

Preserving the Records of the E-Legislature 19-20 June 2006 Project Meeting Summary

The California Legislative Counsel, State Library and Archives hosted the second meeting of the E-Legislature project in Sacramento, California. Representatives from each project partner¹ including the San Diego Supercomputer Center (SDSC), Minnesota Revisor's Office (RO), Legislative Reference Library (LRL) and Historical Society (MHS) met to discuss the progression and future of the project and to learn more about the California legislative system.

Bob Horton began the meeting by updating the partners on the progress of the project. Horton reviewed the project work plan (online at www.mnhs.org/elegislature), which outlines steps completed as well as future ones. Some steps already taken include surveying Minnesota legislative records (summaries posted on web site), completing the Minnesota Revisor's Office workflow and system analysis, installing the RO grid brick and testing file transfers with the SDSC. We are currently ahead of schedule since September 2007 is the end date of the project.

However, we have come across some challenges along the way, particularly dealing with the grid brick technology. The RO experienced bandwidth issues when transferring large files to the SDSC, with system time-outs during the process. Also, since the SDSC frequently releases new versions of the SRB software as they refine the technology involved, it is difficult to set a routine. In addition, the SRB lacks user documentation, which is an important component for new users. Bing Zhu, from the SDSC, assured the partners that the SDSC is moving towards support of a production unit to make sure that implementation is easier. These are obstacles we will continue to work to resolve with the SDSC.

In the final project report we will provide an assessment of the SRB, an appraisal of legislative records and, most importantly, a cost and benefit analysis in terms of disaster recovery. We concluded that disaster recovery is a compelling argument for investment and will be the focus of the analysis. Since the definition of what disaster recovery entails is often disputed, we will define the differences between archival and disaster recovery copies. We look forward to sharing our project findings at conferences such as the annual Society of American Archivists meeting in 2007.

Before launching into the discussion of the California bill drafting system, Michele Timmons, Revisor of the Minnesota Revisor's Office, reported on the successes and challenges of their new bill drafting system. The RO just finished their first year with the new system called XTEND. Overall it was a success and the system provided many advantages. Advantages include auto-engrossment, XTEND tagging and auto deletion and insertion of language, all of which existed in the legacy system, but are now more fine-tuned. The problems were mainly with the training and resistance to change from the employees. There were also technological difficulties, such as creating side-by-sides and tables, but those were relatively easy to fix. Timmons remarked that the Trustworthy Information Systems and RO workflow analyses were helpful since they served as a way to document the new bill drafting system. The RO will send copies from their bill drafting system to the SDSC in fall 2006.

¹ For a list of individuals present from each organization see appendix 1.

In order to better compare Minnesota's bill drafting system to California, the California Legislative Counsel (LC) gave an overview and demonstration of their system. Diane Boyer-Vine, Legislative Counsel, summarized the organization and its responsibilities. The LC's primary function is to assist the Legislature and its members in the preparation of legislation. There are 572 employees including attorneys and staff at the Legislative Data Center (LDC). The LDC provides information technology services, which currently includes 62 applications for the Legislature (trying to reduce to 14).

In December 2004, the LC launched Phase 1 of a new Legal Services System used to produce bills, amendments, budget amendments and California codes. Currently the LC is in Phase 2 of this bill drafting upgrade. Annie Anderson and Mendora Servin from the LC gave an overview of the technologies and tools involved and a demonstration of Legal Services. Like Minnesota, the LC is using an Oracle database and XML as the markup language. It stores documents as individual entities rather than the whole to make it easier to edit and compile codes. All drafts created by the LC are confidential until they are published. The system is backed up daily on tapes, which are stored offsite.

The LC is also using a case management, or workflow tool, called Team Connect. This is a commercial product, customized for the LC, which tracks requests until they are completed. It provides data for each step of the request, including revision dates and the name of every staff member who worked on it. This demonstration was of particular interest to the Minnesota RO since they currently do not have a workflow tool.

The first day of the meeting was rounded out with tours of the California Legislative Counsel, State Archives and State Library. The tours highlighted the array of important legislative materials collected and available at each department. The day ended with a reception in the Supreme Court Conference room (in the State Library) to introduce and publicize the project to other California state employees.

Day two of the meeting started with a discussion, led by Bob Horton, about next steps for the project. The next phase of the project will focus more on technology. We will test the management of files using different user interfaces and the replication process between the MHS, RO and SDSC. Also, we will test routines for capturing files from the RO system. The focus will be on Minnesota records since that is where the technology is installed.

In the meantime the California partners will provide ongoing review and evaluation of work products so that California can determine if it is something they would like to pursue in the future. We will consider another trip to California to look more closely at the Legislative Counsel. We also need to schedule our final project meeting for September 2007 in St. Paul, Sacramento or San Diego.

The future of the project beyond the grant was another important topic discussed at the meeting. This was mentioned because the MHS is currently in the running for two grants that relate to the project. One of those grants is sponsored by the Bush Foundation, a local organization established to support the work of non-profit organizations. If MHS is awarded the grant it will

focus on creating user tools to provide access to digital content.² We can use the Bush experience to enhance what we complete in the E-Legislature project.

The second grant is being offered by the Library of Congress as part of the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP). This new program will support multi-state demonstration projects for the preservation of state government digital information. They are looking for state agencies and/or state professional organizations to lead projects that involve multiple partners to create methods to preserve digital records. The MHS applied as a lead in collaboration with the California Digital Library, Center for Technology in Government and the National Conference of State Legislatures. California, Minnesota, Kansas, Mississippi and Utah have also agreed to participate at different levels whether is it in-kind or monetary contributions. Our proposal will build on what we are already doing with E-Legislature (exploration and research) and turn the project into a working model.

If we are awarded both grants it will certainly benefit the E-Legislature project. It will build our case for investment since it is difficult to obtain funding for only preservation needs. By providing disaster recovery and better access, legislators will more likely fund implementation of this technology in other states. The grants will also provide additional resources to create access tools and meet user needs.

Bing Zhu from the San Diego Supercomputer Center gave the final meeting presentation. Zhu spoke about the Storage Resource Broker software, data grids and data management. The topics included the architecture of the system, storage options (offline, online), the different SRB interfaces (including demo), metadata, risk management and the online resources available. The resources include SRB chat, tutorials, wiki pages, and are available on the SRB homepage (www.sdsc.edu/srb).

The project meeting concluded with tours of the Legislative Data Center and State Capitol. Listed below are key issues discussed as well as immediate and future actions to complete.

Many key issues were discussed during the course of the meeting, including:

- Compelling argument for investment in the project is disaster recovery, which is severely lacking in most states.
- Cost and benefit analysis of digitization of print materials (e.g., old, deteriorating hard-copy statutes and laws).

Immediate Actions:

- Post meeting materials on web site including meeting summary, presentations and work plan.
- Continue testing of grid brick and transferring files between the RO, MHS and SDSC, as well as other technology related tasks detailed in the work plan.

Future Actions:

- Provide updates on grants as possible.

² The MHS was awarded the Bush Foundation grant in July 2006.

- Consider disaster recovery as impetus for investment.
- Capture points of the files. When? Where? What?
- Best practices and cost/benefit analysis.
- Consider implementation of this technology in California.
- Present project findings at appropriate conferences.
- Schedule final project meeting for September 2007.

Appendix 1 Meeting Participants

Minnesota Historical Society: Bob Horton, Shawn Rounds, Beth Lighthipe

Minnesota Revisor's Office: Michele Timmons, Tim Orr

Minnesota Legislative Reference Library: Robbie LaFleur

San Diego Supercomputer Center: Bing Zhu

California Legislative Counsel: Diane Boyer-Vine, Linda Heatherly, Bill Behnk, Mendora Servin, Annie Anderson, David Duarte, Cheri Meadows, Maureen McRandle

California State Library: Kristine Ogilvie, Janet Coles

California State Archives: Nancy Zimmelman, Melodi Andersen

California Digital Library: Patricia Cruse