

As of May 2006, the WSDA holds over 5.9 million online records and is steadily increasing the number available to the public. More than 1,000 searches are conducted on the WSDA Web site daily, and the numbers continue to climb. The WSDA holds a wide range of material from birth, marriage, death, census, military and naturalization records, to historic records like the State Constitution and the first election results in the Washington Territory. In fifteen years, the WSDA is expected to enable citizens to access from their home computers up to 800 terabytes (the equivalent of 200 billion pages of text) of public records and history.

The value of the WSDA to the public and to the cooperating agencies is enhanced by the technology employed as well. The tailoring of the archiving and access system locally, and the use of shared source software along with commercial off-the-shelf 'tools' reduced costs and facilitated maintenance and enhancements. The only proprietary software 'tools' being used are Microsoft SQL Server and Microsoft BizTalk. The costs were kept within budget for the first year by avoiding maintenance, licensing, and update charges because of the largely in-house developed solution. The value is also enhanced by the encryption and authentication technologies built into the archiving process. These technologies provide agencies with the ability to order certified record copies electronically and maintains the legal and evidentiary value of the digital versions of the records.

The performance of the technical infrastructure developed for archiving appears to be quite capable of delivering the promised value (see Table 2 below for details). During March, 2006, the WSDA added over 750,000 new public records and converted approximately 2.5 million images (equivalent to approximately 2.5 million pages) and made them available to the citizens of Washington State from any location in the world with Internet access. The ability to access these records has clear value not only to Washington citizens, but also to state and local government agencies in Washington. The WSDA is providing both backup storage of invaluable, often irreplaceable public records and has shifted the long-term preservation burden of another 1 million records from state and local government agencies to the WSDA. The magnitude of these values is evidenced by the number of searches and documents retrieved by both citizens and government agencies. For the month of April 2006, over 81,000 searches were conducted and over 32,000 documents were retrieved.

Table 2. Washington State Digital Archives Statistics for Month of April 2006	
Activity	Total Number
Total Records in the System	5,927,037
New Records Added	752,320
New Images Converted	2,525,349
Searches Conducted This Month	81,712 (2,723 Avg. /Day)
Records Retrieved This Month	32,910 (1,097 Avg. /Day)

In initial proof of concept testing in 2005, the systems converted 97% of the legacy file formats without change in format or function. In addition, ingestion of Web site material and email was successful. The system spidered the 5,000+ page Secretary of State Web site remotely in eight minutes and remotely ingested email from Novell, Groupwise, and Microsoft Exchange servers. In addition, the facility provides classroom and research space for ongoing professional education and improvements.

The WSDA delivers value to local governments as well. During the month of April 2006, approximately 7,500 marriage records were accessed via the WSDA from 13 counties. The county auditor offices across these 13 counties thus had the opportunity to dedicate personnel and other resources to tasks other than having to handle 7,500 over-the-counter requests for marriage records. In addition, according to Lisa Goldsworthy, records manager for the Snohomish County Auditor, the WSDA is "an excellent place to back up our data and images and potentially use as a disaster recovery resource." The county is currently sending only marriage records, they anticipate sending all of its electronic data and images to the WSDA by the end of the year. Goldsworthy also notes that, "For Snohomish County, having a secondary resource in the form of the Digital Archives to provide access to our public records is beneficial and provides further opportunity to dedicate personnel and other resources to tasks other than handling requests for marriage records."

From a political perspective, returns have been substantial. Sam Reed was elected Secretary of State for a second term in 2004. Upon reelection, Secretary Reed thanked his many supporters to include an "effective grassroots organization in all 39 counties, including 31 County Auditors in both political parties." (12) These same stakeholders were key to the success of the WSDA. The Secretary of State and the rest of his WSDA project

team invested heavily in time and resources serving the needs and concerns of the County Auditors. It seems clear that that effort resulted in a very direct if not quantifiable political return for the Secretary.

During his reelection campaign, Secretary Reed emphasized a number of successes and achievements from his first term. He highlighted the opening of America's first state government digital archives and the placing of Washington historical records and publications online for the first time as two examples of his administration's record progress.⁽¹³⁾ In addition, the Secretary of State and other members of the WSDA team pointed out that lessons learned from the management of the WSDA project directly contributed to the success of other IT-enabled initiatives. Lessons learned from the WSDA project were carried over into the Secretary of State's Voter Registration Database project. According to Assistant Secretary of State, Steve Excell, "We learned from the WSDA project that the top-down approach didn't work. The stakeholders in both projects told us the same thing: you got to show me some benefits." Based on the lessons learned from the WSDA project, the Voter Registration Database project team was able to apply this approach immediately, rather than after months of stakeholder deliberations as occurred early in the WSDA project. This saved time and resources. Most importantly, according to Steve Excell, the success of the WSDA project resulted in less oversight from the state Department of Information Services, allowing the database to be online on schedule and met the federal deadline under the Help America Vote Act. That act required all states to use a single, centralized database to manage voter registration and to verify the identity of each applicant. Many of other states did not meet that deadline. The success of both of these initiatives directly support Reed's ability to fulfill his constitutional responsibilities and political role as the state's chief elections officer and supervisor of the State Library and Archives.

(12) For more information on Sam Reed's reelection campaign for Secretary of State see <http://www.samreed.org/default.aspx>.

(13) For more information see http://www.samreed.org/issues_1.aspx.