

A Review of Previous Strategic Planning Efforts for Electronic Records Management
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This review is intended to inform efforts of the HJR 2 Work Group in formulating recommendations for improving electronic records management (ERM) in state and local government. The Work Group was tasked by the Education and Local Government Interim Committee (ELG) with presenting recommendations at ELG's April 2014 meeting. One of the strategies that the Work Group was encouraged to pursue in its investigation was utilizing previous efforts to improve ERM in Montana. There have been two strategic plans drafted for ERM, and this review will summarize the two plans.

A Strategic Plan for Electronic Records Management in Montana State Government (2004)

In 2004, the Montana State Records Committee applied for and received a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to develop a strategic plan. In December 2004, the Montana Secretary of State's Office and the Montana Historical Society produced [*A Strategic Plan for Electronic Records Management in Montana State Government*](#).

Funding from the grant enabled the hiring of an independent third party evaluator to assess the current state of electronic records management in state agencies and benchmark that against "standards, practices and recent trends in the field of electronic records management". The evaluator identified the following trends:

- No comprehensive, statewide program for managing electronic records
- No statewide authority to require compliance with records management processes
- Current statewide IT programs are an expensive way to achieve an electronic records management system
- An enterprise-wide content management system will not occur without legislative initiative and funding
- Desire of staff to use a workflow product in conjunction with an electronic records system
- Desire to consolidate and share data

The methodology of the evaluation involved conducting interviews with representatives of several state agencies, compiling those responses, and then comparing the revealed status quo against the benchmarks. This allowed the evaluator to produce gap analyses of numerous elements of records management, including: creation/capture, integrity and legal admissibility, retention, disposal, accessibility, and training.

Findings from the "**Benchmarking and Gap Analysis**" section include:

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with having such a decentralized program that Montana currently has, however, to have adequate control over its records a decentralized records program must have someone with overall authority. Currently the state allows each agency to implement its own program with advice and input from the State Records Committee. This may work fine in a paper-based world, but electronic records bring such complexity that this is no longer practical. (13-14)

There was no evidence in the research of this paper that there was active cooperation between ITSD, the records management component in the Office of the Secretary of State, or the State Archives. Currently the ITSD must approve systems that agencies implement, but neither the records manager nor the state archives has input in verifying that essential records management components are present. (14)

Most of the agencies surveyed discussed the desire to be able to keep information in a digital format for its entire lifecycle. Much of the information that is created electronically and then printed is scanned into a system in order to provide access and/or storage. (15)

Perhaps one of the most important guidelines the Kansas State Archives expresses is that “electronic records management procedures are most effective when carried out at the point of creation or very shortly thereafter.” (16)

Most agencies wanted a recordkeeping system that was statewide so that it would allow them to share information with other agencies. (17)

The State of Montana already owns several information management systems. The major issues being that not all of them were designed as “recordkeeping” systems. They are systems designed to create and manipulate data, not maintain and preserve it according to records management principles. (18)

[The] Montana Constitution, Article 2, Section 9 discusses the fact the citizens have a right to access the records of their state. Therefore, not only is employee access for conducting business an issue, but so is how to provide the public with the access that is required. (24)

Retention schedules should not have to mention electronic records specifically any more so than they mention paper specifically. It is the information being assigned retention rather than the media. (27)

Currently, the Montana Historical Society does not provide the means for state agencies to transfer their historical records in an electronic format. To enable the Historical Society to accept these records would take an enormous amount of initial expenditures. (29)

There are just a few agencies that are implementing [ERM] systems and they all said or implied that doing a business analysis is necessary. A good analysis will help create efficiency and point to areas that an agency needs to improve. Some comments related to this area were that there was a fear that any electronic records management system that ITSD implemented would be the one they wanted, in the manner in which they wanted it and the system would not take into account business needs. (33)

As the state moves into the world of electronic records the focus of the training will need to expand to account for all end users of a system, not just the records managers or liaisons. The training will need to include the basics of records awareness and records management, but also provide insights into why the system is in place and how it benefits the agency. There will also need to be emphasis on the consequences, both legal and fiscal, of system avoidance. The trainers will also need to be aware that they can often

learn as much, or more, about what a system can do from its end users as they can from anyone else. (34)

The document ends with a section entitled “**What’s the Plan?**” and recommendations include:

- Securing **top-level support** including the Governor and the Legislature;
- Creating a position in the state that would have the **authority to create, approve, and enforce compliance** with a records management policy for state agencies;
- Ensuring that **agency records managers are qualified** and receive top-level management support;
- Requiring **joint approval for new information systems** between the newly-created state records authority (above) and ITSD to ensure that any new system(s) have records management capabilities;
- Taking a “**long-view**” and “**day-forward**” approach that acknowledges the scope of the issue and the different levels of readiness among state agencies and among programs within the same agency;
- Striving for the **ability to customize** any statewide system to different user needs and basing any system on open standards;
- Ensuring that any system **manage records** from creation to ultimate destruction or preservation and attends to integrity, security, confidentiality, and accessibility issues, including migration/conversion;
- Taking the time to **analyze business needs** prior to the selection and implementation of any ERM system; and
- Prioritizing **education** so that users of a system understand not just how to manage the records they produce, but why it is important they do so.

Montana Electronic Records Initiative (MERI) Strategic Plan (2008)

In November 2007, Secretary of State Brad Johnson and State CIO Dick Clark convened the Electronic Records and Information Management Steering Committee in an effort to “create a framework for managing state and local government public records.” The committee met monthly for at least three months and in September 2008, produced the [*Montana Electronic Records Initiative Strategic Plan 2008-2016*](#). A list of steering committee members and meeting minutes are available [here](#).

The document appears to be an incomplete draft. It contains mission and vision statements, lists values for the initiative, and outlines strategic directions, objectives, and key initiatives. All key initiatives end with “action items to be defined”. It doesn’t appear that the plan was finished or formally initiated.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Electronic Records and Information Management Steering Committee serves the State of Montana in the adoption and recommended implementation of an electronic records and information management (eRIM) strategy, supported by the records management, legal, information technology, business and preservation communities, to support public access; balanced with right to know and right to privacy; to create a framework for managing state and local government public records.

VISION STATEMENT

Propose recommendations in the area of records and information management; collaborating with the legal, information technology, preservation and business communities, which will balance the public’s right to know and right to privacy interests.(3)

The plan outlined the following four strategic directions:

- 1) Develop governmental partnerships that increase community engagement, education, support and outreach for records and information management
- 2) Engage the Legislature
- 3) Create and deliver professional records management experiences for the citizens of Montana
- 4) Manage resources and services efficiently and effectively

Some of the specific objectives and initiatives included:

- Increasing **collaboration** within the records management community;
- Building **awareness** of the importance of records management;
- Developing an **education** strategy including an innovative website to promote best practices;
- Ensuring multi-biennial **legislative commitment** to support the long-term viability of records management in Montana;
- Providing high quality **customer service**;
- Investigating **grants and public-private partnerships** to support/augment efforts;
- Developing a **records management IT plan** “to ensure innovative records management collection, retention and preservation processes are available to Montana while maintaining appropriate security and cost controls”; and
- Employing **project management** best practices.

Again, it does not appear that the steering committee met following September 2008, or that the strategic plan was completed or initiated.

Conclusion

As the Work Group discusses recommendations to present to ELG in April 2014, it may be valuable to review these previous efforts. It appears that many of the same concerns resurface when this topic is broached, and a question to consider may be whether previous efforts missed the mark in terms of strategic planning, or whether similar issues continue to arise due to lack of execution of the plans. It may also be valuable to reflect on what emerges as the perennial issues facing effective electronic records management, and to be sure that the Work Group recommendations address these issues.