Electronic Records Modules

Electronic Records Committee

Congressional Papers Roundtable

Society of American Archivists

Discussing Electronic Records: Repository and Donor Perspectives

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Date Published: **July 2016**

Module#: ERCM002

Discussing Electronic Records: Repository and Donor Perspectives

Overview and Rationale

A vital step in the preservation of congressional electronic records takes place in the negotiations between a donor and an institutional repository. Repositories must acquire a complete picture of the type and amount of data they will receive, clearly address donors' expectations for electronic records archiving, and understand the requirements of the records. Part I of this module provides a range of questions repositories should ask while a member is still in office and also when the office is preparing for transfer. Part II provides guidance to member offices, and the kinds of questions repositories should consider and be prepared to answer, during the initial discussions. These questionnaire templates can help shape the conversations between donors and repositories and aid the donor and archivists in caring for the records appropriately.

Procedural Assumptions

It is assumed that the repository has been in contact with the appropriate contact in the donor's office. The person responsible for records management in congressional offices varies depending on the office, and that role may change over time. Typically the Systems Administrator, Office Administrator, or Executive Assistant (or a combination of these individuals) will be in the best position to assist.

Hardware and Software Requirements

N/A

Workflow

PART I: Repository Questions for Donors

General

1. Did the office establish an archiving policy/program? Does it address electronic records management?
2. How many offices are there, and how are records managed among those offices?
3. Does the office maintain a central list of all staff, dates of service, and areas of specialization?
4. Who will be the office contact for the repository once the office has closed?

Office Network Organization

1. Describe the office's server environment—internal, shared, virtual?
2. Does each staffer have a dedicated network drive for storing documents, or do the D.C. office and state offices use a shared network drive?
3. How is material organized in these directories? Are files sorted into folders? How are folders organized?

4. Is there a naming convention for files and folders?
5. Is there version control for files on shared drives? Are files deleted at regular intervals?
6. Did the office use any digital preservation tools/procedures (such as file fixity verification and checksums) to monitor the integrity of the stored data over time?
7. Are backup files stored? Were permanent files migrated during system upgrades?
8. Is there a separate archives drive for departed staff and non-current records?
9. What are the types/formats of electronic records found in the collection?

Constituent Services/Document Management

1. Which Constituent Services System (CSS) does the office currently use?
2. What were the previous systems and dates of use?
3. Will the office transfer all CSS data to an archival repository?
4. Are periodic statistical reports, such as "top ten issues," generated and kept for the archives?
5. What is maintained in the CSS (e.g. casework, Member schedules, web files, legislative tracking, documents, etc.)?
6. Did the office deploy a Document Management System (such as SharePoint, FileMaker Pro, OnBase, or CSS module)? What was its purpose and how comprehensively was it used?

E-mail

1. Is there a records ownership policy in place so that staff members are aware that their e-mails are owned by the member of Congress for whom they work?
2. When a staff member departs, is his or her inbox converted to a Personal Storage Table (.pst), or other format, and transferred to a separate directory for preservation or subsumed by a current staffer?
3. How is email being appraised? By staff position? By Content?
4. How are emails organized?

Website and Social Media

1. How is the office's website managed, and is it archived?
2. Where are the web source files stored and by whom?
3. Does the office use a content management system/vendor for publishing content to their website? If so, which one?
4. Does the office host a blog on activities of the member? What software or service is used? Is it archived? Where is it saved and in what format?
5. Was the Member/office an active user of social media? What platforms were used and for how long? Was the content ever archived?

Mobile Devices

1. Do staff members or the member use smart phones or tablets?
2. What types of files or communications are typically created on these devices?
3. Are the contents of the smart phones or tablets saved/downloaded?

Images and Media

1. Where are digital photo, audio, and video files stored and by whom?
2. How are the files typically arranged and labeled (date, subject, event, individuals, etc.)?
3. In what formats are media saved (videotape, audiotape, CD/DVD, hard drive, flash drive, digital memory cards, etc.)?
4. Are any materials scans or digitized versions of materials that exist elsewhere in the collection?

Transfer

1. Provide an approximate estimate for the amount of server space required to store all the office's electronic records currently in use and a range of dates.
2. What method would files be transferred to an archival repository (e.g. hard drive, FTP or web transfer, magnetic tape, original computer, CD/DVD, floppy disk, USB/jump/flash drive)?

PART II: Donor Questions for Repositories

1. What is the institution's guiding policy and procedures on caring for its electronic collections?

2. Will the archivist who is in charge of accepting the entire deposit also be in charge of the electronic records? If not, who will be responsible?

3. What does the institution plan to do about screening content for common types of PII (phone numbers, social security numbers, etc?) Are records containing PII embargoed and processed later in accordance with any restrictions mandated by the donor and with the institution's policies and practices?

4. If the records are transferred on external drives/discs/tapes, and they remain on them for a year or more, will they be turned on and integrity checks (file fixity verification) run until such time as a more permanent storage solution is determined? Will a backup copy of the content be made?

5. Will the records be ingested and accessioned into a server environment? Will that server be networked or stand-alone? Or does the repository use a hosted cloud environment?

6. If the records are ingested, wherever that may be, will integrity checks (file fixity verification) be run at least annually? If there should be a data loss, does the archivist understand the backup procedures and recovery processes available?

7. Does the institution have a policy in place to identify and manage closed electronic records?

8. How are electronic records collections described and made available to researchers? Do you include descriptions of closed records alongside open records?

Examples

N/A