

**Preserving the Records of the E-Legislature
National Historical Publication and Records Commission Grant #5416-MN
April 2006**

Background

In April 2005, the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) in collaboration with the Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes (Revisor's Office), Legislative Reference Library (LRL) and San Diego Supercomputer Center (SDSC), launched a project to develop and test a method to preserve the electronic records of the Minnesota legislature in a web-enabled architecture. The project will use the electronic records created by the Revisor's Office, within their XML-based XTEND bill-drafting system, used for the first time this legislative session. The project team will take these valuable electronic records, attach metadata, store them at the SDSC using grid technology and create tools to make them more useful and accessible to the public.

The SDSC will provide the technical expertise needed to help the project use grid technology and the Storage Resource Broker (SRB) software to plan for their long-term preservation. The LRL will assist with the appraisal process and the development of metadata standards to ensure trustworthy electronic records. Most importantly, they will help to address public access and needs, in order to create useful tools and products. Staff from the California Legislative Counsel, State Archives and State Library will make up an advisory board to evaluate and assess the model and its applicability to their state. As a result, Minnesota can establish the potential of the project to other states.

The phases planned for the project are (some overlapping):

- Phase 1: Preparation (April-June 2005)
- Phase 2: Research and analysis (June 2005-June 2006)
- Phase 3: Testing and implementation (June 2006-January 2007)
- Phase 4: Evaluation and advocacy (January 2007-June 2007)
- Phase 5: Completion of final reports and products (June 2007-September 2007).

Activities to Date

In its beginning stages a project web site (<http://www.mnhs.org/elegislature>) was developed to communicate with project partners and the public. Included are links to a project summary, an annotated list of resources, partner information and materials from the September 2005 meeting. Also posted on the web site is a summary of the Revisor's Office workflow and document type analysis (mentioned below). The web site will continue to be an important tool to update partners and promote the project.

The Minnesota Historical Society hosted the first project meeting in September 2005. Project partners met to discuss the goals and objectives of the project, as well as the work plan, products, and the partners involved. Representatives from the Revisor's Office, LRL, California Legislative Counsel, State Archives and State Library gave an overview of their organization and involvement with government records. The Revisor's Office also gave a demonstration of their XTEND bill-drafting system and provided a tour to illustrate their organization's workflow.

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Richard Marciano from the SDSC introduced the SRB software and explained the advantages of XML and the possibilities it creates. Several future plans were mentioned, including creating a cost and benefit analyses, drafting a best practices document for use of the model, and surveying bill-drafting systems in other states.

To research and analyze Minnesota legislative records in all formats, the MHS project team met with a variety of sources, including staff members from the MHS, LRL, Legislative Coordinating Commission, and the House and Senate IT. We were able to recognize the array of legislative documents available and their extensive use value to the public. It also served as a way to promote the potential of the project. These groups expressed much interest in the possibility of preserving electronic records outside the bill-drafting system, using the SDSC technology. Summary reports were written for each of these visits and will be posted on the web site.

Since the Revisor's Office (RO) is the primary creator of records central to the project, the team met with the RO numerous times to document the XTEND system and its associated paper and electronic workflow. The information gathered from this process will be used to help identify documents that should be preserved in this project. In March 2006, the MHS project team met with the Revisor's Office to examine the XTEND system in greater detail, using the *Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook* (TIS) methodology. TIS is a tool developed by the Minnesota Historical Society to help agencies create trustworthy systems and manage electronic records. Rather than examining the system's workflow, as before, we concentrated on the XTEND system itself, looking at documentation, security measures, audit trails, disaster recovery plans and metadata. This will help create a baseline for the project, which will be useful for other states that might implement this technology.

In addition, the project team will continue to work with the Revisor's Office to test the grid brick and begin the process of transferring files. Since their grid brick was installed ahead of schedule there will be even more time to plan the process. For now the Revisor's Office will only transfer final versions of legislative documents since drafts are confidential and require security measures. This is an issue that will be addressed in the latter stages of the project.

The project partners will continue to look for opportunities to promote the project through conferences, publications, and meetings. To date Bob Horton and Robbie LaFleur (from the LRL) presented the project at the 2005 Professional Development Seminar hosted by the National Association of Legislative Information Technology in Rapid City, South Dakota. Shortly after Horton was invited to Vermont to speak to a group of legislators, legislative staff, and the state archives, as they plan their own electronic legislature initiative.

As we approach the one-year mark of this project it is clear there is wide spread interest in it because there is a growing concern for managing and maintaining electronic records. It is vital that we continue to address this issue to ensure the preservation of these important records. Also, we must continue to think of educational tools and products to make these records more accessible and useful for the public.

Next Steps

In the next months the MHS team will:

- Develop metadata standards (with the help of the LRL and SDSC) to attach to documents that come out of the bill-drafting system.
- Outline appraisal criteria to set standards for documents that will be preserved and transferred to the SDSC.
- Review and analyze the Revisor's Office XML schema.
- Establish and document a procedure for transferring files between the Revisor's Office, MHS and SDSC.
- Plan the June 2006 project partner meeting in Sacramento to take a closer look at California's bill-drafting system. At the meeting, we will provide an update and present new materials including a glossary of terms to help with the comparison of the California and Minnesota bill-drafting process.
- Begin process of surveying other states legislative systems.
- Draft costs and benefits analyses and best practices document to address sustainability over time and the implementation of the project in other states.
- Consider disaster recovery issues since it may be another use for our project.