

Working Together: A Collaboration Among Archivists, Records Managers, and Information Technologists

by Joan Lippincott, Associate Executive Director, CNI

Institutions are grappling with questions concerning long-term access to electronic records, the policies that need to be put into place to specify responsibilities for retention of electronic materials, and the institutional mandate to respond to Freedom of Information Act requests that necessitate searching of electronic records that may not be structured for easy analysis and that may include confidential information. Archivists and records managers have historically had the responsibility for ensuring the institution's long-term access to its records and documents, and many new challenges are apparent in the networked environment. Working collaboratively with institutional information technologists may help in developing policies and solutions.

CNI Working Together Workshop

CNI first offered a Working Together workshop in 1994. That workshop focused on facilitating partnerships between senior library and information technology (IT) managers and their staffs, an embodiment of CNI's mission. Over the years a broader spectrum of individuals, such as instructional designers and academic administrators, have been included in the teams that participated.

CNI realized the need for an expanded program, and one of the areas for redirection was to encourage collaboration among archivists, records managers, and information technologists. A grant from the National Historical Preservation and Records Commission provided funding for revamping of the program and the preparation of a curriculum and materials geared to a new audience of professionals. The grant also underwrote many of the costs of the first implementation of the specialized workshop.

Teams from 11 institutions participated in CNI's Working Together: A Workshop for Archivists, Records Managers, and Information Technologists, held on December 16-17, 1998 in Washington, DC. The workshop clearly tapped a growing institutional need for policies and projects that address the thorny issues surrounding electronic records management and the archiving of electronic documents. The participating teams, selected in response to a call, represented a wide geographic range (including one European institution) and a diversity of institutional types.

A New Convergence

CNI's Executive Director, Clifford Lynch, stated in his keynote that the diffusion of networked information into our community is actually beginning to work. While historically archives and information technology have had relatively separate missions and realms of work, their missions are beginning to converge. In the past, archivists and records managers dealt exclusively with paper spun off from organizational processes, but now the types of materials managed and collected by these professionals is migrating onto the Net. We are just beginning to address the need and mechanisms for keeping a long-term record of email that documents institutional processes and policies, of videoconferencing that may contain the record of an

official decision, and of website materials that represent the history of the institution.

Major Issues

Participants identified major issues surrounding electronic archives and records, including policy-oriented concerns such as: confidentiality, retention versus disposal of electronic records, authority for decision-making and policy, and the legal/regulatory environment. Participants also identified the long-term archiving of web resources and email, the economics of long-term archiving, educating users and producers about electronic records policies, and the lack of input from archivists and records managers into system design as significant concerns.

Facilitators Gerry Bernbom (Special Assistant for Digital Libraries and Distance Education, Office for Information Technology, Indiana University) and Fynnette Eaton (Director of the Technical Services Division, Smithsonian Institution Archives) guided the teams, providing an overview of forces affecting collaboration among individuals representing different sectors of the institution, and finally focusing on an institutional project of relevance to each team.

Institutional Projects

Teams developed plans to take back to their home institutions. Topics included plans to archive portions of the institutional website, to design a system to archive email created by a dean's office that had enduring value to the university, to design information systems that will provide continuing access to student records, to design a system of legally acceptable electronic records for a state agency, and to develop a campaign to inform university employees in one case and state employees in another about their responsibilities in dealing with electronic records.

Perspectives & Future Workshops

Participants found that the structured agenda, interaction with others facing similar problems, and the time away from daily work to focus on these issues as key elements in their satisfaction with the workshop.

CNI is planning two more workshops on this topic for spring or summer 1999. One will be hosted by CIC and held in the Midwest, and the second will be held in Washington, DC. Information will be posted on <cni-announce> or check the CNI website, <<http://www.cni.org/projects/working.together/>>, for specifics. In addition, a session on the issues that institutions face regarding electronic records and archives will be held at the Spring CNI Task Force meeting, April 26–27, Washington, DC.

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