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AUTHOR Lazar, Jonathan; McClure, Charles R.; Sprehe, J. Timothy
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the conference was to review the current legal issues, policies, and practices in Federal ERM electronic records; learn specific strategies and solutions for managing electronic records on Web sites; exchange ideas and share information for Web site ERM; and contribute to the development of ERM policies and guidelines for the Federal government. At the beginning of the conference, 147 attendees completed a short survey about their views of ERM on government Web sites. Preliminary findings from the surveys were presented at the end of the conference. There was also an open discussion session at the end of the conference for participants to discuss their views on problems and solutions in the ERM of Web sites. This report includes findings from the 22-item surveys and also a summary of the problems and solutions presented at the open discussion session. The text of each survey question is presented with the results. A complete copy of the participant survey is appended. (AEF)

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SOLVING ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT (ERM) ISSUES FOR GOVERNMENT WEBSITES: POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND STRATEGIES

Conference Report on Questionnaire and Participant Discussion

April 22, 1998
Washington, D.C.

Conference Presented By:

Dr. Charles R. McClure	Dr. J. Timothy Sprehe
Distinguished Professor	President
School of Information Studies	Sprehe Inf. Mang. Associates
Syracuse University	4201 Conn. Ave., Suite 610
Syracuse, NY 13244	Washington, DC 20008
cmclure@mailbox.syr.edu	jtsprehe@intr.net

Conference Report Written By:

Jonathan Lazar
University of Maryland Baltimore County

Charles R. McClure

J. Timothy Sprehe

Conference Sponsored by:

Federal Internet Institute
Syracuse University, School of Information Studies
Council for Excellence in Government.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 22, 1998, a conference entitled "Solving Electronic Records Management (ERM) Issues for Government Websites: Policies, Practices, and Strategies" was held in Washington, D.C. The conference was presented by Drs. Charles R. McClure and J. Timothy Sprehe, and was sponsored by the Federal Internet Institute, The Syracuse University School of Information Studies, and the Council for Excellence in Government. Over 180 leaders in ERM and website development attended the conference.

The purpose of the conference was to review the current legal issues, policies and practices in Federal ERM; learn specific strategies and solutions for managing electronic records on websites; exchange ideas and share information for website ERM; and contribute to the development of ERM policies and guidelines for the Federal government. McClure and Sprehe presented findings from their recently completed study, funded by the National Historical Preservation and Records Commission, *Analysis and Development of Model Quality Guidelines for Electronic Records Management on State and Federal Websites*. The final report is available at <http://istweb.syr.edu/~mcclure/> which also includes Guidelines for ERM.

At the beginning of the conference, attendees were asked to fill out a short survey about their views of ERM on government websites. Preliminary findings from the surveys were presented at the end of the conference. There was also an open discussion session at the end of the conference, for participants to discuss their views on problems and solutions in the ERM of websites. This report includes findings from the surveys and also a summary of the problems and solutions presented at the open discussion session. This report is not intended to summarize the entire conference.

The text of each survey question is presented with the results. A complete copy of the participant survey is included as Appendix A. At the conference, 147 participants completed the survey.

RESULTS OF SURVEY

Responses to PART I: Background Information

1. Which of the following *best* describes the SETTING in which you work:

Setting	Number	Percentage of Respondents
Federal Agency	142	96.60 %
Private For-Profit Organization	2	1.36 %
State Government	0	0.00 %
Private Non-Profit Organization	1	0.68 %
Other	2	1.36 %
No Response	0	0.0 %

2. How many years of experience do you have in this setting?

The average participant had 17.04 years in the current setting. The range was from 0 years (possibly a new employee?) to 43 years.

3. Which one category *best* describes the FIELD in which you work?

Field	Number	Percentage of Respondents
Webmaster	16	10.88 %
Research and Development	3	2.04 %
Records Management	44	29.93 %
Software Development	1	0.68 %
Program/Project Manager	29	19.73 %
Procurement/Contracting	1	0.68 %
Computer Systems	9	6.12 %
Library/Information Center	11	7.48 %
General IRM	10	6.80 %
Other	22	14.97 %
No response	1	0.68 %

4. Which one category *best* describes your INVOLVEMENT WITH or INTEREST IN agency websites?

Involvement with/Interest In Agency Websites	Number	Percentage of Respondents
Implementor of Web Site	30	20.41 %
Website Designer	12	8.16 %
Website Records Creator	10	6.80 %
Records Manager	53	36.05 %
Technical Standards Developer	3	2.04 %
Website Policy maker	20	13.61 %
Other	17	11.56 %
No response	2	1.36 %

PART II: Key Issues concerning Web sites and Federal Information Policy

For this section of questions, respondents were requested to respond with TRUE, FALSE, or DON'T KNOW. The data tables also include information on survey respondents who chose to not respond to the question.

5. My agency has an ERM policy that instructs employees regarding the federal records aspects of email.

	True	False	Don't Know	No Response
Number	76	45	21	5
Percentage of Respondents	51.70 %	30.61 %	14.29 %	3.40 %

6. My agency keeps an historical record or log of all agency web site postings for purposes of accountability.

	True	False	Don't Know	No Response
Number	34	56	54	3
Percentage of Respondents	23.13 %	38.10 %	36.73 %	%

7. When web site postings are only copies of materials published elsewhere by the agency, we assume the record copy is kept elsewhere as part of agency publications procedures.

	True	False	Don't Know	No Response
Number	95	16	34	2
Percentage of Respondents	64.63%	10.88%	23.13%	1.36 %

8. If the Web postings are original materials, we have provisions for determining their federal record status and retention schedule.

	True	False	Don't Know	No Response
Number	30	70	43	4
Percentage of Respondents	20.41%	47.62%	29.25%	2.72 %

9. My agency has a written policy covering records management on web sites.

	True	False	Don't Know	No Response
Number	24	76	44	3
Percentage of Respondents	16.33%	51.70%	29.93%	2.04 %

10. Where my agency is accumulating email addresses into a database with intent of future database use, the agency has published a notice of Privacy Act system of records for the database.

	True	False	Don't Know	No Response
Number	34	38	64	11
Percentage of Respondents	23.13%	25.85%	43.54%	7.48 %

11. My agency posts fair information principles with respect to how it handles personal information about users

	True	False	Don't Know	No Response
Number	57	45	39	6
Percentage of Respondents	38.78%	30.61%	26.53%	4.08 %

12. My agency has an Internet policy that instructs employees regarding the proper use of the Internet for official business, including web site design and management.

	True	False	Don't Know	No Response
Number	98	35	11	3
Percentage of Respondents	66.67%	23.81%	7.48%	2.04 %

For this section, respondents were asked to select the number on the scale that corresponded to the degree to which they agreed with the statements. The scale was a likert-type scale, with 1 representing strongly agree, and 5 representing strongly disagree. The respondents were also given the choice to respond "Don't Know." The data tables also include information on survey respondents who chose to not respond to the question.

13. A website (like a reading room) should not be the exclusive location of any record.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	73	31	18	11	9	3	2
Percentage of Respondents	49.66%	21.09%	12.24%	7.48%	6.12%	2.04%	1.36 %

14. Materials posted on agency websites are essentially boilerplate or ephemeral and federal records considerations are therefore negligible.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	9	6	22	41	52	14	3
Percentage of Respondents	6.12%	4.08%	14.97%	27.89%	35.37%	9.52%	2.04 %

15. Agencies already have adequate guidance on the policy aspects of their web sites.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	3	5	14	49	62	11	3
Percentage of Respondents	2.04%	3.40%	9.52%	33.33%	42.18%	7.48%	2.04 %

16. Agency websites should be seamlessly integrated into the Government Information Locator Service (GILS).

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	32	31	41	5	14	22	2
Percentage of Respondents	21.77%	21.09%	27.89%	3.40%	9.52%	14.97%	1.36 %

17. Agency websites should eventually become repositories for all current agency publications.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	54	33	27	13	12	6	2
Percentage of Respondents	36.73%	22.45%	18.37%	8.84%	8.16%	4.08%	1.36 %

18. I am confident that NARA will develop specific guidelines in the near future to assist agencies' ERM of websites.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	19	31	41	28	12	15	1
Percentage of Respondents	12.93%	21.09%	27.89%	19.05%	8.16%	10.20%	.068 %

19. Agency webmasters are working closely with records managers to clarify policy and procedures for ERM of websites.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	4	15	20	46	38	22	2
Percentage of Respondents	2.72%	10.20%	13.61%	31.29%	25.85%	14.97%	1.36%

20. The index of a website's contents, the on-line instructions for using the website, and other user aids may qualify as records.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	32	44	25	9	6	30	1
Percentage of Respondents	21.77%	29.93%	17.01%	6.12%	4.08%	20.41%	.068%

21. Agencies should give high priority to training programs related to ERM policies and procedures.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	63	52	22	6	1	2	1
Percentage of Respondents	42.86%	35.37%	14.97%	4.08%	0.68%	1.36%	.068%

22. Records generated during the delivery of services or the exchange or collection of information via on-line forms and surveys [websites for example] are subject to the same management requirements as similar information in other media.

	Strongly Agree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Don't Know	No Response
Number	69	42	14	6	1	14	1
Percentage of Respondents	46.94%	28.57%	9.52%	4.08%	0.68%	9.52%	.068%

For the next two questions, the responses have been summarized. For a complete list of responses, please contact the authors.

23. In your judgment, what is the most important single issue affecting records management on your agency's websites?

The issue most frequently mentioned by survey respondents was the need for guidelines on records management of websites. Survey respondents understood the need for records management on web sites, but they felt that they needed to be provided with clear guidelines on how to implement ERM. Currently, there are few, if any, policies in place, and employees are unsure about how to proceed. One respondent wondered what constitutes an electronic record on a website. Another respondent wondered if their agency would receive increased funding to maintain all of these extra records. Respondents were also curious about whose responsibility electronic records were. Are records managers, webmasters, content providers, or network managers responsible? Survey respondents felt that there needs to be a set of guidelines and procedures for agency employees to follow.

Two other issues were mentioned frequently by survey respondents. Survey respondents felt that there was a need for more employee training in electronic records management. Survey respondents also were unsure about the security of electronic files. If unauthorized persons were able to obtain access to web-based agency records, the integrity of the data might be compromised.

24. In your judgement, what is the single most important step that NARA could take to assist agencies in the ERM of websites?

A majority of survey respondents felt that the most important step that NARA could take is to create specific guidelines to follow in electronic records management of websites. This need is supported by the responses in Question 23. Different respondents described different ways of meeting the need, but most of the responses led to the same conclusion: NARA needs to provide specific guidelines for electronic records management of websites.

Some survey respondents suggested that NARA sponsor research in this area, and find and publicize the "best practices." Other respondents suggested that NARA provide training in this area. One respondent suggested a "cheat sheet"—a short pamphlet giving a brief summary of issues and guidelines for ERM of websites. Another suggestion was that NARA should find, purchase, or develop software tools to assist in electronic records management of web sites.

RESULTS OF OPEN DISCUSSION SESSION

After the survey results were announced, an "open discussion" session was held. At this session, conference participants had a chance to share their experiences and suggestions.

One conference participant wondered whether a meeting held over the Internet (in the form of a "chatroom" or "netmeeting") would be considered an official meeting, for recordkeeping purposes. If so, how should a record of that meeting be preserved? Another conference participant asked whether a summary of the meeting would be adequate. The participant noted that the minutes of a meeting capture the essence of a meeting, along with any decisions made, without capturing every word said at the meeting. Dr. McClure said that this is an example of "reasonable record-keeping requirements."

The topic of electronic ERM software came up. Dr. Sprehe asked the conference participants to raise their hands if they use ERM software. Very few people raised their hands. A few participants said that their agencies were looking into such packages. For instance, the Environmental Protection Agency is examining the possibility of software packages for ERM. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is planning on implementing a software package for ERM in the middle of 1999. The Office of Thrift Supervision, Department of Treasury, has recently installed an ERM software package that is certified under the DoD standard but is just beginning to gain experience with the package. However, none of the conference participants knew how expensive these packages would be per user. These officials did not expect to know whether these packages would be cost-effective until after they were implemented.

The discussion moved on to the problem of finding information about ERM. The conference organizers wondered aloud whether there needs to be a "clearinghouse" of information on ERM of websites. Conference participants generally agreed that this was a good idea. One conference participant, Michelle Bartman from the U.S. Mint, offered a list of recommendations that she felt should be included in such a clearinghouse. The recommendations from this participant were in the following general areas.

Customers:

- 1) Stakeholder Requirements: Provide a list on the web site of customer (stakeholder) requirements for Electronic and physical Records found at other agencies, both the typical and atypical, by customer segment: public, paying customers, vendors/ suppliers, media, researchers/ historians, Congress, etc. Key here is to remind agencies of what different stakeholders expect from them in providing access to records, protecting privacy, etc.
- 2) Legal Requirements: In addition to the full text of the laws, provide a "translated" version of the applicable records management laws and regulations, i.e., use bulleted, abbreviated statements to describe the provisions of the laws in plain English, not legalese.

Strategy:

Include sample policy statements, decision memos, standards, etc. in document templates (RTF please, not PDF) so that agencies can

download them, globally insert their agency's name, and they have a good "straw man" or draft memo to route for comments. Include other agency policies for retaining/ disposing of records: Save type x for 6 months, type y for 6 years, type z forever, type n delete.

Process:

- 1) Workflows: Include sample process workflow charts from the creation of a record at the user's desk to use/ tracking to management to scheduling to disposition. Show for all different record scenarios: word processing/ spreadsheet documents, web pages, emails, virtual meetings, chat rooms, audio recordings, videos, video conferencing, etc.
- 2) Links: Hyperlink to and create a searchable index of all other agencies with good pages, descriptions, ideas, etc.

Organization:

Show suggested organization charts and division of responsibilities- who should be responsible for what in Records Management- ideally!!

- 1) Internal to the agency: user, records manager, IT manager, web manager, content manager, FOIA officer, etc. and
- 2) External to the agency: NARA, OMB, GSA, GPO, contractors, customers/ public, etc.

People:

- 1) P.D.'s: Give sample Position Descriptions with required Duties, Skills, Authorities and Responsibilities or verbage to include in P.D.s for everyone in the organization responsible for records management. Should include a statement or two for all federal employee job descriptions.
- 2) Training: Provide a centralized RM training database of all related training, not just from NARA. Include an online tutorial for RM, similar to EPA's so anyone can train themselves. (Check out Case Western University's award-winning Basic HTML online Tutorial for a great example.) Hint: This would be a great university-partnership project.
- 3) Change Management: Provide consultants from the various oversight agencies to answer agency questions and advice on how to work change management issues. Discuss issues confronted by other agencies in convincing/ training/ requiring users to actually implement the new RM processes and systems.

4) **Communication:** Provide ListServes to inform of new issues. List Contact names and numbers around government for people willing to act as internal government advisors to other government agencies. Create a "Looking for Records Management Partners" section for agencies who want to split the workload or share their experiences for analyzing/developing good policies, procedures, technology. Create chat rooms, bulletin boards or threaded discussion groups where agency employees could share ideas, ask questions, make contacts.

Intelligence:

Provide sample reports, server logs, and other items that are and are not records and explain why not. (This is a great topic for a Tutorial!) Sample cost analyses and other items would be helpful. A fully searchable online FAQ database of records management questions and answers is indispensable and would save NARA a lot of work in the long run!

Automation:

Provide examples of what RM steps can be automated and agencies where they've been implemented. Create a depository of ideas and analyses done by other agencies.

Data:

Give examples of specific fields, file formats (RTF, PDF), data types, and tolerable ranges for saving different record types.

Technology:

- 1) **COTS Tools:** Create a repository of all ERM tools in the industry so agencies don't have to hunt all over the place to find out. Since this is could be a burden, this could be limited to those that pass the DoD standard, or could be a self-serve area where vendors add their own listings of their tools.
- 2) **Government Tools:** Create a repository of government-created, pre-canned office software tools, including spreadsheets with formulas, document and fax templates, content submission checklists, etc.
- 3) **Reviews:** Provide comments from government agencies who've used these tools.

4) Contracting: Provide sample RFPs/ Statements of Work, testing scenarios, usability testing results

Business Impact:

In order to justify getting the budget and resources to actually carry this all out:

1) Business Case: Show sample business cases for doing ERM/ RM properly. Include typical costs, ROI, accountability/ risk assessment, negative impact if not funded, possible benefits if funded. E.g., reduction in duplicate storage, commercial uses if records are kept (selling books, postcards, CD-ROMs of historical data).⁴

2) Resources: Show realistic budgets, required human and system resources, timeframes and compare to industry standards whenever possible.

3) Project Plan: Provide a sample Project plan for agencies to use as a baseline.

4) Senior Management P.R.: NARA/ OMB/ GSA together should issue a memo to all agencies with instructions to send out to all employees about new Records Management issues and requirements that all comply. This will begin to generate the senior management focus and front-line employee awareness necessary to make Records Management move up on the priority list.

Finally, I [Michelle Bartram] would add that more conferences are needed to create open dialogs. Also, invitations to agencies through management asking for volunteers are needed, since it's difficult for already busy front-line employees to ask management if they can participate in a Working Group when the managers don't know about the topic, its urgency, or its Administration focus.

The conference organizers stated that this was a good summary of the current needs. Dr. McClure stated a clearinghouse of information would be an excellent idea, since "We don't need to re-invent the wheel every time someone thinks they have a new idea."

One conference participant wondered about links to outside websites, provided by Federal websites. Are the Federal agencies responsible for the material on these outside websites? Many times, users may be confused as to who is providing material. If a user follows a link from a government website, they sometimes assume that the link is leading to another government website. Dr. McClure suggested implementing a pop-up dialog box so that, if a user is about to leave a government site and go to an outside side, the box will be displayed, saying,

for example “You are now leaving the EPA website. We are not responsible for outside content.” One government webmaster was quoted as saying that “The government should not be in the business of providing subject lists... Yahoo or AltaVista can do that.”

SUMMARY

After the open microphone session, Drs. McClure and Sprehe provided a summary of the day’s session, including a discussion of the main topics.

In the networked environment, ERM has reached a higher level of visibility. It is clear that there is a high level of uncertainty as to how to proceed with ERM in the networked environment, especially with websites. There are currently no guidelines for agencies on how to manage records from their websites. For that matter, there are not guidelines for defining what is a record on a website. It was noted that a large percentage of survey respondents answered questions with the “Don’t Know” option. This is another sign that guidelines are desperately needed.

The conference organizers stated that there needs to be a clear statement of what agencies can reasonably be expected to do. For instance, it may be unreasonable to ask agencies to record a copy of their website once an hour. More information has to be made available to records managers, webmasters, and content providers. This could possibly be done through a “clearinghouse,” which was discussed during the open microphone session.

This conference served as a beginning to the discussion on ERM of websites. There needs to be more discussion, more training, more guidelines, more communication, and more action. Different agencies can learn from each other’s experiences. The conference discussions were summed up nicely by one of the survey respondents: “[We need] Guidance, Guidance, Guidance. We want to do the right thing but need the benefit of NARA and Federal ERM community’s expertise”

McClure and Sprehe encouraged participants to continue communication with them regarding the development of the Guidelines contained in their final report. McClure and Sprehe expect to continue development of these guidelines and asked for feedback to revise and update these Guidelines. They also encouraged participants to respond to and become actively involved in the Working Group at the National Archives and Records Administration that is developing guidelines to replace GRS 20. McClure closed the conference by thanking participants for their attendance and encouraged them to continue sharing information about solving ERM issues for websites in state and Federal government.

Appendix A-Survey Instrument
SOLVING ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT (ERM) ISSUES
FOR GOVERNMENT WEBSITES: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

PART I: Background Information

1. Which of the following *best* describes the SETTING in which you work:
 Federal agency Private for-profit org. State government
 Private nonprofit org. Other _____

2. Years of experience in this setting? _____

3. Which one category *best* describes the FIELD in which you work?
 Webmaster Research & Development Records management
 Software development Program/Project Mgmt. Procurement/Contracting
 Computer Systems Library/Information Center General IRM
 Other _____

4. Which one category *best* describes your INVOLVEMENT WITH or INTEREST IN agency websites?
 Implementor of web site Website designer Website records creator
 Records manager Technical stds developer Website policy maker
 Other _____

PART II: Key Issues concerning Web sites and Federal Information Policy

Please circle TRUE or FALSE or DON'T KNOW for the following:

- | | TRUE | FALSE | DON'T
KNOW |
|--|------|-------|---------------|
| 5. My agency has an ERM policy that instructs employees regarding the federal records aspects of email. | TRUE | FALSE | DON'T
KNOW |
| 6. My agency keeps an historical record or log of all agency web site postings for purposes of accountability. | TRUE | FALSE | DK |
| 7. When web site postings are only copies of materials published elsewhere by the agency, we assume the record copy is kept elsewhere as part of agency publications procedures. | TRUE | FALSE | DK |
| 8. If the Web postings are original materials, we have provisions for determining their federal record status and retention schedule. | TRUE | FALSE | DK |
| 9. My agency has a written policy covering records management on web sites. | TRUE | FALSE | DK |
| 10. Where my agency is accumulating email addresses into a database with intent of future database use, the agency has published a notice of Privacy Act system of records for the database. | TRUE | FALSE | DK |
| 11. My agency posts fair information principles with respect to how it handles personal information about users. | TRUE | FALSE | DK |
| 12. My agency has an Internet policy that instructs employees regarding the proper use of the Internet for official business, including web site design and management. | TRUE | FALSE | DK |

Please circle the number that corresponds with the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

	STRONGLY AGREE			STRONGLY DISAGREE		DON'T KNOW
	1	2	3	4	5	
13. A website (like a reading room) should not be the exclusive location of any record.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
14. Materials posted on agency websites are essentially boilerplate or ephemeral and federal records considerations are therefore negligible.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
15. Agencies already have adequate guidance on the policy aspects of their web sites.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
16. Agency websites should be seamlessly integrated into the Government Information Locator Service (GILS).	1	2	3	4	5	DK
17. Agency websites should eventually become repositories for all current agency publications.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
18. I am confident that NARA will develop specific guidelines in the near future to assist agencies' ERM of websites.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
19. Agency webmasters are working closely with records managers to clarify policy and procedures for ERM of websites.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
20. The index of a website's contents, the on-line instructions for using the website, and other user aids may qualify as records.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
21. Agencies should give high priority to training programs related to ERM policies and procedures.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
22. Records generated during the delivery of services or the exchange or collection of information via on-line forms and surveys [websites for example] are subject to the same management requirements as similar information in other media.	1	2	3	4	5	DK
23. In your judgment, what is the most important single issue affecting records management on your agency's websites?						
24. In your judgement, what is single most important step that NARA could take to assist agencies in the ERM of websites?						

Thanks. Preliminary results will be presented later in the conference!



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