

Preserving State Government Digital Information Vermont Partners Meeting



Minnesota Historical Society

Monday, April 14, 2008
Room 10, Vermont State House
Montpelier, Vermont

Bob Horton and Charles Rodgers, of the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), met with the Vermont partners of the NDIIPP-sponsored project, Preserving State Government Digital Information.

Vermont participants included Gregory Sanford and Tanya Marshall (State Archives), Darwin Thompson (Enterprise Project Management Office), Thomas Murray (State Chief Information Officer), Duncan Goss and Michael Chernick (Legislative Council), Richard Reed and Becky Buck (Joint Fiscal Office), and Sybil McShane (State Librarian).

Gregory Sanford introduced Bob Horton and Charles Rodgers, and encouraged participation and discussion by the meeting attendees.

The following account is paraphrased.

Chernick: Vermont is just starting to develop plans for making legislative content more fully accessible; decisions are needed to further invest in information technology. Web harvesting and digitization standards are appealing to Vermont. There is a real need for practical applications.

Goss: We've talked about XML at various NSCL conferences, and are not sure that the purported benefits are worth the effort, based on reports from other states. Metadata elements for key legislative documents would be important.

Reed: The Joint Finance Office is developing an XML schema (skeletal version) for appropriation bills and related documents.

Marshall: The Vermont State Archives is already developing and using recordkeeping metadata standards for records of state agencies.

Discussion about born digital reports and documents that are posted on the web, but a paper copy is not necessarily preserved for historical purposes. Preservation of records with historical value is an ongoing challenge, and states will have different requirements, options and solutions to meet this challenge.

Murray: Regarding authentication, will best practices be developed as part of this project?

Horton: Project staff is working on a white paper concerning issues surrounding authentication of electronic information. The American Association of Law Libraries¹ (AALL) has a position that anything electronic is inherently suspect; advocates the need for digital signatures to authenticate electronic documents, specifically legislative electronic content. Alternative position is that of the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act² (UETA), COBIT standards³, the Sedona Conference's *Sedona Principles*⁴ (as it relates to electronic discovery rules), the Federal Rules of Evidence⁵, and the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure⁶; presumption is that electronic information is presumed authentic unless proved otherwise. UETA does not prescribe any particular information technology. Probably two conflicting approaches about authentication of electronic information that will have to be resolved.

Goss: Vermont transitioning to International Roll Call bill drafting system and will replace the locally developed bill drafting system. Other modules may be adopted in later years. Fourteen other states use the IRC system.

Horton: Let's talk now about our next steps. Are there any Vermont projects or initiatives now underway this project could assist with?

Reed: We will share the Joint Fiscal Office schema for budget documents, and would appreciate your review and comment. [Rich Reed will send a copy to Bob Horton so the project staff can study it.]

Chernick: There is a need for digitization and preservation standards for audio of meeting minutes.

Horton: The project will research practical description and storage standards for preserving electronic audio files.

Sanford: There is a need for communicating standards and best practices across the enterprise in Vermont. Ongoing question of what content is being permanently preserved, and most importantly, why is it being permanently preserved?

Marshall: It is important to identify the business needs/requirements of the legislature, what are reasonable retention periods, and what information has truly permanent value.

Horton: Remember, it's important to identify the costs/benefits of preserving legislative content.

Chernick: Could we talk more about the project goals?

Horton: Proving authentication, and providing accessibility are key goals. The issue of retrospective digitization keeps coming up, and that is something the project will address in some manner, perhaps with practical standards and outlining costs/benefits of digitization projects.

¹ <http://www.aallnet.org/aallwash/authenreport.html>

² http://www.nccusl.org/Update/uniformact_summaries/uniformacts-s-ueta.asp

³ http://www.isaca.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Members_and_Leaders1/COBIT6/FAQ6/COBIT_FAQ.htm

⁴ http://www.thesedonaconference.org/dltForm?did=TSC_PRINCP_2nd_ed_607.pdf

⁵ <http://judiciary.house.gov/media/pdfs/printers/110th/evid2007.pdf>

⁶ <http://judiciary.house.gov/media/pdfs/printers/109th/31308.pdf>

Marshall: There is a need to develop and share standards for successful digitization of bill files that are in paper form. What is the context for looking at digitization standards?

Horton: Advocating standards that avoid a large amount of metadata are important so that digitization projects are practical and low-cost. Would favor standards based on practical experience, keeping in mind costs and benefits. Comparative analysis of different projects is important, since different records and information may require different metadata.

Sanford: The most important element to digitization is the indexing of the documents.

Horton: Described the digitization of tobacco company records [University of California-San Francisco's Legacy Tobacco Documents Library], which used minimal indexing.⁷ Goal was more information, available sooner, and at a low price.

Goss: Format is of concern, so what about open source content?

Horton: Attractive idea, but potentially very expensive to implement. An XML schema is important for born digital information. On the other hand, metadata is crucial for retrospective digitization to properly index the information.

Reed: There are eight parts to the XML schema used for the appropriation bill. It is a skeletal setup, but with more detail in a template. The schema is being tweaked and at the end of the session there will be an evaluation by the House and Senate clerks.

Goss: Observed that the format of statute titles is often inconsistent.

Horton: Let me wrap up tonight's meeting by summarizing next steps:

- 1) Will send participants a summary of the meeting minutes, to include a review of common ground, plus action steps.
- 2) Presumption we will further communicate and share ideas.
- 3) Base Camp and project Web sites where partners can review information, especially the authentication white paper.

Thank you again for your time this Monday evening, and for sharing your ideas, comments, and experiences. Your questions and comments will greatly assist our project as it proceeds, and will share information we learn from our other state partners. Thanks again.

Goals as part of the consensus for next steps:

- Recordkeeping metadata and XML schema
- iStart: policy questions (e.g., authenticity and accessibility)
- Digitization standards (bill files)
- Preservation vs. storage (disaster recovery, continuity of operations)
- Web harvesting

⁷ <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/>