

Records Transparency/Accountability Interest Group
Meeting: March 3, 2017 1:00-2:00 pm EST

AGENDA

Introductions. Present: Bethany Nowviskie, Sara Rubinow, Robbie Sittel, Ken Rockwell, Shari Laster, Liza, Micki Kaufman, Meg Phillips, Rachel Mattson, Cassie Findlay, Andrew Berger, Sheila Blackford, Brandon Locke, Noah, Kirsten Mapes.

1)Introductory check-in/go around (10 mins)

Tell us your name, location, and a few words on one or more of the following:

- Something you've been thinking/talking about vis a vis transparency/accountability the past couple of weeks,
- A news item of relevance that you've recently read or noticed, or
- Other campaigns/groups that you're part of that are also working on these issues

Initiatives, work & news items noted during introductions included:

- Open trials project - working to extract data from PDFs
- Presidential libraries
- Metadata management
- Government information libraries
- Digital preservation
- Digitization
- PEGI - Preservation of electronic government information
- Government data, Endangered Data Week
- Local efforts in NY area to make data more accessible
- Web archiving of government sites
- NARA: Open Government Partnership liaison, Federal/Presidential Records Act
- Digital humanities
- Union of Concerned Scientists - interested in government records for policy and rule making
- Data refuge
- NDSA
- DLF
- Access to the Bill to replace the ACA blocked
- Email sent on personal systems are public records

2)Reviewing our previous conversations + continuing to brainstorm directions for our work. (25 mins)

We've started to identify some specific areas of possible study and action, including:

1. How might we look at the opening of data critically?

- a. What is the relationship between *records* access and open *data*? E.g. the Sunlight Foundation went from a focus on FOIA requests to a focus on data dumps and data visualization. Maybe we wish to track these kinds of shifts and ask: What are their costs/benefits?
- b. Government touts open data initiatives as examples of transparency and openness but many of the really important data sets information are locked away or never created.

Related Question: are there websites or groups that list or aggregate what kinds of data sets are currently made available (at local, state, federal levels?). And is there an aggregation of data sets/records that people and groups calling for being made open that aren't, currently?

2. Usability.

- a. Government records, when available, are not necessarily transparent or even useful. Can we locate the spaces where actual transparency and accountability happens, and conversely, where supposed "openness" doesn't translate into transparency?
- b. How usable are government records in the first place, and how readable are they?
- c. Develop use cases?

3. What are the needs of requestors? As informational professionals, what can we offer that helps people who make requests for information know what to make out of what they get back? Are there things we could provide to help them make sense of the information they receive upon request? What kinds of info + from which agencies are of particular import to journalists' work, for instance? What are they already relying on, what do they have trouble finding, and what do they have trouble getting? Also, what do the people responsible for disseminating information need? Possibly develop resources that address the topics of:

- a. *How* to read/understand different kinds of government records
- b. What you can do to verify a document's **reliability and authenticity**.
- c. How to use records to promote accountability wherever you're situated.

4. Obstructions/non-compliance

- a. FOIA practices rely on antediluvian technologies (FBI says they'll respond to faxed requests)
- b. Efforts to legally deem police-worn body camera footage NOT a public record
- c. Standards for records creation, transformation of data into other forms (give examples).
- d. Documenting all the ways that an investigative journalist was told no. Seeing all the dead ends can be useful.

5. **The role of digital technologies here.** What infrastructures and architectures exist for gov record retrieval and how do they impact transparency? (See eg private contractors taking over access to data that is legally in the public domain, and forcing the public to pay for access). Can we support the development of platforms to make public data more freely accessible (see e.g publicresource.org)?
6. **Two pronged approaches?**
 - a. Strategies to hold officials accountable regarding records transparency *and* to develop tools to educate people about their rights to access records.
 - b. State vs Federal?
7. **Transparency in our local contexts.** *Can we build a culture of accountability from the ground, up?*
8. **Connecting out.** Where are opportunities for connector roles for DLF to make in these areas - e.g., w/data refuge events? How might we wish to connect to ongoing/existent projects vs Where might we wish to strike out in new directions?

Rachel outlined the main issues already identified by the group, as listed in the Agenda.

Conversation on what people are keen on:

- Removing the distinctions between open data and government records and government information products
- Use and usability of government information
- Thinking about data from a records-oriented approach
- Journal of Community Informatics resources are available on open data ad shared in the group's resources
- Taking the wiki forward, posting and sharing resources
- Privatization and paywalls - ProQuest, Elsevier etc.
- Where are the most contested / vulnerable data?
- Federal Govt has a new contract for an open data 'vendor'
- Relationship between public / private sector involvement in preservation of government information
- How to enable public access to government data (as opposed to its preservation)
- Need for clear definition of the problem we are trying to solve

3)Two weeks ago, a few mini working groups formed to address a couple of these ideas.

Can we get reports-back? (5 mins)

- Andrew, Lindsey, and Cassie, Documenting how a record is made or a request is processed (or not processed), how FOIA plays out
- Noah, digging deeper into the resources document
- Cassie on authenticity

Lindsay:

Relationship between Federal and State FOIA

Decided to keep scope manageable - ie Federal Govt FOIA

Has documented some of the useful resources there and document how it works

Would suggest focus on Federal FOIA - but leave open possibility to amplify State level stories

Andrew

FOIA is overwhelming - so many resources

Interested in FOIAing how agencies process information - identified some useful resources here

Feel that scoping the work is difficult eg tracing a case from start to finish: what to pick? How to track?

Such an example could be useful for outreach / education

Cassie

Reported on brief document on keeping authoritative records

Noted the existence of transparent FOI request sites eg Right to Know / What do they know?

Noah

Still working on a collection of tools, projects and resources

Focus on resources on making FOIA requests

Rachel

Let's get some of this stuff on the wiki? (Agreement)

4)Endangered Data Week (April 17-21) (10 mins)

- An overview and intro to the event by Brandon Locke
- How might we wish to contribute, signal boost, etc?

Brandon:

A series of coordinated events, focus on publicly available data - ways to make more secure, accessible, engage with some of the power dynamics

Has been in the news a lot recently.

Recurring event, keeps pressure up

What policies and practices can help?

Just started a wiki on DLF - has links to GitHub resources, hopefully more stuff there soon

Kirsten

We have 1000 stickers to promote EDW. Contact me to get some!

Rachel

Might be useful to start bringing in presentations by people working in this area? Short pops on interesting work and to pose questions - a webinar? Sunlight? MuckRock? FOIA Mapper?

Brandon

A webinar would help in clarifying the true state of things, not the hype

(General agreement)

Rachel

Let's brainstorm ideas for a webinar over email

Brandon please follow up to the group with an email

Sheila

Question: Is law for access and management of government records fit for purpose? Or do the problems lie elsewhere? (let's add this to the list)

5) Administrivia and Next Steps (5 mins)

- Communication tools:
 - Shared GoogleDrive folder and Google group
 - Editing the wiki
- Do we want to set this as a regular meeting time? How often do we want to meet?
- Next steps/Working groups?
- Facilitator and note-taker for next meeting?

Rachel

We have launched officially

We have Google Drive and wiki - be aware everyone has edit rights

We need to think about how we edit the wiki on the DLF page and also what messages / help we want to focus on

Can we set a regular meeting time? One Friday per month? (Agreed)

Rachel will continue to facilitate

Sheila volunteered to take notes at next meeting

Next meeting in 4 weeks

One thing people are going to try to do in the next 4 weeks?

Brandon: get MSU events on website, develop resources for workshops

Kristen: will work with Brandon

Lindsay: would like to assist with survey of existing resources with Andrew

Andrew: adding to resources

Shari: will take conversation back to Free Government Information group to consider how they can help (freegovinfo.info)

Noah: will continue to work on survey and analysis of existing resources

Meg: will see if there's anything to add to resource list

Robbie: same and also take notes to the PEGI group

Cassie: Liaison with concerned archivists group

Micki: Will report to Exec Council on Computers and the Humanities

ps.

Our shared Google Folder is [here](#).

Our resource list (under development) is available [here](#).

Our DLF-hosted wiki is [here](#).