University of Denver
Penrose Library
Office of the Dean

MEMO

Date: August 17, 2011
To: Lucy Barber, NHPRC
Cc: Lynn Backstrom-Funk, Project Administrator
Office of Research & Sponsored Programs
From: Nancy Allen, Dean and Director
Subject: Interim Report #2, January 31, 2011

The project is going very well, and at the end of the first year of our two-year timeline, we are putting the final touches on the software and moving into the testing, sharing, and partner installation phase.

Staffing

The software project team was re-enforced by the addition of two new staff members to the University of Denver Records Management team. Lindy Naj, MLS CRM was hired in September 2010 as the new University Records Manager, and Joanna Lamb MLIS was hired as Records Assistant.

Lindy Naj
Lindy holds her MLS from the University of Hawaii (UH) at Manoa. She led the UH Library IT department for almost ten years, where she built an inter-island library network, and earned tenure. After moving to Denver Lindy managed IT tech support and professional services teams in small-to-medium-sized businesses. Four years ago, she moved into Records Management and has led programs for Nelnet, Inc. and the Molson Coors Brewing Company. Lindy has developed programs and retention schedules and has implemented systems for managing email and records in SharePoint. She recently passed the Institute of Certified Records Manager exams.

Joanna Lamb
Joanna holds her MLIS from the University of Denver with concentrations in Archives and Records Management and School Library Media. Prior to returning to DU, she was employed as the Archival Collections Assistant in Special Collections and Archives at UC Irvine. She also worked as a K-12 school librarian at Viewpoint School in Calabasas, California. Joanna is providing support for the project plan and partners and assisting with testing and development.

The Records Management department is providing subject matter expertise to the software project, which continues to be administered and developed by Penrose Library staff.

Software Development Progress

The focus of the second six months of software development was on improving the interoperability of the software for data sharing and reuse. This period was intended as a transition from a DU-focused system and a system that other institutions could install and use.

The new records management team members and the transition of the records management function from the library to the Business & Financial Affairs unit brought a fresh perspective to the software development. In a way, the new records management program at DU became the first "testing partner" for the software, since the new staff members had no familiarity with the software project before being hired.

Feedback from the new staff members led to changes in the software that will make it more readily adaptable to the work of other records management programs and more grounded in records management best practices. Examples of improvements to the software include: the addition of a record classification code field, a new emphasis on functional rather than departmental organization, the renaming of many display fields to make the terminology more accessible to end users, and a switch to "natural language" retention period explanations rather than coded retention periods.

Though these changes to the software delayed some of the original items in the grant plan, we believe the project will be useful for a greater number of institutions with these changes incorporated.

A detailed review follows of the major tasks undertaken in addition to the above changes. As always, the most critical goal of the project is to have a stable, functional product based on records management best practices at the end of the grant period. As we learn more about the needs of various records management programs and the limitations and capabilities of the software, some of the original tasks have been modified or replaced by other tasks to better accomplish the ultimate goal of the project.

Goal 1: Data Sharing

Task 1.1: Develop an open API to share data from Records Authority with other applications

After examining the uses for an API, the grant team decided that a simpler approach would be the most efficient way of sharing data from the software. The idea of an API was included in the original grant proposal in the event there was a need to enable other programs to harvest large volumes of quickly-changing data, or to connect "live" to the Records Authority database. In our work at DU and in discussions with our partners, we didn't identify a need for that kind of interaction with other software and have decided instead to focus on getting data into and out of Records Authority using a simple, reusable format: a comma-separated value (CSV) file.

Task 1.2: Export Data

We wanted to get retention schedule data out of Records Authority in two formats: a comma-delineated file that could be reused in other programs (such as MS Excel or other database-driven applications) and printer-friendly reports for distributing as retention schedules to units.

We built export functions in the Dashboard (administrative) side first. Administrative users can retrieve reports of retention schedule data in Excel, CSV, and HTML formats.

For public users, we created a print-friendly HTML report of the full retention schedule, which shows retention periods for all record groups/series.

Still under development is the ability to export a CSV of search results for both Admin and Public users.

Task 1.3 Import Data

Another key function of the software is to import an institution's pre-existing retention schedule into the database structure. We created an import function that can import data from a CSV template into the database and tested it successfully with a small sample of DU retention schedule data. The next step will be to import DU's entire new retention schedule in February 2011, which should contain about 200-250 record groups.

Goal 2: Surveys and Data Collection

An initial goal of the project was to give records management users the ability to create surveys for collecting additional data beyond the initial survey, the record inventory form, and the record group form that populates the retention schedule.

As there are already many tools for creating and distributing surveys online, we decided to focus development on the ability to improve and customize the three existing forms.

Goal 3: Generalized Login/Authentication

Task 3.1: Add the ability to create and manage user accounts in the Dashboard

User authentication is handled from two angles:

1. "Public" Retention Schedule Web Users
   RA manages authentication of institutional "public" users by using the LDAP protocol. It could be configured to work with other protocols instead, for example Microsoft Active Directory.
2. Retention Schedule Managers
   Authentication of retention schedule managers has been added since the last report. It is handled through user accounts within RA. Currently there are two permission levels:

RA Administrator	• Create and delete user accounts. • Change name and password in user accounts. • All survey, inventory, schedule maintenance functions.
Retention Schedule Managers	• Change own password. • All survey, inventory, schedule maintenance functions. • Future: May make survey, inventory, schedule maintenance and publish functions discrete permissions.

NOTE: Given that retention schedule management is often mediated by RM, specifically one or two people per institution, we are reviewing the cost/benefit of breaking out permissions in more granular fashion, and will gather feedback on this from partners.

Goal 4: Finish work from Stage 1

Task 4.1: Method of auditing changes in retention schedule database

Currently in place:

- Activity stamping for all actions (add, change, delete) with date has been added since the last report.

- Deleted records are retained in a retention schedule recycle bin until a Retention Schedule Manager either Purges (hard deletes) or Restores them.

Planned:

- Session/user info will be added to Activity stamp
- As a default we will create a report that will on demand export in Excel format the schedule and all activity stamps associated with it.
- This report is also intended to provide in snapshot form documentation of the official retention schedule for a given point in time.

Task 4.2: Public Retention Schedule Search Refinements

We added a "Full Schedule" function that returns the entire retention schedule for users with a single click, and relabeled and rearranged many of the display fields to make the search results easier for users to understand.

We are soliciting partner feedback on what facets or other advanced functions are necessary in the public search to refine search results.

Partners

Goal 5: Partner Communication

Task 5.1: Launch demo server

Due to the changes made to the software as part of the realignment of the records management program at DU, the team decided to delay opening the demo server to the partners for testing until the new version of the software was production-ready at DU. The current estimate for the launch of the DU production instance and partner demo server is late February 2011.

Task 5.2: Web conferences with partners

As part of our efforts to involve the software testing partners earlier in the development of the software, we started holding monthly web conferences with representatives from our partner institutions. The partners have already provided valuable feedback on the needs of their institutions, which has helped the development team get a better sense of priorities and common requirements.

Goal 6: Documentation

Original plans called for the development of documentation to be underway at this point. Due to the some of the staffing transitions we have laid out the plan of attack for the documentation, but not yet finalized the delivery method or commenced with creating it. Plans call for the documentation to be developed in two parts: a technical/installation guide and a retention schedule manager guide.

Sharing

Goal 7: Conference Proposal

Task 7.1: Submit conference proposal

In October 2010, the team submitted a proposal for a conference presentation at SAA 2011.

"Two NHPRC-grant recipients will present their free, open-source tools for records management. The "Records Authority" web application is used to collect structured, reusable records inventory data and publish retention schedules online. The Tufts TAPER project has implemented a process for documenting entities using EAC and created open-source tools for transferring records to a preservation environment. Each tool and process will be demonstrated, with plenty of time to discuss how these open, publicly funded projects can help solve records management problems at your institution."

During the first week of January, 2011 we received confirmation that the proposal was accepted.