

Opening Gateways: The Guide and Online Workbench

The growing demand for information to be available in electronic form and for direct access to this information is changing the design and management of electronic information access programs. Programs are:

- Increasingly focused on electronic rather than paper as the format desired by users.
- Shifting from staff-supported access models to direct-user access models, now made possible over the Web.

Making a successful transition to increasingly user- and usage-focused programs requires careful assessment of any desired program in terms of:

- the users
- the uses
- the content
- the operation
- the cost of a desired program.

This shift often requires program managers; the content experts, to join traditional information access professionals in a new way of working.

The Opening Gateways Guide and Workbench support this new way of working; they guide program managers and information access professionals in the creation of electronic information access programs that are effective, manageable, and affordable. They provide a framework for a design team to account for the specifics of the environment within which a program will exist.

Taking the environment into account in the design of electronic information access programs is a human process. The Gateways Guide and Workbench are not intended to replace that process, but to support it through a cycle of individual effort, group discussion, and integration of the best ideas from the group. This process depends on project managers who are skilled at cultivating individual commitment and group process and participants who have a stake in the outcome. The Workbench supports this process by organizing and sharing the information needed to reach a sound design. Together, the Guide and the Workbench provide a process and an analytical framework to ensure that a design team is able to focus on the complexity of information access program design.

The Opening Gateways Guide is a paper and a web based document that presents a strategy for designing electronic information access programs. The Guide presents a set of analytical tools to help groups of people as they collaborate on the design of electronic records access programs.

The Gateways Online Workbench is provided as a companion piece to the Guide. It is an interactive version of the Guide enhanced with features that support groups of people as they collaborate on the development of electronic information access programs. The Workbench design supports this group process by allowing multiple users to capture individual ideas and to contribute to group efforts through the Workbench's collaboration features.