

News from the SAA Archives Management Roundtable

August 1993

1993 Roundtable Meeting Set

The SAA Management Roundtable will meet in New Orleans on Friday, September 3 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.. The Meeting will feature a presentation on Strategic Planning by Admiral James Whitaker (USN Ret.) the consultant who served as a facilitator in the recent National Archives and Records Administration planning effort.

The National Archives and Records Administration Strategic Plan for a Challenging Federal Environment, 1993 - 2001

In July of 1992, Michael Kurtz (Roundtable co-chair) attended a seminar in strategic planning. He returned to NARA convinced that the Office of National Archives could benefit from strategic planning and management. In October 1992, the Office of National Archives sponsored a seminar in strategic planning for a select group of staff members representing not just managers but all levels. The seminar, run by Admiral James Whitaker was very well received.

Confronted by the challenges of information technology in an era of declining resources and by criticism of management at NARA from the U.S. Senate's Government Operations Committee, the Archivist of the United States Don W. Wilson decided to expand the seminar into a 35 member working group representing all of the functional areas in the agency in November 1992. In the course of the process, the working group reevaluated the cardinal principles that have traditionally served as guideposts. Their purpose was to measure NARA's progress as an institution, to reexamine directions and priorities for the future, and to renew the agency's commitment to serve the Federal Government and the American people. The strategic planning process promotes disciplined, critical self-analysis. In the resulting strategic plan, NARA's guiding principle remains public service enhanced by the acknowledgement that new methods must be developed if the institution is to be capable of meeting public expectations in the 21st century.

The first step in strategic planning is to know where you are. This is identifying point "A." Point "A" for the National Archives is a list of basic functions. The National Archives and Records Administration establishes policies and procedures for managing U.S. Government records. It assists Federal agencies in documenting their activities, administering records management programs, scheduling records, and retiring noncurrent records to Federal Records Centers. It appraises, accessions, arranges, describes, preserves and makes available to the public the historically valuable records of the three branches of Government. It manages the Presidential Libraries system. It assists non-Federal institutions through a grants program administered by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. It publishes the *Statutes at Large*, regulations, Presidential and other public documents through the *Federal Register* system.

The next step in strategic planning is to define one's mission. The working group developed a new mission statement which is remarkably similar to the original mission written in 1935. The National Archives and Records Administration serves the American people and their Government by safeguarding their interests in Federal records and other documentary materials, by promoting effectiveness and efficiency in the administration of those materials, and by advancing the knowledge of the history of the nation.

The last step in the process is to define point "B" or where you want to be and to identify the steps that you must take to reach that point. The working group developed a strategic agenda for the agency. The National Archives and Records Administration's strategic agenda is composed of six critical success factors. NARA must succeed in all six of these factors or it will have failed to fulfill its mission. Each of the six critical success factors is supported by a series of goals which NARA will strive to achieve by setting and meeting specific objectives for each of the goals.

The critical success factors are:

1. **Serve the records and information requirements of the Government and the people.** NARA will provide for timely availability of records in its custody; provide guidance and assistance to Federal agencies to ensure adequate and proper documentation of agency policies, decisions, and transactions and to ensure timely and proper disposition of records; manage a coordinated, nationwide system of exhibits, educational programs, publications, and other activities that inform the American people and the Federal government of their documentary heritage; and establish an ongoing means to identify the public's and the Federal government's expectations of its services and to evaluate its effectiveness in meeting those expectations.
2. **Manage the National Archives and Records Administration effectively to ensure mission accomplishment.** NARA will develop, establish, and institutionalize the strategic management process; complete the move to its new facility (Archives II) with a minimum disruption to services and other activities; maintain and develop a diverse staff of the highest quality; manage the agency as a nationwide system; and manage space and facility needs on an integrated basis.
3. **Aggressively pursue the National Archives and Records Administration's mission in all areas being impacted by changing information technology and electronic records.** NARA will develop and implement a formal strategy to address the complex and dynamic issues presented by the use of changing information technology in the government and integrate technology into its management and service delivery systems.
4. **Preserve the records of the Federal government and other historical materials.** NARA will revise and expand its long range preservation plans into an integrated, comprehensive, agency-wide plan; provide guidance to agencies in preserving records throughout the life-cycle; and provide leadership in preservation to organizations outside the Federal sector.
5. **Provide leadership in the archival, records, and information fields.** NARA will establish itself as a national leader in archives and records management; develop mutually beneficial partnerships with federal agencies and other institutions and organizations with which NARA shares common records and information interests; and operate and promote Archives II as a model archival facility.

6. **Communicate information about the National Archives and Records Administration's priorities, policies, services, and holdings.** NARA will improve internal communication; publicize its mission, programs, holdings and services through education and outreach; and establish and maintain an open dialogue with its constituents.

In developing the strategic plan, the National Archives finds itself in a management leadership role in the Federal Government. Bills currently before the U.S. Congress will require that all agencies develop strategic plans and institute the ongoing strategic management process. One of the key elements, and most difficult goals to achieve, is the requirement for evaluation of your success through customer evaluation and feedback. It is difficult for any institution to willingly open itself to criticism. However, during the strategic planning process panels representing interested user, peer, and oversight groups met with the NARA working group to share their perspectives about the agency. The process, while difficult, was enlightening. Without exception, the panelists identified needs that NARA was not meeting. While many of these needs would require extraordinary increases in funding, many were requests for leadership or partnerships that NARA can and should meet.

As we move into an era of declining resources and increasing demands, archivists must learn to plan effectively and efficiently. Strategic planning is a straight forward approach that has found great favor in the Congress. The NARA facilitator, Admiral James Whitaker, will be speaking to the Roundtable about the process of strategic planning. Having spent many months immersed in planning at NARA, the Admiral has achieved "Honorary archivist" status, a title of which he is quite proud.

Kansas Develops Long Range Preservation Plan

The Kansas Library Network Board's Preservation Committee (300 SW 10th Avenue, Room 343 N, Topeka, Kansas 66612-1593) has issued a report entitled, *Saving the Past to Enrich the Future* (March 1993). The report is a long range plan for preserving information resources in Kansas. It reflects the results of a series of preservation forums that the Preservation Committee held across the state in the summer of 1992. It was prepared by Kay Walter, a consultant hired with funds from a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, under the direction of the KLNB Preservation Committee.

Report Finds Progress in States' Care of Historical Records

The Council of State Historical Records Coordinators has just released a survey entitled: *Recognizing Leadership and Partnership, a Report on the Condition of Historical Records in the States and Efforts to Ensure Their Preservation and Use*. Written by Victoria Irons Walch, the report describes itself as the first attempt to try to obtain a nationwide overview of state archival and records management programs since "Ernst Posner's survey in 1963 for his ground-breaking study, *American State Archives*."

The Study, funded by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, reports some impressive indicators of progress in the last 30 years. In 1963, twelve states had no state archivist; nine had no program at all for managing permanently valuable records; and fourteen had no coordinated program for the management of local government records. In 1993, every state government has a "functioning archival program"; all but one also has a functioning state government records management program; and just one lacks a formal local government records program. Moreover, every state but one now has a functioning state historical records advisory board, none of which existed prior to 1975.

Also in the past 10 years, ten states have built new archival buildings to protect records and make them accessible, and ten have constructed new records centers. Twelve more states are planning new archival buildings; and nearly one third of all state archives occupy buildings less than twenty years old. States with new buildings report dramatic increases in public visitation and use. The study confirms how well the states are saving their historical records citing evidence of considerable progress. We hope that budget cutting pressures of the 1990s do not reverse the trend.

Research Libraries Group Develops New System

Research Libraries Group (RLG) is demonstrating a new Archives and Museum Information System (AMIS). The system is designed to meet the special needs of archives and museums, especially regarding administrative control of holdings and to serve as a standard interface to the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN). RLG developed the system in response to a study conducted by David Bearman that called for compatible systems for archives and museums to allow institutions to organize and exchange information about holdings.

AMIS is process oriented and organized into procedural steps called "checklists." A checklist is a computer screen template or form composed of descriptor fields and data drawn from any number of databases. A user defines the template through the platform software's interface builder. As long as the data is somewhere in the system, a template can be designed to list any combination of information and perform functions (such as mathematical computations) on the data. The platform that RLG selected is a state-of-the-art object-oriented database software.

National Archives Issues New Records Management Glossary

The National Archives Office of Records Administration has revised and expanded the 1993 edition of the "Federal Records Management Glossary." The updated glossary, which replaces the 1989 edition, contains 40% more information with additional terms, abbreviations, and acronyms relating to electronic, microform, and special records management. Copies are available from the Records Administration Information Center (NIA), National Archives, Washington, DC 20408.

Shrink Wrap Test Results Issued

The Preservation Policy and Service Division of the National Archives has completed tests on the use of plastic film wrapping on old volumes. To protect volumes of original records during the move to the new archives facility in College Park, Maryland, the National Archives chose a plastic wrapping process similar to the process used to package meats in a grocery store. Each volume is identified with a strip of alkaline buffered paper and wrapped to ensure that its binding will remain intact during the move. In order to determine if the wrapping should be removed immediately after the volumes are relocated, testing of the impact of the process over time was required. The tests, conducted by the Research and Testing Laboratory section of the Document Conservation Branch, used aging ovens to determine the effects of the passage of time on simulated wrapped volumes. The test results show that the wrapping causes minor changes in the color of the paper but no breakdown in the cellulose fibers were found. Further tests are being conducted to determine if there is any link between the changes in color and the chemical composition of the paper.