

Preserving State Government Digital Information Tennessee Partners Meeting



Minnesota Historical Society

Tuesday, August 19, 2008
State Capitol
Nashville, Tennessee

Bob Horton, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), met with the Tennessee partners of the NDIIPP-sponsored project, Preserving State Government Digital Information. Jami Awalt, Cathi Carmack, Wayne Moore, and Greg Yates represented the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA); Doug Hines, the Office of Legal Services; Steve Krieglish, the Director of Legislative Information and Brian Lewis, the Office of Legislative Information; Tammi Metzler, Assistant Chief Clerk, House Clerk's Office; Alan Whittington, Assistant Chief Clerk, Senate Clerk's Office.

Bob Horton began the meeting with a presentation on the NDIIPP program and the Legislative Information project. In the discussion that followed, these topics were addressed.

Legislative bill drafting system

Tennessee uses its own application to draft bills, using Microsoft Word to develop texts. The header of each contains some standard identifying content. The texts are captured in a SQL server database.

Active server pages (ASP) translate the texts for presentation on the web. A PDF version of each text is also made available. Actions, bill histories and transactions are noted online, on the bill information page.

This system was developed in 1995/96. Digital content is preserved from that point forward. The predecessor was a Wang system; content from that was not carried forward.

Roughly 18,000 drafts (including bills, amendments, acts, resolutions, etc.) are produced in a biennium; 4,000 are bills. Texts are public only when filed; prior to that, they are confidential, per attorney-client privilege.

Digital copies are made for Lexis and WestLaw. Lexis is the official publisher of the state code, which is the official copy for citations and references. The executive branch, through the Tennessee State Chief Information Officer's (CIO) office, also receives a digital copy; this content is sold as a service to departments, with the content informing fiscal notes.

Approximately 14 entities are harvesting legislative content. They are directed to a site that provides an XML feed of content. The TSLA uses Archive-It to harvest complementary material, such as government reports and publications.

Authentication

As noted, the printed publication from Lexis is the official copy. The clerks' offices can provide hard copies with certifications. Bills and their jackets are transferred to the State Archives, which can also certify copies for evidentiary purposes.

Digital video

Since 2002 for the House and 2006 for the Senate, there are digital videos of the committee and floor sessions. These files are preserved—in the original tape format, in DVD copies and on the legislative storage area network (SAN). The legislative staff will explore the use of tags in this session, with time stamping and identification of committee/session and time.

Apparently, state law requires both the Legislature and the State Archives to record legislative activities. The State Archives has been recording since 1955, first on Audograph, then tape cassettes and, in the upcoming session, digital media. All of these are readily available, with additional resources, through TSLA's Legislative History office.

Points for further consideration

There is clearly some redundancy in the digital recording of the legislature by two entities, with room for collaboration. The legislature has more sophisticated technological resources and expertise; the TSLA staff has a long history of experience with the audiences for the content and understands its value.

Storage processes and costs could be explored. It would be useful to know more about the legislature's disaster recovery project. Some appraisal of the legislative content could help to reduce the preservation burden.

Metadata is an area where the legislature and the TSLA could cooperate. Some standard, perhaps crosswalked to the schema the MHS is developing, would support the comparability and possibly the interoperability of the digital content being created. The logsheets the TSLA uses should be a reference point for the legislature as it develops tagging scheme for its digital video.