemination technology** by replicating the growing collection on microfiche. ERIC received the [National Microfilm Association](#)’s Special Award in 1975 for “including a major micropublishing program as an essential part of its activities in making unpublished educational materials available to a wide public.”
 - In 2024, the [National Archives and Records Administration](#) recognized the historical importance of ERIC’s microfiche and has accepted it for preservation in perpetuity.
- **Support developing search technologies**, making content available to CD-ROM vendors and, even before the internet, by being the #1 database on [Dialog](#), a pioneering online computer search product.
 - An early World Wide Web adopter, ERIC went completely digital in 2004.
 - In late 2024, ERIC will display full text in XML in addition to PDFs.

- **Create its own products.** ERIC’s subject-matter experts created [Digests](#), Information Analysis Products, monographs, bibliographies, and books.
 - This tradition continues with ERIC making accessible the research it contains for studies and reports from the [Regional Educational Laboratories](#), [What Works Clearinghouse](#), and other programs under the [Institute of Education Sciences](#) (IES).

Follow the timeline below for highlights from ERIC’s six-decade journey to advance free access to high-quality research for all who care about education.

Establishing ERIC: 1964-1965

Federal funding for research increased in the late 1950s, and the 1960s saw numerous studies and discussions about the feasibility of establishing a repository for this non-commercially published, non-journal research. ERIC, then named Education Research Information Center, was formally established on [May 15, 1964](#).

- ERIC was housed in the Division of Educational Research within the Office of Education, which was a component of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.
- In 1965, its first effort, named “Project Fingertip,” pilot tested disseminating documents to special education teachers. Packets of resources, each containing 1,746 full-text documents with program descriptions, indices, and abstracts (called “resumes”) were sent to all state boards of education, 100 largest American cities, and a school district in each of the 500 congressional districts.
- The success of Project Fingertip led in 1966 to the establishment of the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) with a contract to Bell and Howell for subsequent dissemination via microfiche. This was cutting-edge technology at the time.
- The EDRS’s for-profit contract set the stage for ERIC’s public-private partnership model. The government funded acquisition and cataloging of material and shared the data at no cost with companies to ensure widespread dissemination.

Building the Decentralized Infrastructure: 1966-1969

In 1966, ERIC established two prototype, subject-specific clearinghouses, Vocational and Technical Education and Preparation of Urban School Personnel, to help reduce the burden of acquiring and cataloging content on the central ERIC office. Decentralized acquisition, cataloging, indexing, distribution, and outreach lasted into the early 2000s. By 1967 the expanded system was renamed the Education Resources Information Center.

- Ten more clearinghouses followed: Educational Administration, Small Schools and Rural Compensatory Education, Junior Colleges, Counseling and Guidance, Science Education, Reading, Disadvantaged Children and Youth, Teaching of Foreign Languages, Applied Linguistics and Uncommonly Taught Languages, and Exceptional Children.
- And then later six additional ones made a total of 18 clearinghouses: Teaching of English, Library and Information Science, Educational Media and Technology, Educational Facilities, Early Childhood Education, and Adult and Continuing Education.

- While clearinghouses focused on acquiring and preliminary cataloging of research, the ERIC Processing and Reference Facility (the Facility) was created with an initial contract to North American Aviation to provide quality oversight, scheduling, and coordination for the system and to develop a thesaurus.
- Phase 1 of the *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors* was issued in 1966 and has continued to be developed over the lifetime of ERIC. Records are indexed with the Thesaurus's subject terms, which are the standard for information retrieval.
- The monthly publication [*Research in Education \(RIE\)*](#) was first released in November 1966 and made ERIC available to the public. RIE compiled all ERIC records created from every clearinghouse during that month of the grey literature content, including the metadata, abstract, and indexing.
- Journal literature was added to ERIC in 1969 and was compiled into the monthly *Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE)*. The monthly paperback issues of *RIE* and *CIJE* were bound into separate, annual hardback volumes.

Expanding Capabilities: 1970s

Before the internet, ERIC took a technology leap when the Lockheed product Dialog became the first online, consolidated database search option. Dialog chose ERIC as the first database included and listed in its 140-catalog collection. Dialog worked with ERIC leaders to bring computer-based searching to the education community. In 1972, ERIC was relocated into the newly formed National Institute of Education (NIE). The original 18 clearinghouses had been reorganized, renamed, and, in some instances, closed. The following clearinghouses became the backbone of ERIC:

- Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The Ohio State University
 - Assessment and Evaluation, University of Maryland
 - Community Colleges, University of California at Los Angeles
 - Counseling and Student Services, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
 - Disabilities and Gifted Education, Council for Exceptional Children
 - Educational Management, University of Oregon
 - Elementary and Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois
 - Higher Education, The George Washington University
 - Information and Technology, Syracuse University
 - Languages and Linguistics, Center for Applied Linguistics
 - Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University
 - Rural Education and Small Schools, Appalachia Educational Laboratory
 - Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education, The Ohio State University
 - Social Studies/Social Science Education, Indiana University
 - Teaching and Teacher Education, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
 - Urban Education, Teachers College, Columbia University
- During this decade, the National Microfilm Association presented its Special Award to ERIC—recognizing its integration of microfiche distribution.
 - To match the ERIC system, *RIE* changes its name to *Resources in Education*.

Under Review and Enhancing Operations: 1980s

ERIC's [20th anniversary](#) saw critiques of its cost and usage. Recommendations suggested major changes to ERIC's structure and focus, and possibly the elimination of the clearinghouses. NIE transferred to the newly created U.S. Department of Education in 1980 and then into the department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) in 1985.

- In 1986, OERI leaders began a series of studies and reviews to assess ERIC's 20 years of operation. Although ERIC was serving the research community well, other possible users—like practitioners, parents, and the public—were being left behind. Clearinghouse leaders considered changes, with discussions focused on technology, dissemination, and quality control.
- By 1987, after many meetings, testimonies, and other advocacy, there was no major redesign of the clearinghouse system. A congressional oversight committee reaffirmed the clearinghouse structure and ensured ERIC an ongoing line item in the federal budget.
- In response to critiques, ERIC added Access ERIC, Adjunct Clearinghouses, and ERIC Partners to enhance outreach, subject-matter coverage, and quality.
 - Access ERIC was funded from clearinghouse budgets and tasked with providing information about ERIC to wider audiences through outreach and awareness, assessment, training, and client services.
 - Adjunct Clearinghouses were affiliated with individual clearinghouses and funded by the private sector. They expanded ERIC's coverage in specific topics:
 - Art Education
 - Child Care
 - Clinical Schools
 - Compensatory Education (Chapter 1¹)
 - Consumer Education
 - Educational Opportunity (TRIO)
 - Entrepreneurship Education
 - ESL Literacy Education
 - International Civic Education
 - Law-Related Education
 - Postsecondary Education and the Internet
 - School Counseling Services
 - Service Learning
 - Test Collection
 - US-Japan Studies
 - ERIC Partners were recruited by the clearinghouses and included funders of adjuncts, education institutions, organizations, and government agencies. These groups helped with dissemination, acquisitions, presentations, and joint publications. Each clearinghouse designed its own Partners program.
- In 1985, ERIC became available on several [CD-ROM products](#) through public-private partnerships. ERIC supplied database updates to OCLC, Silver Platter, and Dialog OnDisc (which also included the

¹ *Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, 1981*

ERIC Thesaurus) that sold quarterly subscriptions. The portability and features added by the different vendors made ERIC on CD popular.

- ERIC hit the 500,000 records mark!

Widening the Audience: 1990s

As the World Wide Web took off, ERIC went online through the leadership of the Clearinghouse on Information and Technology and the support of OERI leaders. Eventually all clearinghouses and Access ERIC had individual websites, offering searching capability and other site-specific features. ERIC also expanded to include books, offer full text, and form international partnerships. The [National Library of Education](#) was founded in 1994, and ERIC transferred there in 1995.

- ERIC's online offerings included the following:
 - AskERIC, which won multiple awards, offered "Education Information with the Human Touch." Users could write a question and receive a high-quality answer from clearinghouse-affiliated, subject-matter experts within 48 hours. It involved all clearinghouses and opened ERIC to a whole new public constituency.
 - Gateway to Educational Materials (GEM) was a consortium effort sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education that included ERIC and myriad other databases and collections. GEM was targeted to teachers and offered access to lesson plans in a one-stop internet environment.
 - National Parent Information Network (NPIN) was a collaboration between the Early Childhood and Urban Development clearinghouses that provided research-based information for parents and those who work with and support them.
 - Virtual Reference Desk (VRD) was a component of AskERIC that compiled all the questions received and the resources used to respond.
- During this decade, the ERIC Facility led efforts to connect internationally with other education databases. In 1993 Dialog offered a combined CD-ROM titled "International ERIC" with ERIC, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.
- Books were added to the collection beginning in 1993.
- ERIC users wanted access to the full text of the resources they found. By the end of the decade, EDRS offered full-text images of non-journal content from microfiche through a program called E*Subscribe and provided an electronic document delivery service.
- ERIC reaches 1 million records!

Moving Into a New Era: 2000s

In the early 2000s, ERIC was consolidated into a central contract and the decentralized, clearinghouse-based structure was dismantled. All ERIC operations became fully digital.

- When the Education Reform Act was passed in 2002, ERIC joined the newly formed IES.
- To truly move into the online age, IES decided to streamline, centralize, and make ERIC more efficient. IES issued a request for proposals for one contract to encompass the ERIC functions that it wanted to retain. This plan touched off a period of controversy and consternation among the clearinghouses and other system components, the librarian community, ERIC users, and others. By December 2003, IES

closed all clearinghouses, the Facility, Access ERIC, and EDRS. The sole contractor was Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC).

- Access to ERIC, the Thesaurus, and customer service resources are free to anyone with an internet connection, anywhere in the world.
- ERIC went completely digital, with one website for searching; an internet-based workflow for acquiring, cataloging, and indexing content; and full-text PDFs when permitted.
- *RIE* and *CIE* and microfiche production ceased.
- All sources of content had to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education with written agreements.
- ERIC publications were eliminated, and there was limited exhibiting at conferences.
- CSC drew on the expertise of three experts for every subject covered by the clearinghouses.
- The [Online Submission](#) feature debuted in 2006. Individuals now can submit conference papers, reports, or other material for review and inclusion in ERIC.
- Another 2006 initiative encouraged contributors to develop and submit structured abstracts to ERIC. This initiative was the result of discussions with members of the Structured Abstract Work Group, research into sources that successfully implemented structured abstracts, and consultations with the Department of Education.

Maturing Online: 2010s

ERIC's online presence continued to grow. Some full text needed to be removed temporarily due to unintended consequences of digitizing the microfiche. By mid-decade the ERIC website, search engine, and back-office systems were reconfigured.

- Between 2006 and 2009, ERIC digitized the legacy microfiche collection of 340,000 documents. ERIC obtained permission from many copyright holders to display full-text PDFs.
- The National Library of Education's historical materials collection was cataloged and added to ERIC. These documents dated to the 1800s and included reports produced by the Office of Education, textbooks and readers, and other materials.
- Anyone can download the entire ERIC collection and the Thesaurus from the website. Vendors such as EBSCO and ProQuest offer access to ERIC via subscriptions.
- In 2010, ERIC debuted on social media by posting regularly on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to announce ERIC news, highlight IES program publications, and link to ERIC searches on education-related topics.
- 2012-2013 saw a temporary removal of full-text PDFs from ERIC as it was discovered that the digitization of the microfiche collection made public in an accessible manner, instances of [Personally Identifiable Information \(PII\)](#) within a significant number of documents. These were older records when including such information on research cohorts was an accepted practice. IES moved swiftly to withdraw the PDFs and set up a review process to screen all suspect documents. The process was partially automated and partially manual examination. Only when IES and ERIC were satisfied that PDFs containing PII had been identified and taken off display was full text restored.
- In 2013, a new contract continued ERIC's full operation and launched a redesigned, Google-like website ("New ERIC") and revamped search engine.

- The IES [Public Access Policy](#) made ERIC the repository for federally funded publications, which are identified as Grantee Submissions and their full text placed under a mandatory 12-month embargo. ERIC contains thousands of such submissions for work funded since 2011.

Taking ERIC Into the Future: 2020s

Leading up to its 60th anniversary, ERIC implemented an API, added new fields to its records, updated the ERIC Selection Policy, prepared to present full text rendered from XML to increase search capabilities, and issued an updated Public Access Plan to make federally funded research immediately available.

- When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the U.S. Department of Education moved to identify and make available as many resources as possible for schools, educators, parents, and others. ERIC quickly indexed pandemic-related content with appropriate Thesaurus terms until new descriptors could be developed specific to COVID-19, thereby culling its collection for research-based practices to contribute to the effort.
- ERIC added its Application Programming Interface (API) to support the integration of ERIC search capabilities into external systems. Results from API searches can be exported into three different formats.
- New [metadata fields](#) have been added to ERIC records to link content in the collection with its use in studies by the What Works Clearinghouse, Regional Educational Laboratories, and other programs. Other fields link to research datasets, author IDs, related ERIC records, and others.
- Grants awarded after 2025 will be subject to an updated [Public Access Policy](#) requiring the immediate display of full text. The [ERIC Selection Policy](#) has been revised to reflect the new plan's requirements, and ERIC will develop a range of resources including webinars, videos, infographics, and frequently asked questions to help awardees fulfill their obligations.
- A new [online portal](#) allows publishers, editors, and any interested stakeholders to search and view metrics about the content any time.
- The National Archives and Records Administration has deemed the ERIC microfiche / film collection to be of historic importance and has accepted the materials for preservation, in perpetuity.
- ERIC reached 2 million records just in time for its 60th birthday and is cataloging new content every day. ERIC is acquiring new sources of education research, helping users through additional communications and products, and adding evolving and emerging subject terms to the Thesaurus.

For more on ERIC's history, see the following:

ED195289 Trester, Delmer J. (1981). *ERIC—The First 15 Years. A History of the Educational Resources Information Center*. SMEAC Information Reference Center, The Ohio State University. Columbus, OH <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED195289>

ED300031 Schamber, Linda. (May 1988). *ERIC on CD-ROM. Update*. ERIC Digest <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED300031.pdf>

ED431410 ERIC Clearinghouse and Support Contractor Publications, 1997. *An Annotated Bibliography of Digests, Information Analysis Products, and Other Major Publications of the ERIC Clearinghouses and Support Contractors Announced in "Resources in Education" (RIE) January-December 1997* <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED431410>

Susanne Bjorner and Stephanie C. Ardito, *Online Before the Internet: Early Pioneers Tell Their Stories. Part 1: In the Beginning* Archived 2006-10-17 at the Wayback Machine, Searcher, June 2003 ISSN 1070-4795 <https://web.archive.org/web/20061017114606/http://www.dialog.com/about/history/pioneers1.pdf>

ED437937 Colker, Laura J. (2000). *Reminiscences from the Field: The Continuing Story of ERIC*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service, DynEDRS, Inc. Springfield, VA <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED437937>

50 Years of ERIC 1964-2014 [ERIC Retrospective \(ed.gov\)](#)

Webinars, videos, and infographics about ERIC's operations and features [ERIC Multimedia - Home](#)

Frequently Asked Questions [ERIC FAQ - General](#)