

Notice

Maintaining State Records in an Era of Change: A National Challenge. A Report on State Archives and Records Management Programs. VICTORIA IRONS WALCH. St. Paul, Minnesota: Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, April 1996. Softcover, 76 p. Available electronically through the National Historical Publications and Records Commission home page at <http://www.nara.gov/nara/nhprc/nhprx.html>

The Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC) works to define and communicate state archival and records concerns at a national level. It biennially publishes a statistical report containing benchmark data on state archives and records management programs. This report, published in 1996, is the third such study and contributes to the evolution of this body of knowledge by expanding on the previous data to include state government use of technologies in management of archives and records programs. In addition to providing thirty tables of state data, the report also provides recommendations that will help records managers in all sectors meet the demands and requirements in records-keeping that result from technological change.

The statistical summaries, discussions, and recommendations will be of interest to state and provincial archivists and records managers in the U.S. and in Canada. Even though Canadian data is not reported, provincial archivists and records managers can view comparable program elements that exist south of the border. The report may even motivate provincial specialists to undertake similar studies, if they have not already done so. The report will also interest local and municipal archivists and records professionals because many states' records schedules encompass the records of local government, health institutions, school districts, and post secondary education.

The report is a cerlox-bound document with a detailed table of contents, but no index. It is most easily obtained by downloading from the World Wide Web at the address shown above. Discussions of the data and recommendations are concisely described in thirty pages of text that precede the thirty tables of

comparative state data, making the report quick to read. The report aims to provide ideas to generate “forward thinking” and to give practical advice. As a tool to generate innovative thinking, it is not strong, however. It describes conventional wisdom in a pedantic manner, with little hard basis in the data. Readers cannot argue with the proposition that ideas “be visible, be informed, have vision” (page 4), but neither are readers informed about anything new.

The report is highly useful as a practical guide and yardstick for best practices. The evolution from paper to electronic records storage calls for archivists and records managers to develop agency guidelines and training, functional requirements for systems, and automated information locator tools (pages 5–12). If a state agency is not meeting the best practices model described in the text and supported by the collected state data, this report will motivate it to work in the direction of the states that do. An important contribution is made in this report concerning the development of Information Resources Management (IRM) policies. An integrated IRM policy that encompasses records in all formats is more likely to occur in state agencies in which the archivist/records manager reports to the administrative unit (where the stronger authority rests) instead of reporting to a cultural resource.

The latter half of the report’s text relies on the state survey data and explains how states overall respond to six areas of program operation: legislation, facilities, holdings, staffing, fees, and preservation. This section is well supported with solid data that can be viewed in the appendix tables.

The report concludes with five significant recommendations that will surely help state agencies meet the technological challenges. For the general archives or records professional, the recommendations and discussions are useful; for provincial and state professionals, this report should necessarily be included in their reference library.

Patricia B. Daum

Coopers & Lybrand Consulting
Vancouver, B.C.