



Interorganizational collaboration and community building for the preservation of state government digital information: Lessons from NDIIPP state partnership initiative

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ABSTRACT

As a part of the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP), the Library of Congress (LC), partnering with the Center for Technology in Government (CTG), launched an effort in 2005 to integrate state governmental entities into the national network to preserve born-digital information that is both significant and at risk of loss. The main theme that emerged from the efforts of LC, CTG, and the state and federal digital preservation community was the importance of partnership efforts and collaborative strategies for the preservation of state government digital information. Based on the findings of the initiative, this paper discusses challenges and opportunities regarding interorganizational collaboration and community building for digital preservation of state government information. Following the community of practice framework, it is recommended that a “state government digital information preservation community” be developed to facilitate collaboration across agencies and knowledge professionals in state governments.

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of information technology has dramatically changed the way information is created, stored, and used in the public and private sectors in the United States. Government agencies, for example, create vast amounts of information in electronic form including land data, school records, official publications, and court records. An increasing quantity of these materials is “born digital,” in other words, created digitally with no paper equivalent. A 2003 study reports that over 50% of North Carolina state government publications are produced and disseminated in digital format only (Martin and Reagan, 2003). Although the digitization of government information can enhance efficiency, searchability, and accessibility, it also creates new challenges for government agencies. The long-term preservation of these electronic records is one of them. Much of electronic government information is of permanent legal, legislative, or cultural value, yet is at significant risk of loss because of fragile media, technological obsolescence, and other difficulties. Unfortunately, no systematic solution to the problem has been identified. As a 2003 American Association of Law Libraries study concludes, however, the need to preserve electronic government information is “yet unmet in

any comprehensive manner either at the federal, state or local level” (Matthews, Burnett, Cain, Dow, McFadden & Baish, 2003).

In order to address these issues, in December of 2000 Congress enacted the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP) legislation. The legislation charges the Librarian of Congress to lead a nationwide planning effort for the long-term preservation of digital content, as well as to capture current digital content at risk of disappearing (LC, October, 2002). NDIIPP involves a number of domains covering digital content in both the public and private sectors including academic institutions, financial and entertainment industries, and mass media. The domain of interests in this study is the preservation of electronic information of state and local governments. The Library of Congress (LC) aims to integrate state governmental entities including state libraries, archives, and other state agencies into the national network to preserve “born digital” state and local government information that is both significant and at risk of loss. The Center for Technology in Government (CTG), a digital government research center at the University at Albany, worked with the LC in this effort from September 2004 until September of 2006. In this initiative, CTG worked with LC to plan and facilitate collaborative workshops, to develop and administer the baseline survey, to analyze the results of the workshops and the survey, and to produce related toolkits and reports.

In April and May of 2005, LC sponsored three workshops to help states identify their needs and priorities for digital preservation. Over 150 representatives from state and territorial libraries, archives,

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records management units, and information technology departments participated in these workshops. One of the themes emerging from the workshops was the importance of partnerships within and across states for preservation of state government digital information. Workshop participants showed strong interest in baseline information regarding digital preservation activities of other state governments in order to identify and launch partnership development efforts. In response to this interest, between January and February of 2006, CTG administered a baseline survey of 125 individuals representing state and territorial librarians, archivists, and records managers in order to gather information about at-risk government digital information, the role of regulatory frameworks, and preservation activities underway in state governments.

The main theme emerging from the workshops and the survey was the importance of partnership efforts and collaborative strategies for the preservation of state government digital information. This paper presents the challenges and opportunities regarding interorganizational collaboration and community building for digital preservation of state government information that emerged from the workshops and baseline survey and makes recommendations for digital preservation practitioners in state governments.

2. Interagency and interprofessional collaboration for digital preservation

The main actors in a digital repository system are producer (information provider), manager (professional), and consumer (user) (Borbinha, Kunze, Spinazze, Mutschke, Lieder, Mabe, Dixon, Besser, Dean & Cathro, 2005; Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems, 2002). The collaboration among these actors (as well as within each class of actors) is crucial for ensuring the preservation of and the long-term access to digital records. According to Webb (2003) Collaborative efforts in digital preservation can bring the following benefits:

- Access to a wider range of expertise
- Shared development costs
- Access to tools and systems that might otherwise be unavailable
- Shared learning opportunities
- Increased coverage of preserved materials
- Better planning to reduce wasted effort
- Encouragement for other influential stakeholders to take preservation seriously
- Shared influence on agreements with producers
- Shared influence on research and development of standards and practices
- Attraction of resources and other support for well-coordinated programs at a regional, national, or sectoral level

To effect the successful preservation of state government digital information, those agencies responsible for preservation need to leverage partnerships with various stakeholders including other state and local government agencies, other states, the federal government, and private sector entities. The discussion in this paper focuses on interagency and interprofessional collaboration among librarians, archivists, records managers, and IT staff.

As Borbinha et al., (2005) found, most research in digital libraries thus far has taken system-centric approaches to address how services will be provided, and does not explore in detail the roles of (and the relationships between) different actors in the digital preservation community. In particular, the influence of different perspectives and behaviors of these actors on interactions between them in public sector needs to be examined. Although not specifically focused on long-term preservation of digital information, there have been collaborative efforts between librarians, archivists, and information technologists for electronic records management in academic institutions. The Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) was formed in 1990 to bring together the content expertise of librarians and the

networking expertise of information technologists. According to CNI's workshop report (Lippincott, 1998), the factors motivating collaboration include executive mandates, scarcity of financial resources, the interdependence of librarians and information technologists, the desire to consolidate overlapping functions, the need to incorporate the other professional group's perspectives into project design, while time and costs needed for partnerships, differences in organizational culture, lack of respect for the other profession, and personality conflicts mitigate against successful partnerships.

McGovern and Samuels (1997) emphasize the importance of collaboration between archivists and IT staff at colleges and universities. Such partnerships bring together archivists' knowledge on the value and context of records, identification and selection of content, and legal issues concerning information technologists' expertise on the structure of records, networked environments, and technical issues. The authors contend that other professionals including legal counsel, auditors, and financial officers need to join this partnership to insure successful electronic records management.

Some academic studies in other areas (eg: health care and criminal justice) contain detailed discussions on interprofessional and interdisciplinary collaboration. Hall (2005) explains the influence of different professional cultures on interprofessional teamwork. Professional culture, which includes values, beliefs, attitudes, customs, and behaviors, is established by means of education and socialization and remains obscure to other professions. Although different cultures pose challenges with unfamiliar vocabulary, different approaches to problem solving, and a lack of common understanding of issues and values, they can lead to synergistic efficiency, creative solutions, and improved job satisfaction – if properly leveraged.

Interagency settings in state governments pose challenges to collaboration in digital preservation. In many cases, different agencies involved in preservation of digital records including state libraries, archives, records management agencies, and IT departments form multiple silos¹ and battle for their “turf.” As a result, communication and the sharing of information across these agencies is hindered and the collaboration becomes more difficult. Based on the results of their international case studies, Dawes and Prefontaine (2003) assert the need for a formal institutional framework and relevant technology choice for successful interorganizational collaborations in the public sector.

3. The library of congress consultation with states workshops

Beginning in March of 2005, LC invited U.S. states and territories to a series of workshops designed to begin the process of forming collaborative arrangements and developing collective strategies for preservation of significant state and local government information in digital form.² The workshops were also used to collect facts, perspectives, and recommendations regarding digital preservation of state government information from librarians, archivists, records

¹ Silo in this usage means information silo, which can be defined as a system of management which is incapable of reciprocal operation with other, related management systems. It is a useful term for describing the absence of operational reciprocity. See also: Doty, P., and Erdelez, S. (2002). Information micro-practices in Texas rural courts: Methods and issues for E-Government. *Government Information Quarterly*, 19(4), 369–387.

² For more information about the workshops, see U.S. Library of Congress. (October, 2005). Preservation of state government digital Information: Issues and opportunities. Washington DC: Author Unknown. Retrieved August 4, 2006, from the Library of Congress Digital Preservation Website: http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/partners/states_wkshps.pdf. Three one-day workshops were held on April 27th, May 11th, and May 25th. The first and third workshops were held in Washington, DC, the second in Baltimore, Maryland. Three dates were selected to facilitate participation from all states, territories, and the District of Columbia. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories sent representatives to one of the three Spring workshops. Across the three workshops, 67 librarians, 53 archivists, 13 records managers, and 20 IT professionals were in attendance.

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