

Many organizations are taking advantage of new technologies to conduct an increasing amount of their business electronically over networks. Many are implementing technologies such as electronic data interchange (EDI), digital imaging, geographic information systems (GIS) and groupware to support paperless transactions. These technological changes are having a substantial impact on organizational abilities to create, manage and use records to support legal responsibilities and business needs.

Organizations often lack adequate tools to manage the growing number and variety of electronic records. Some are in danger of losing access to records stored in personal computers, e-mail boxes or personal local area network (LAN) directories. Others face the problem of linking documents created in different forms and formats to business transactions. Many organizations are finding that their electronic records do not meet their organization's evidentiary needs.

From an archival perspective, which focuses on long-term societal and organizational needs, this means that electronic records of enduring value may be lost. Perhaps more importantly, organizations are finding that their electronic records are not sufficient to support the ongoing needs of business processes. In many cases, redundant paper systems must be maintained or substantial additional resources must be expended in order to address records management requirements after information systems have been implemented. Electronic records management requirements must therefore be addressed at the system design stage and not after-the-fact, as an isolated additional activity. Therefore, organizations need immediate and specific solutions and tools that will help them integrate electronic records management requirements into their applications and business processes.

The Models for Action Project

The Models for Action Project, funded in part by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), is focused on the development of these types of practical tools. The project is being conducted by the Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at the Albany, in partnership with the New York State Archives and Records Administration. The project seeks to develop and promote practical tools that will assist organizations, particularly state and local government agencies, in addressing electronic records management and archival requirements as they develop networked computing and communications applications.

The Center for Technology in Government, an Innovations in American Government award winner, forms strategic partnerships with government agencies, technology corporations and university faculty and students. CTG's mission is to solve practical problems of information and service delivery in the public sector. CTG projects focus on increasing productivity, reducing costs, increasing coordination and enhancing the quality of government operations and public services. Since its inception in 1993, three dozen high-tech companies, more than 30 government agencies and a dozen academic researchers have participated in Center projects.

The New York State Archives and Records Administration (SARA) promotes, assists and oversees responsible stewardship of state and local government records. SARA's focus is on stewardship -- making certain that state and local government records, regardless of media, are usable, efficiently managed and accessible for as long as they are needed. SARA fosters stewardship through regulation, advice, education and technical assistance and oversees agency efforts to protect and provide access to archival records. SARA is part of a larger information resource management community concerned with current and future uses of information and information technology. In partnership with other government entities and information professionals, SARA works to support the development and maintenance of sound records and information systems.

The products of the Models for Action Project are the overall tool, the Records Requirements Analysis and Implementation Tool (RRAIT), which is comprised of two parts: the Records Requirements Elicitation Component (RREC) and the Records Requirements Implementation Component (RRIC). The RREC is described in more detail below, but in short, its purpose is to facilitate the identification of records management requirements during business process improvement and systems analysis activities. The RRIC focuses on the identification of management, policy and technology strategies that address the requirements once they have been identified. Combined, the tools will facilitate the identification and implementation of application-specific records management requirements.