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[SPOTLIGHT]



MARILYN REDMAN AND LAURA MCCARTHY

National Archives and Records Administration: The Nation's Recordkeeper



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What better NISO member to spotlight for this issue's theme of preservation than long-time NISO voting member, the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Marilyn Redman <marilyn.redman@nara.gov>, Management and Program Analyst, and Laura McCarthy <laura.mccarthy@nara.gov>, Senior Policy Analyst, responded to questions from the ISQ editor about NARA and their involvement with standards and preservation.

Q For readers who aren't familiar with NARA, can you briefly explain what the agency does?

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the nation's recordkeeper. We preserve, safeguard, and make available the records of our Government, ensuring that the people can discover, use, and learn from this documentary heritage. We establish policies and procedures for the preservation and management of U.S. Government records; manage the Presidential Libraries system; and publish Federal laws and regulations, as well as Presidential and other public documents.

Q How do people who don't work for the government benefit from NARA's preservation activities?

In a democracy, the records of the Government belong to its citizens, and providing access to them is a vital service. Working with Federal agencies as our partners, the Archivist and NARA staff identify records to be retained for posterity. NARA then gathers, stores, processes, and preserves the records. Our holdings can only be made available to current and future generations if we invest in the archival preservation and processing of records in our custody.

Q Tell us about NARA's Electronic Records Management (ERM) and Electronic Records Archives Program (ERA).

Electronic records management [ERM] guidance at NARA is created in two units of Modern Records Programs: the scheduling and appraisal division and the ERM policy team. These two units produce front-end records management guidance for use by Federal agencies ranging from advice on scheduling requirements to advice on format selection and technology-specific management guidance. Guidance is frequently produced in consultation with archival custodial units as well as selected Federal agencies and the Chief Information Officers Council.

The Electronic Records Archives (ERA) Program is NARA's strategic response to the challenges posed by electronic records, and it is providing the foundation for an e-government approach to the management of all types of Federal records. ERA supports NARA's mission for oversight of the management of records by all agencies of the U.S. Government. It also enables NARA to preserve and provide access to increasing volumes of historically valuable electronic records, in ever more complex formats. ERA is being implemented as a set of federated systems. To date, three instances of ERA have been deployed. The first provides online tools for agencies to request and receive authorization from NARA for disposition of Federal records. That instance is being expanded and enhanced for the preservation of permanent electronic records. The second instance was designed to handle the over 72 terabytes of electronic presidential records from the George W. Bush White House, which were transferred to NARA on January 20, 2009. The third version is customized for electronic records of the Congress. Work is currently underway to develop additional capabilities for preservation and access that will be available in all instances of ERA.

Q How has NARA incorporated standards into its services and which standards (NISO or others) are most important to NARA?

NARA has incorporated ISO 15489 (*Information and documentation – Records management – Part 1: General*) as an underlying tenet in the recent update of our regulations for Federal records management (36 CFR Chapter 12 Subpart B). NARA guidance and training emphasizes the principles contained in ISO 15489-1. We believe that this standard is useful to all records managers.

NARA leverages its involvement in the PDF/A standard to inform our transfer instructions for Permanent Records in PDF. Participating in PDF/A provides NARA with a comprehensive technical understanding of the PDF file format. This helps us to develop transfer instructions that restrict use of PDF features that could complicate the long term preservation of information maintained as PDF.

Q What benefits has NARA gained from utilizing standards and incorporating them into its services?

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is involved in many standards activities focusing on ensuring long-term usability, authenticity, and preservation of records over time. NARA's standards participation touches on a wide range of issues relating to both electronic and physical records in the following areas:

- » Records management – usability and authenticity
- » Digital repositories and digital preservation – management, maintenance, and preservation of electronic or digital records
- » Interoperability and IT environments – data exchange, management, and storage
- » Stability and storage of physical records – stability, permanence, and storage of paper, photographic materials, and electronic storage media

Additionally, basing citations in our regulatory environment on international standards, and incorporating such citations into our training and guidance, demonstrates to our stakeholders a long-standing commitment to international collaboration. We continue to believe that approaches based on voluntary consensus standards offer the best opportunity for leveraging experiences in differing juridical environments which provides alternative approaches to those we might otherwise develop.

Q What standards development has NARA been actively involved in and what benefits do you gain from involvement in standards development?

NARA has been involved in the development of a number of international standards. As a member of ISO TC46/SC 11 (Information and documentation/Archive & records management), NARA was involved in the development of ISO 15489, the original core international records management standard. Following on that work, NARA has also actively participated in the development of ISO standards and technical reports relating to metadata, business process analysis, records management compliance, archival description, and preservation. NARA is now participating in the development of an ISO management system family of standards relating to records management. This management system of standards will stand beside ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 as fundamental management systems for operating in the global economy. NARA is also a participant on the Joint Working Group responsible for ISO 19005-1:2005 (*Document management – Electronic document file format for long-term preservation – Part 1: Use of PDF 1.4 (PDF/A-1)*).

NARA was heavily involved in the development of the *Open Archival Information System Reference Model* (ISO 14721:2003) and is contributing to the development of the follow-on standard, *Digital Repository Audit and Certification*, being developed by the Consultative Committee on Space Data Systems for submission to the ISO under TC20/SC13 (Aircraft and space vehicles/Space data and information transfer systems). NARA is also collaborating with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in the

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The burgeoning use of social media tools represents a significant challenge to records management principles and techniques. We are evaluating the recordkeeping aspects of specific social media technologies, on a case-by-case basis, and would welcome an international perspective in evaluating and addressing these challenges.

new initiative to develop a standard for a digital preservation interoperability framework under ISO/IEC JTC1 Study Group on Digital Content Management and Protection. NARA contributed to the development of the PREMIS metadata model for digital preservation. NARA has also been working for several years with several other archives, libraries, and cultural institutions in the effort to create a Universal Digital Format Repository (see article on page 26), which will provide a shared source of basic data on the great variety of digital formats that need to be preserved.

In addition to ISO standards participation, NARA has also been involved with standards development work of the International Council on Archives, the Object Management Group, the IEEE, and the World Wide Web Consortium.

Q What problem areas have you encountered that would benefit from further standards or best practices development?

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A second issue for NARA is the difficulty of keeping track of the many standards activities that occur in the various ISO technical committees. As a result, we are sometimes surprised when draft standards appear in near final form that can have a significant impact on our mission. This problem also exists for standards activities that occur in organizations outside the ISO framework. RSS feeds for mission related subjects might help alleviate the laborious and sometimes unsuccessful efforts to scan the horizon for relevant ongoing work.

Q What else would you like NISO ISQ readers to know about NARA?

Promoting and ensuring effective records and information management across the Federal Government is the foundation on which the long-term success of NARA's mission depends. We carry out this foundational work by ensuring that:

- » Federal agencies can economically and effectively create and manage records necessary to meet business needs,
- » records are kept long enough to protect rights and assure accountability, and
- » records of archival value are preserved and made available for future generations. | SP | doi: 10.3789/isqv22n2.2010.09



RELEVANT LINKS

NARA website
www.archives.gov

Document management Electronic document file format for long-term preservation - Part 1: Use of PDF 1.4 (PDF/A-1), ISO 19005-1:2005
www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=38920

IEEE Standards Association
standards.ieee.org/

International Council on Archives standards
www.ica.org/en/standards

Object Management Group specifications
www.omg.org/gettingstarted/overview.htm

Permanent Records in PDF
www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/initiatives/pdf-records.html

PREMIS Data Dictionary for Preservation Metadata
www.loc.gov/standards/premis/

Space data and information transfer systems - Open archival information system - Reference model, ISO 14721:2003
www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=24683

World Wide Web Consortium
www.w3.org