



Priorities for Electronic Records Management in Vermont

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Available online at
<http://crs.uvm.edu/municipal/erm/priorities.html>



THE VERMONT ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

The Electronic Records Management Working Group¹ was formed by the UVM Center for Rural Studies as part of a grant from the Vermont Historical Records Advisory Board. The goals of the grant are to provide education and training for those Vermont municipal officials and employees who are responsible for maintaining and preserving records in electronic format and to identify and create resources pertaining to electronic records management. The working group is made up of representatives from various Vermont municipalities, as well as the Center for Rural Studies, the Vermont Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Association, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Vermont Public Records, and the Vermont Secretary of State's Office². The working group met throughout the summer of 2002.

What is an Electronic Record?

For the purposes of this document, an electronic record is defined as a public record (e.g. a land records or public meeting minutes) that exists in electronic format and cannot be accessed without the use of computer hardware and software. The working group recognizes the growth in the creation and use of electronic records in Vermont and its municipalities and is concerned with their continued security, integrity, and accessibility. Secondly, the working group is also concerned with the proper management of other forms of electronic information (e.g. most email correspondence), which may not be governed by specific statutes, rules, or records schedules, yet are still important tools of Vermont's municipal government.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

One of the objectives of the working group in the summer of 2002 was to determine priorities for proper electronic records management throughout Vermont and its municipalities. This document is the product of that effort. The working group determined eleven priorities that need to be addressed in order to ensure proper electronic records management Vermont and its municipalities. However, at present, the working group does not have the resources to address all of these issues and find solutions. The purpose of this document is to identify areas that can be addressed by different groups and towns in Vermont. Thus, through coordination and collaboration, many different interested parties will be able to help guide the state down the path to proper electronic records management. In order to ensure coordination, it is suggested that interested agencies, organizations, and municipalities contact the Vermont State Archives³ and/or the UVM Center for Rural Studies⁴.

¹ The working group website is <http://crs.uvm.edu/municipal/erm>

² See <http://crs.uvm.edu/municipal/erm/reps.html> for a full list of participants.

³ Contact information at <http://vermont-archives.org/>

⁴ Contact information at <http://crs.uvm.edu>



HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

The eleven priorities in this document are classified into two groups, (1) those that deal with the development of “best practice” materials for municipal offices and (2) those that invoke more universal issues that need to be addressed statewide. Each priority that isn’t actively being addressed is followed by a short description, some suggested primary objectives, and a comment on the current need to address the issue. Those that are interested in furthering proper electronic records management in Vermont are encouraged to follow these suggestions to frame their efforts.

The priorities are listed below and elaborated upon further in the document.

Best Practice Materials begins page 3

- Information Technology Disaster Prevention and Management in Vermont’s Municipalities
- Budgeting and Planning for Municipal I.T. and Electronic Records Management
- Example Requests for Proposal (RFPs) for Vendors and Consultants
- Inter-Office and Inter-Departmental Cooperation
- The Public vs. Publishable Issue
- Event-Based Electronic Records Management Manual for Town Officers
- Management of Email in the Municipal Office

Statewide Issues begins page 7

- Electronic Records Management Training for Town Officers
- Outreach to Municipal and State Legislative Bodies
- Funding and Grants for I.T. and Electronic Records Management in Municipal Offices
- The Computerization of Land Records

**“BEST PRACTICE” MATERIALS****INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DISASTER PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT IN VERMONT’S MUNICIPALITIES**

Proper disaster management is essential to ensure that Vermont’s electronic records are as safe as possible from loss and corruption and that recovery options exist in case damage does occur. This issue has been addressed by the Electronic Records Management Working Group through a draft plan for towns to consider when designing their disaster management policies. However there is great need for outreach to make this a priority in town offices and municipal legislative bodies.

Objectives:

1. Provide outreach and training to municipalities to make I.T. disaster management a reality throughout Vermont.
2. Continue to review and enhance the *Information Technology Disaster Management Plan for Vermont Municipalities*⁵ as it is applied throughout the state.

Need:

This issue is of ultimate importance and should be an ongoing effort.

BUDGETING AND PLANNING FOR MUNICIPAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The implementation and use of new information technology hardware and protocols in the town office include some unique issues that need to be addressed at the planning stages. Such issues include dealing with vendors and consultants to identify the hardware and software that best fit the office’s needs and setting aside funds for future costs associated with upgrades, data migration, and the anticipated growth of electronic records and information that will need to be managed. Identification of best practices on budgeting and planning for these issues could expedite the process and ensure that Vermont’s municipalities are implementing electronic records management in the most effective ways possible.

Objective:

Identification and proliferation of best practices for budgeting and planning for municipal information technology and electronic records management in the municipal office.

⁵ Available online at <http://crs.uvm.edu/municipal/erm/dmp.html>



Need:

There is an immediate need for this effort. Even with limited resources, many Vermont towns are moving ahead on implementation of electronic records management to varying degrees. These towns could benefit from assistance in the realm of budgeting and planning for the future.

EXAMPLE RFP's AND CONTRACTS FOR VENDORS AND CONSULTANTS

Often the services of vendors and consultants are needed for the implementation of information technology and the management of electronic records in the municipal office. These services can include everything from storage of data on a server to the digitization of land records. However many "horror stories" exist of relationships in which a vendor or consultant's actions did not serve in the town's best interests. The best bid is not necessarily the best situation for the municipality. Examples of good RFP's and contracts that set up a truly beneficial and secure agreement between a municipality and another party would help towns prevent the negative situations that others have had to deal with.

Objectives:

1. Identify existing RFP's and contracts that afford their municipalities the best relationships possible with vendors and consultants in the electronic records management effort.
2. Using these examples and other suggestions, create sample language for RFP's and contracts for various aspects of I.T. implementation and electronic records management that municipal offices can use.

Need:

Should be responsive to the bulk of vendor and consultant services being sought by Vermont's municipalities. For instance, many towns have, or are building, municipal websites and could benefit from sample language to use in agreements concerning hosting services, etc. However, demand for some electronic records management services, such as land record digitization, may not reach such a critical mass until Vermont's legislative and political climates are more favorable to them.

INTER-OFFICE AND INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COOPERATION

I.T. implementation and electronic records management will be most effective if all of the departments and officers in a municipality share the resources, responsibilities, costs, and duties necessary. For instance, there is no reason why a town's listers, clerk's office, planning office, public works department, police department, and fire department should each have their own disaster management policies when it is possible to integrate data resources and responsibilities with today's information technology. Resource and data integration can lend time and cost efficiency to an electronic records management effort.



This is an issue that should be addressed at the state level, in addition to the municipal level. Perhaps the state could adopt an inter-departmental electronic records management model that municipal offices could follow.

Objectives:

1. Identify ways in which state and municipal governments could integrate the resources, costs, duties, and data associated with proper electronic records management.
2. Provide outreach and training on step-by-step models for such integration within the town office.

Need:

Inter-office electronic records management could expedite the implementation process in the town office, but this is an ideal that may be illogical to tackle at this time and at expense to other management priorities. Nevertheless this is an issue that should not be forgotten. Perhaps inter-departmental integration would best be addressed at the state level at this time.

THE PUBLIC VS. PUBLISHABLE ISSUE

More and more of Vermont's municipalities are beginning to see the internet as a useful information dissemination tool. Meeting minutes, dog license databases, grand list data, and more have found their way onto town websites. Whereas all of the information in these formats may be public, there are some items that may provoke controversy when posted on the internet. For example, residents may not appreciate seeing their social security numbers up on the town website. Pointers on what should and should not be published when electronic records and information go up on the internet could help town officers to avoid undesirable situations. Suggestions on information that may be too sensitive from a security standpoint to even become electronic would also be helpful.

Objectives:

1. Tips on which public information should and should not be posted from electronic records on town websites.
2. Information on sensitive information that will require extra attention from a security standpoint when transferred to electronic format; and ways to provide the necessary protection.

Need:

This issue can be considered very important due to the increasing number of town websites, but it is not necessarily vital to the safe management of electronic records in Vermont at this time. Very few, if any, electronic records are being maintained in web format only.



EVENT-BASED ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT MANUAL FOR TOWN OFFICERS

Eventually all of the strategies and suggestions that result from the electronic records management effort in Vermont should be documented into an event-based manual that town officers can reference at various stages of implementation and yearly operations. These materials could be collected into a separate resource or incorporated into existing event-based manuals for town officers. Strategies and procedures of both a planning and reactive nature should be included.

Objective:

A reference guide of strategies and procedures for electronic records management for town officers to use.

Need:

This tool will be most effective once more strategies and procedures have been documented and identified for electronic records management in Vermont.

MANAGEMENT OF EMAIL IN THE MUNICIPAL OFFICE

Materials on how to determine whether an email correspondence is a public record and which statutes apply are needed for municipal officers. The Vermont State Archives office is currently working on a policy statement and guidelines for electronic mail.



STATEWIDE ISSUES

ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT TRAINING FOR TOWN OFFICERS

Vermont's municipal officers are where our hopes and fears begin and end for proper electronic records management. There must always be training and education available for town officers on the planning, implementation, and strategies necessary for proper management of the state's municipal information. As new issues arise and new questions are answered, town officers must be continuously brought into the fold. Training within town offices and at regional venues is essential. There is opportunity for many different groups to be involved, but coordination must be a priority. It is not necessary for Vermont's municipalities to all manage electronic records in the same way, but they must be unified in their resolve and ability to provide proper management.

Objectives:

1. Continuous regional and on-site electronic records management training for Vermont's municipal officers.
2. Annual e-government related conference at which electronic records management can be addressed, bringing in municipal, state, regional, national, and international insight and expertise.
3. Coordinated involvement of many different groups.

Need:

In many ways, this effort has already begun through the many municipal officer-oriented workshops and conferences held in the state. However, trainings focused on electronic records management should be increased and offered continuously.

OUTREACH TO MUNICIPAL AND STATE LEGISLATIVE BODIES

To make proper electronic records management a reality in Vermont, much work needs to be done to educate town select boards, trustee boards, city councils, and the state's General Assembly. These legislative bodies are the source of the funding and staffing resources needed for this effort. If a priority shift occurs in favor of electronic records management, then municipalities will have more at their disposal to perform the correct procedures and use the right equipment.

Objective:

Education and dialogue with legislative bodies throughout the state, especially the state's General Assembly and select boards of towns that are having the most difficulty with electronic records management costs.



Need:

This issue of publicity and education is of utmost importance and needs to be carried out on all fronts by as many different committees, groups, agencies, and organizations as possible.

FUNDING AND GRANTS FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN MUNICIPAL OFFICES

State and municipal legislative priorities are still in the process of shifting toward the allocation of resources for proper electronic records management. In the meantime, funding sources need to be identified to help support efforts to address the important issues now. A particular need exists for grants focused at the municipal level of management and implementation. Vermont's diverse spectrum of municipalities holds a wealth of important government information that is steadily being transferred over to the electronic realm. It is essential that these electronic records and information be properly managed for safety, integrity, and accessibility. While some Vermont municipalities have experienced a great degree of success in implementing I.T. and managing electronic records, most are in dire need of funding and staffing resources. In many Vermont towns, the use of electronic records and information has far exceeded the ability to adequately address management issues. The provision of funding could improve the situation most effectively. For example, a grant could offset the start-up costs associated with implementing back-up protocols and installing the necessary hardware. Grant money could also be applied to the fees associated with software and hardware training for town officers.

Objectives:

1. Identification of existing grant sources that are appropriate for addressing IT and electronic records management issues at the state and municipal levels.
2. Creation of more grant sources for I.T. implementation and electronic records management at the municipal level of government.

Need:

There is an immediate need for this effort. However the existence of funding for electronic records management should not outrun the materials and knowledge necessary to guide town officers down the right path.

THE COMPUTERIZATION OF LAND RECORDS

In 1999 a committee produced a report⁶ on the computerization of land records in Vermont. There is increasing pressure from municipal officers for guidance on the creation of electronic land records. The results are improvements to indexing and accessibility. Currently the Vermont Municipal Clerks' and Treasurers' Association has taken the lead on

⁶ The report can be found online at <http://vermont-towns.org/land/comprprt.htm>



addressing the issues identified by the land records committee, including the creation of indexing standards and impediments at the legislative level.