

Voice from the Vault

By Gregory Sanford, State Archivist

State Archives and Records Administration: An Odyssey

Odysseus famously took ten years to complete his journey home from the Trojan War. With the passage of Act 96 (S. 351) the State Archives and the Public Records Division within Buildings and General Services recently reached home after their own odyssey. I wish I could say it only took ten years, but that is a story for another day.

Under Act 96 the functions, staff, budgets, and equipment of Public Records will be integrated with the State Archives on July 1st to create a new division of State Archives and Records Administration (SARA) within the Secretary of State's Office. This will create better opportunities for providing professional advice and guidance for managing public records from point of creation to final disposition, whether that means destruction or transfer to the Archives.

Part of the vision that led to Act 96 was to allow agencies to manage their records and information as key business assets for informing decision making and measuring program outcomes. The mission includes providing effective guidance so that records are retained only as they have a legal or administrative purpose. This in turn will reduce the risk of litigation, including the costs of legal discovery, while improving government's ability to efficiently respond to public records requests. Underlying all of this is the ability to manage records and information at the enterprise level so that related records, and the mandates governing

them, can be viewed across bureaucratic boundaries. All of which sounds good, but how will this be achieved? Partnerships with agencies and the Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) within the Department of Information and Innovation will be important components of the program. Through a Targeted Assistance Program (TAP), modeled after a federal program, agencies can contact SARA for assistance on records management projects. Each project will have a defined scope, schedules, milestones, and outcomes and will be conducted by agency teams working with SARA. See: <http://vermont-archives.org/records/tap/index.htm>

The partnership with EPMO is important to implementing an enterprise approach. EPMO business analysts do process mapping to create a graphical depiction of agency business processes. SARA record analysts will work with the business analysts, and the participating agencies, to identify and manage the records produced by these business processes. The partnership among business and records analysts will allow some pooling of resources, sharing of information, and using of common terminologies for describing business processes and the records they

produce. This, in turn, creates a consistency that supports the identification of related or similar processes and records across agency boundaries. This ongoing collaboration is known as iSTART (for more on iSTART see: <http://vermont-archives.org/records/iSTART/newsletter/index.htm>).

This more proactive approach will positively impact the other record services. The ability to identify related or similar business processes and the records they produce will allow SARA to develop general record schedules so, where appropriate, similar records can be managed similarly. This replaces the long-standing practice of viewing each agency request to store, reformat (microfilm or scan), or dispose of records as unique and assigning retention requirements in an ad hoc manner. For example, identifying all permitting processes and their associated records should help breakdown traditional agency information "silos" so permitting activities and records can be viewed across agencies, enhancing access.

Beyond improved accessibility, managing records from the point of creation will allow agencies to better identify which records need to be retained for how long. This can reduce storage and reformatting costs. An analysis of one group of records found that stored or reformatted files could be reduced by at least 40% simply by weeding out duplicate

or transitory records from long term files.

So what does this mean for you, whether you use the current programs to store your records or you need to research in those records? Initially you will see little change as we work on the immediate issues of transition and refine strategies for achieving our vision. For the near term the Archives will remain at the Secretary's 26 Terrace St. Office in Montpelier and the record center services will remain in Middlesex, though there may be some limited movement of personnel or records. The ultimate goal is to physically unite SARA in Middlesex once a proposed archival and research center is built (if the current capital construction request is approved, construction could start as early as this fall).

As changes are implemented we will keep you informed. I started by talking about our odyssey toward integration. Where we have arrived is not home, but a new, better embarkation point. We look forward to working with you as we start our new journey.



Greg Sanford, Sec. Markowitz, and Gov. Douglas at bill signing.