It Never Hurts to Ask:
Archival Surveys as Tools to Enhance
Electronic Records Practices
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES & HISTORY
ESTABLISHED 1901

George Doak moving archival records in the Capitol basement, ca. 1901

Archives Director Tom Owen sorting archival records in the Capitol basement, ca. 1901
WHAT WE’RE GOING TO COVER TODAY

• Intro to Alabama State Electronic Records Project (ASERP)

• ASERP Survey Process

• ASERP Survey Benefits
WHAT IS ASERP?

• Three year grant project funded by NHPRC

• Started in January 2017

• ADAH working to enhance electronic records management, transfer, preservation, processing and access protocols

• ADAH coordinating and collaborating with Office of the Governor on project
WHY A SURVEY FIRST?

• Importance of listening and getting input from stakeholders

• Meet all the people!

• I was new, and this was a task I had experience with
SURVEY PROCESS

1. Developed Questions in Advance
2. Agency Records Liaison Sent Email
3. Scheduled Meetings During Legislative Break
4. Conducted in-person interviews of 30 minutes to 1.5 hours
5. Typed notes
6. Analyzed content and process
Open-ended: Tell me about the work you do in the office.

Specific Technologies: Do you use Google Docs? Do you text for work?

Locations: Do you use a laptop for work? Do you save those files just to the laptop?

Survey Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about the work you do in the office. What are the main activities that you perform/your sub-office performs?

2. What types of documents do you produce to complete those activities from day to day? What types of programs do you use to create them? (Word, Excel, etc.)

3. Where do you save those documents? (Are they on a shared drive? Are they saved to your individual computer?)

4. What does your file folder structure look like? Is that structure consistent throughout the sub-office, or does it vary person to person?

5. Does your sub-office have a standard way of naming those files, or does that vary person to person?
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CONTENT ANALYSIS

- Files saved multiple places
- No standardized naming convention throughout office
- File organization varied widely
- What to do with records on departure
- Not reporting systemic use of personal email

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**Governor’s Office Survey 2017
Key Takeaways and Trends**

[We had 18 meetings with 23 staff members representing every sub-office (legal, press, etc.).]

Files are saved in multiple places – on various sub-office shared drives and on staff members’ named drives and local computers.

Staff are not reporting systemic use of personal email or saving of files to devices at home.

Staff members have varying levels of familiarity with technology.

Staff members are creating and using their files in a largely PC/Windows-based environment.

Staff members have either not had training on files management or it has been a long time.

The level of file organization varies widely between staff members. Some save individual files on their desktop, while others work in highly organized shared drives with many folders.
PROCESS ANALYSIS

• Can’t say this enough: write questions in advance
• Notetaking can be a challenge
• Be careful with scheduling
• Follow up!
• IT staff are your friends

Governor’s Office Survey 2017
Strengths and Opportunities to Improve

Strengths

Don’t just cold call people. Socialize!

The day that the survey meeting request was sent, we had a friendly contact in the Governor’s Office take me around for in-person introductions. I warmly greeted everyone and introduced the project while our contact asked the staff which days would generally be good/bad to meet.

Use authority to get the message across.

The actual survey meeting request was sent via email by the Governor’s Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS). I drafted the email to concisely achieve 3 purposes: introduce the project, introduce my role, and ask people to schedule survey meetings with me. The DCOS edited the email before sending but retained the core draft, resulting in a perfect combination of getting our message out and having the message backed by a high-level staff member in the surveyed Office.
GOV. BENTLEY’S RESIGNATION

Robert Bentley, Alabama Governor, Resigns Amid Scandal

BY ALAN RISNER   APRIL 19, 2017

Gov. Robert Bentley of Alabama before a news conference on Friday outside the State Capitol in Montgomery.

The case against Bentley, a Republican, has been growing since he released a letter in February saying he had an affair with his top aide.

Why Alabama's governor resigned — and what’s next

POLITICS

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS   APRIL 19, 2017 11:24 AM EDT

Robert Bentley appears in a booking photo after pleading guilty to misdemeanor campaign finance violations.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley managed to hold onto his job for a full year after his political career exploded with the news of his relationship with an aide in the administration.

Bentley, who is 73 years old, resigned in May.
GOV. BENTLEY’S RECORDS TRANSFER

- Had already built relationships with Governor’s Office staff members
- Provided instructions for paper and electronic records transmittal procedures
- Utilized information from the survey meetings about current records practices
- Partnered with IT department
TAILORED GUIDANCE DEVELOPMENT

• Needed to update procedural leaflets
• Wanted to tailor these documents to each office
• Our goal was to be concise and relevant

FAQ
Handling and Transferring Public Records to the Archives

1. Why should I learn about handling and transferring public records to the Archives?
Public officials are legally obligated to create and maintain records that adequately document the business of their agencies. By transferring these records to the Archives, state agencies help build a better understanding of our shared history, ensure transparency, and promote good government.

2. What files are transferred to the Archives? When?
The Office of the Governor has a Records Disposition Authority (RDA), which lists records created by the office that are kept permanently. Permanent records are transferred to the Archives at the end of the gubernatorial term. For the policy office, these include:
- Administrative Files of the Policy Office
- Special Project, Task Force Files (possibly)

More detail on each permanent record type can be found on page 7-8 of the RDA.

Note that archivists consider a file to be a record based on its content, not its format. Thus, permanent records can be paper or electronic. Things like Word documents, emails, handwritten notes, etc., could all be considered permanent records, depending on their content.

3. Do I need to organize the files in any way?
Whether dealing with paper or electronic records, the use of folders can help with organization. For electronic records, consider making the highest-level folders correspond with the types of permanent records listed in the RDA. Then create sub-folders based on subject or another organizational approach that works for you. Whatever approach you use, consistency is key.

If your office uses a shared drive, ensure that you are saving records to the appropriate location. If multiple staff members work in the same folder on the shared drive, make sure that you use the same organizational and naming approach to avoid confusion.

4. For electronic files, do I need to name them in a certain way?
Following a few simple naming conventions makes electronic files easier to find and organize. It also helps protect the files for long-term preservation at the Archives. Use the following tips:

Choose descriptive but concise file names.
Avoid using special characters in file names, such as / * ? " < > | { } & $. (Use underscores instead of spaces in file names.)
E-MAIL ANALYSIS

- Received 50 pst files representing 42 staff member accounts
- Reviewed the inboxes for:
  - Date ranges
  - Organization system
  - Security concerns
  - Resignation information
  - Personal use
  - Mailing lists
CAPSTONE RECOMMENDATION

• Used the email analysis and survey responses to identify our capstone accounts
• Need to make it very clear to staff members which accounts will be retained moving forward
NEXT STEPS

• Working with a new records liaison
• Conducting records training at the end of the month
• Analyzing a second round of surveys
• Beginning to process the Bentley email records
CONCLUSION

• The survey was hard and took a long time
• But it provided real and lasting benefits