InterPARES 3 Project
International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems
TEAM Canada

General Study Research Proposal
Public Sector Audit Reports on Digital Recordkeeping

Version 1.4, July 2010

Background and Rationale for Study

Public sector audit reports that assess the effectiveness of program or service delivery, including the delivery of archival or other recordkeeping services, are called performance or value-for-money audits. Auditors' decisions to conduct performance audits are taken strategically, "based on risk, relevance and significance."[1]

The work of auditors provides a widely recognized and ready-made framework for comparison of recordkeeping issues and needs among jurisdictions. A comparative study of audit reports will help identify common themes in existing policy, practice, or tools. Such a study can equally shed light on how resources are being allocated to manage information. The allocation of resources is a critical consideration for the small and medium-sized institutions that form the test-beds for InterPARES research.

The proposed comparative study of public sector audits will follow three broad investigations. The first investigation will focus directly on audits of recordkeeping programs and services themselves. This will help highlight the issues faced by archival and other recordkeeping programs, ranging from allocation of resources to gaps in services or capacity and their relevance (comprehensiveness and application) to the stated objectives and mandates of the programs, such as administrative accountability and organizational transparency. The second investigation will look indirectly at recordkeeping through statements of auditors as to how the presence (or absence) of reliable records helps (or hinders) the audit work. That is, this investigation will examine audits of non-recordkeeping programs looking for observations about recordkeeping that helped (or hindered) the program audit. The third investigation will examine audits of information systems, in terms of their development and use, and will help set recordkeeping issues in the larger technological and budgetary contexts.

The purpose and expected findings of this study will speak directly to at least three of the Project's stated research objectives, specifically:

---

[1] Sheila Fraser. Notes for an address to the Association of Canadian Archivists, 28 May 2004, Montreal, Quebec. Available at http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/sp_20040528_e_23862.html.

1. to promote an environment supportive of the research goal by demonstrating to regulatory and auditing bodies and to policy makers that it is essential to integrate digital records preservation requirements in any activity that they regulate, audit or control;

9. to create evaluation models capable of measuring the success of the preservation solutions that have been proposed and implemented; and

13. to establish a strong network of research and education on digital preservation that is deeply rooted in the various communities served by each of its partners, and that integrates academic work with social and community action.[2]

Research Questions

The following three questions will be addressed by the three investigations outlined above. They are drawn from the research questions outlined in the InterPARES 3 Project Proposal. [3]

Question 1: Which common or consistent messages emerge from a review of audit reports of publicly supported archives and recordkeeping programs? That is, in a time of technological change, what are auditors looking for and commenting on in their assessments? This question is especially relevant to the second part of InterPARES 3 research question #1:

1. Which are the regulatory, auditing and policy making bodies that need to be sensitized to the importance of digital preservation, and what are the best ways of influencing them?[4]

Question 2: What messages, if any, about technology and the preservation of digital records emerge in audit reports about other programs? That is, what observations do auditors make about what helped or hindered their conduct of a program audit? Answers to this question should contribute to addressing InterPARES 3 research questions #6 and #7:

6. What are the nature and the characteristics of the relationship that each of these archives or programs should establish with the creators of the records for which it is responsible?

7. What kind of policy, strategy and procedures should any such archives or program have in place to be able to control the digital records for which it will be or already is responsible from creation to preservation, and on what factors are these administrative devices dependent (e.g. a specific accountability framework and governance structure)?[5]

Question 3: What messages relevant to recordkeeping, if any, emerge about information technology implementations in audit reports, including how many resources (including financial resources) are invested in new technologies and what observations are made on the returns on

---

[2] Luciana Duranti (2007), "Theoretical Elaborations into Archival Management in Canada (TEAM Canada): Implementing the theory of preservation of authentic records in digital systems in small and medium-sized archival organizations," SSHRC CURA InterPARES 3 Project Proposal, section 2, pp. 14-15.
[3] Duranti (2007), SSHRC CURA InterPARES 3 Project Proposal, pp.15-16.
[4] See http://www.interpares.org/ip3/ip3_questions.cfm.
[5] Ibid.

those investments? Answers to these questions will contribute to addressing InterPARES 3 research questions #7 (see above) and #13:

> 13. How can records professionals keep their knowledge of digital preservation up-to-date in the face of ongoing and increasingly fast technological change?

Research scope and method

All public sector environments have some sort of audit element or component. All three levels of government in Canada, as well as institutions in the broader public sector, including universities, and hospitals, for example, maintain public audit programs established by statute. The only "natural" limitation on scope is in relation to the first question; i.e., that there will be only a limited number of audits done of public sector records.

The study will be conducted by establishing a list of audit reports pertaining to the three areas of investigation, created from a survey of those available. The geographic scope of the study will be limited to jurisdictions and organizations within Canada. The date range will be limited to reports dating no earlier than 2000 for reports relating to the first research question, and reports dating no earlier than 2005 for reports relating to the other two questions.

Limitations of Study

Published audit reports relating to the public sector are available but the availability and access to audit reports in the broader public sector, including universities, hospitals, etc., may be limited. A more extensive limitation may be that no audit reports may be publicly available for artistic or scientific areas of endeavor. As a result, findings from this general study may not be applicable, even indirectly, to those environments.

The research scope will be limited to jurisdictions where audit reports are published in English. (If a co-investigator and/or research assistant fluent in French is assigned to this study, this limitation could be reduced.) Because the focus of the study relates to digital recordkeeping, and because both audit and archival practice are based on internationally accepted principles, the limitations of the study could also be reduced by participation of other InterPARES 3 International Alliance research teams, reviewing audit reports in their jurisdictions.

Plan of Action

Activities	Target Completion Date	Status
1. Acceptance of Study Proposal	July 2010	Completed
2. Set parameters for study, especially number of reports to review relating to the three research themes	July 2010	
3. Create inventory of audit reports	August 2010	
4. Analysis	Aug 2010 through April 2011	

5. Preliminary report on findings	TEAM Canada Plenary Workshop 7: November 2010	
6. Complete review of identified reports; finalize findings	April 2011	
7. Final report on findings	TEAM Canada Plenary Workshop 8: May 2011	

Research Team

Lead investigator: Jim Suderman
Research Assistants: 2 GRAs required

Dissemination Activities

There are no dissemination activities currently planned, but the result of the study, when ready, will be formally presented at conferences.