

1-1-2013

# The State Electronic Records Initiative: Working to Solve the Crisis

Jim Corridan

*Indiana State Archives*, [jcorridan@iara.in.gov](mailto:jcorridan@iara.in.gov)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Corridan, Jim (2013) "The State Electronic Records Initiative: Working to Solve the Crisis," *MAC Newsletter*: Vol. 40 : No. 3 , Article 8.  
Available at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter/vol40/iss3/8>

This Electronic Currents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in MAC Newsletter by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

MACers interested in writing a column for *Electronic Currents* are encouraged to contact Joanne Kaczmarek at [jkaczmar@illinois.edu](mailto:jkaczmar@illinois.edu).

### The State Electronic Records Initiative: Working to Solve the Crisis

By Jim Corridan, *Indiana State Archives*

State archives have long worked to address electronic records, beginning in 1979 with a grant to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. But over the past three decades, as the volume and complexity of electronic records have grown, funding for state governments, and state archives in particular, has shrunk. During this time, all state archives have experienced reductions in personnel, with an average decrease of 19.7 percent from 2004 to 2012.<sup>1</sup> This shrinking pool of resources has left efforts to address electronic records hanging in the balance. What was once a major concern has now become a crisis.

The Council of State Archives (CoSA) report *The State of State Records* examined the status of state archives and records management programs nationwide. The report noted, “Electronic records, now created in abundance by every state government office, present enormous but, as of yet, unresolved problems related to long-term preservation and access.”<sup>2</sup> A Blue Ribbon Panel agreed and also asserted, “Archivists and records managers are not receiving sufficient training to deal with digital materials.”<sup>3</sup> Five years later, these problems remain largely unresolved and continue to grow. Continued budget cuts have further reduced staff and staff training opportunities. Even those rare programs that have the ability to fill openings have had difficulty finding candidates appropriately trained to handle electronic records.

#### Phase I: Data Gathering

The 2010 biennial CoSA survey provided further evidence of the continuing gap in states’ abilities to address electronic records. The survey reported that only 55 percent of states and territories had an electronic records program, and only 61 percent reported accessioning electronic records in any manner.

In response, CoSA launched in 2011 the State Electronic Records Initiative (SERI). During 2011, CoSA completed the first phase of SERI, the goal of which was to create a detailed profile of the status of each state’s electronic records program. The profile was created through the coordinated work of a team of SERI committee members, CoSA staff, and SERI consultant Phillip Bantin. Representatives from the 56 states and territories were contacted and asked to complete a written survey addressing the following:

- Archives and records management legislation, including the long-term management of electronic records
- Policies currently in place
- Archival and records management staff (including job descriptions)
- Functional requirements already in place
- Metadata models used
- Relationships with Information Technology units (internal and statewide)
- How the state’s records management program currently addresses electronic records
- If the archives seek to capture records from local government agencies
- Whether electronic records are currently accessioned, and, if so, what is the total volume and format types used

Each archivist was also asked to assess the status of his/her electronic records program using a letter scale:

- A. An electronic records program is in place that addresses all stages from creation in the agency to long-term preservation.
- B. An electronic records program is in place but does not address all stages of the lifecycle.
- C. The state has started to develop an electronic records program (or plans to do so), but little or nothing has been implemented.
- D. No progress has been made in addressing electronic records.

The SERI team followed up with telephone interviews. A majority of the states confirmed they did not have an electronic records program in place. In addition, 17 states and territories indicated their archives had not yet accessioned electronic records. Interviewees were asked about the keys to their success and the barriers preventing them from success. The number one need identified was more staff with training and experience in electronic records management.

CoSA also asked consultants Charles Dollar and Lori Ashley to assess the collective condition of state and territorial electronic records programs using their Digital Preservation Capability Maturity Model (DPCMM). The

*(Continued on page 26)*

*(Continued from page 25)*

model measures 15 key components of a digital preservation program. Here, too, the programs fell short, with an average composite score of “minimal” capability, while some states and territories fell into the “nominal” capability ranking, the lowest of the five capability levels. Their report noted that “Unless electronic records are adequately managed and protected from the point of their creation/receipt, their authenticity and usability over time may become suspect, and therefore, undermine the foundation of our democratic processes.”<sup>4</sup>

## **Phase II: Moving Forward**

Phase II of SERI focuses on moving forward. After the results of Phase I, the Steering Committee outlined next steps to build a comprehensive program to strengthen the management of archival electronic records in all states, territories, and the District of Columbia. Four key areas were identified and a subcommittee was formed to focus on each area.

### **1. Education Subcommittee**

- Develop and recommend criteria for continuing education grant funding
- Develop and recommend curriculum for the (one) Primary and (three) Advanced State Electronic Records Institutes
- Identify appropriate presenters for the four institutes
- Work with SERI’s Best Practices and Tools Subcommittee to identify potential continuing education opportunities for inclusion on the electronic records resources Web site
- Explore post-institute training opportunities/methods

### **2. Awareness Subcommittee**

- Coordinate electronic records awareness and advocacy programming through CoSA and SERI
- Recommend, develop, and implement a national awareness campaign centered on electronic records and preservation
- Create partnerships with other groups

### **3. Governance Subcommittee**

- Identify existing state and territorial governance models and establish best practices
- Consider establishing a model law for electronic records management
- Provide proposals to establish records governance within the IT infrastructure
- Identify critical roles for governance to work correctly and to achieve functional outcomes

### **4. Best Practices & Tools Subcommittee**

- Establish and identify standards and tools for the entire lifecycle of electronic records from records management through preservation
- Identify existing resources and tools for inclusion in an electronic records resource Web site
- Identify existing programs and state implementations of electronic records management systems for states and territories to evaluate and consider
- Work with SERI’s Education Subcommittee to identify potential continuing education opportunities for inclusion on the electronic records resources Web site
- Monitor the field for new tools and developing best practices to share with CoSA

For the work of the Education Subcommittee, CoSA was awarded a Laura Bush grant of \$500,000 from IMLS. The funds will be used to support continuing education grants and to develop Primary and Advanced Institutes for the states’ electronic records programs. This grant is serving as a cornerstone to advance the state programs by infusing them with well-trained staff.

Awareness and advocacy were identified as key areas because if decision makers and the public have a better understanding of the challenges of managing electronic records, the threat posed by the potential loss of terabytes of historic records may be more easily minimized. Efforts are afoot to build a national coalition to raise awareness about electronic records preservation issues through education and by advocating for additional resources.

Linked to Awareness is SERI’s concept of governance. Archivists must have a seat at the information technology table so that systems are developed in a framework that takes into consideration all aspects of the information governance lifecycle. System design must include consideration of retention requirements and mechanisms for transferring records out of active systems into archival systems. An effective educational program for state archivists and records managers must cover the entire life cycle of electronic records—from creation by state agencies, through active use for state business, to ingest and preservation by the archives.

The fourth key area identified by SERI is the development of best practices and tools. One example of efforts in this area is CoSA’s proposal for the development of a Web portal to consolidate links to E-records resources for the NHPRC and CoSA. When completed, much of the E-resource center portal will be made available to the public.

This December at the Best Practices Exchange in Annapolis, Maryland, SERI members will be providing updates on their work. The conference will bring together those working with electronic records from industry, academia, government, and libraries to share ideas and successes. Information about the meeting is available at [www.bpexchange.org](http://www.bpexchange.org).

---

Notes

1. Council of State Archivists, *Preliminary Report on the Survey of State Historical Records Advisory Boards*, September 2012, [http://www.statearchivists.org/shrabs/2012-SHRAB-survey-report\\_prelim-tables.pdf](http://www.statearchivists.org/shrabs/2012-SHRAB-survey-report_prelim-tables.pdf) (15 November 2012).
2. Council of State Archivists, *The State of State Records: A Status Report on State Archives and Records Management Programs in the United States*, January 2007, <http://www.statearchivists.org/reports/2007-ARMreport/StateARMs-2006rpt-final.pdf> (15 November 2012).
3. Council of State Archivists, *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel: A Supplement to The State of State Records—A Status Report on State Archives and Records Management Programs in the United States*, January 2007, <http://www.statearchivists.org/reports/2007-ARMreport/BRPreport-final.pdf> (15 November 2012).
4. Council of State Archivists, *State Electronic Records Initiative – Phase I Report from the Council of State Archivists’ State Electronic Records Initiative (SERI) Committee*, June 2012, <http://www.statearchivists.org/seri/SERI%20Phase%20One%20Report%20-%20final%20review%20draft%20-%202012-06.pdf> (15 November 2012).

**Aeon**  
Managing Special Collections

**Service.  
Security.  
Statistics.**

“Aeon gives us robust statistics about users and collections.”

“Aeon will reduce the appalling amount of paperwork associated with registering patrons and keeping track of collections used in Special Collections.”

“The ability to track who is using what materials provides valuable information for maintaining the security of the collections.”

“Aeon provides a chain of custody and the patron information we need to make data driven decisions.”

**ATLAS SYSTEMS**  
Library Excellence Through Efficiency

Visit [www.atlas-sys.com/aeon/](http://www.atlas-sys.com/aeon/) to see who's using Aeon.

Sign up for a demo  
[www.atlas-sys.com](http://www.atlas-sys.com)