

Minnesota Context for Recordkeeping Metadata

A wide variety of projects and resources have underscored the importance of metadata in the past few years. In Minnesota, a number of government agencies have looked closely at metadata-related issues, concepts, and applications for locating, using, and managing data and records.

The most substantively realized application of metadata comes from the Geographic Information System (GIS) community. In this arena, two state agencies, the Land Management Information Center (LMIC) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), have played major roles. Their work in setting standards, developing educational curricula, and building applications for GIS metadata has set an example for the rest of state government. The Minnesota Geographic Data Clearinghouse and the Data Deli are products that showcase how metadata can foster the exchange and re-use of information.¹

Recordkeeping metadata is information that facilitates both management of, and access to, records. While the optimum metadata for any particular record set may vary, such information often includes items like the name of the record creator, date and time of creation, record identifier, key words, location, and description. It can also give reference to applicable policies and laws like the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. Without adequate metadata, a number of records management problems can arise, particularly with respect to electronic records. To list a few examples, it may be difficult to: locate records, pinpoint the official record when multiple copies exist, determine whether a record has been modified since its creation, determine who should have access to a record, and carry out the proper disposition of a record (e.g., archive, destroy) at the end of its retention period.²

Two efforts have already yielded practical records management and metadata tools which would complement a formal recordkeeping metadata scheme. The *Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook* was developed by the State Archives and issued in January 2000.³ The *Handbook* provides agencies with a methodology and tool set for establishing the authenticity and reliability of their records. The Foundations Project, which was coordinated by the DNR and completed in July 2000, established a set of best practices for web page metadata tagging with an accompanying commercial software tool.⁴ Another deliverable from this project is the Ultraseek search engine used on the North Star web site, which is optimized to give higher rankings to web pages with Dublin Core metadata tags.

The Information Policy Council (IPC), the Data Issues Group for Information Technology (DIG-IT), and the Office of Technology (OT) have compellingly established the need for metadata through several studies. The information architecture workshops presented by the META Group demonstrate that metadata standards will be a basic, fundamental component of any statewide

¹ The Clearinghouse is available online at: <http://www.lmic.state.mn.us/chouse/index.html>; the Data Deli is available online at: <http://deli.dnr.state.mn.us/>

² Refer to Appendix B for the committee's business case for recordkeeping metadata.

³ The *Handbook* and associated tools are available online at: <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/tis/tis.html>

⁴ More information on the Foundations Project and its products is available online at: <http://bridges.state.mn.us/>

architecture. The work of the Data Summit, sponsored by the IPC and DIG-IT, called for metadata standards as primary elements.⁵

Finally, the need for metadata standards is evident from the most recent developments in legal policies and mandates governing the adoption of information technology. Minnesota has passed Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA)⁶, and it is covered by the federal Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (E-Sign). Both make the deployment of electronic government services contingent on the description of systems and records sufficient to meet the demands of the rules of evidence. This has been confirmed in the work of the Electronic Real Estate Recording Task Force, which has studied especially how E-Sign determines the way government can formulate standards for the submission of records in an electronic format.⁷

⁵ This work is summarized in a Meta Group report entitled “Metadata Strategy: Minnesota State Archives,” available online at: <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/metadastudies.html>

⁶ Minnesota Statutes, chapter 325L is available online at: www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/stats/325L/

⁷ Information on UETA and E-Sign can be found at: <http://www.etaonline.com/>