

## Preserving State Government Digital Information Mississippi Partners Meeting



### Minnesota Historical Society

Tuesday, May 20, 2008  
Jackson, Mississippi

*Bob Horton, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), met with the Mississippi partners of the NDIIPP-sponsored project, Preserving State Government Digital Information. Julie Dees, Matthew Glover, David Pilcher, and Julia Young represented the Mississippi Department of Archives & History (MDAH) and Rob Patterson, the Legislative Budget Office.*

*Horton reviewed the project to this date. A general conversation followed, with the significant points outlined here.*

How does this project fit into the context of what other organizations are doing, e.g., State Search, Lexis, WestLaw?

Our niche reflects the missions of the state archives and libraries involved: long-term preservation is a priority, with the capacity to search across disparate resources, and not just legislative material. We are also working within the framework of the national cyberinfrastructure under development through NDIIPP. Last, the project puts a special emphasis on education, increasing the awareness of states, especially through the NCSL, of how to position themselves to do better in the future.

The Mississippi legislature uses XML sparingly, primarily to format content for display on the web. It relies on a FoxPro database. Documents are created in Word, then translated into HTML and PDF for the web. The site has legislative and bill histories online now, with good bill status system, to track legislation. The information online dates back to 1998, with additional information in house back to 1990. The system was designed to meet the needs of the legislators themselves. All programming is done in house, with the priority of keeping the system running to meet current demands.

There is a general interest in what other states are doing, with the proviso that Mississippi has to set its own priorities, within the constraints of its resources. The legislature is exempted from the records management system and can draw up its own policies and procedures. Pilcher has sent Charles Rodgers (Minnesota Historical Society) the extant retention schedules. The legislature is sending paper copies and reports to the records center. The MDAH has some legislative records series, dating back from the territorial period.

The MDAH would like to update the legislative retention schedules and is interested in collecting legislative electronic records, especially for preservation. The MDAH has a proven capacity for providing access to records online, using the online catalog for the interface—e.g., Governor

Musgrove records, as PDF files. To support this, there is a strong interest in learning more about the comparative table of schedules, to use it as a point of comparison, with the possibility of working with the legislature to do more. The electronic records of the legislature would be a priority for the MDAH.

In general, the MHS staff, during the project, can serve as the medium of communication among the states and do some preliminary evaluation—we can explore landscape, the continuum of options and functions, that allow people to build on what they're doing and position themselves to do better. All the states are interested in learning what each other is doing, but few have the leisure at this time to study the possibilities; the project can fill that role. The overall goal then is to increase awareness, to have all the partners become more conscious of what everybody else is doing and to take advantage of technology to make things cheaper and easier.

Specifically, given that the MDAH is an agency that collects comprehensively (newspapers, private papers, government records, etc.), it is very interested in the concept of the arc of content, following the development of a legislative event, from the initiative stage through to implementation.

All of this would have to be done within the framework of the legislature's schedule, with participation confined primarily to the down times and when the chambers are not in session.

To start, the Mississippi participants will review these white papers, as they are drafted:

- Preservation
- Web harvesting
- Policy issues: authentication, accessibility

The immediate next steps are:

- Give Mississippi staff access to Basecamp
- Circulate drafts of the policy issues
- Keep them informed of the work on the minimal schema