



PROCEDURAL LEAFLET

Approved by State Records Commission and Local Government Records Commission

January 2006

GUIDELINES FOR THE PRESERVATION AND TRANSFER OF AGENCY WEBSITE RECORDS

State and local government agencies are increasingly using websites as a medium for communication with the public. Because the very nature of the internet is its immediacy, agencies often change information on their websites without documentation of their previous appearance and content. Many agencies have stopped producing such permanent records as state publications in paper format, and are making them available only on their websites. This rapidly changing environment demands attention, so that records of permanent value are preserved for future generations. One of the mandates of the State and Local Government Records Commissions, as stated in the Code of Alabama 1975, Section 41-13-21, is to determine which records should be preserved permanently because of historical value. The State and Local Government Records Commissions have designated all websites established by state and local government entities as permanent records. This leaflet is designed to provide government agencies with basic guidelines in fulfilling their responsibility to maintain those records permanently.

In accordance with the retention guidelines approved by the State and Local Government Records Commissions, a state and local agency with a website should preserve a complete copy of its website annually, or as often as significant changes are made. The agency should work in conjunction with staff of the Government Records Division of the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) to determine what constitutes a significant change. As long as older files that have been changed are maintained within the directory until the CD-R/DVD-R is burned, then preserving the website once a year should be sufficient. However, if, substantial material is deleted each quarter, then the agency may need to consider preserving the website more frequently. The State Records Commission encourages each state agency to establish its own procedures for preserving the website, either with the changing of the fiscal or calendar year, or in conjunction with the submission of its annual agency records disposition authority implementation report.

To preserve and transfer an agency's website on CD-R/DVD-R, agency staff should follow

the steps listed below:

- **Choose a Storage Medium.** Depending on the size and complexity of its website, a state agency needs to decide the proper storage medium for capturing the website. For a regular website, a CD-R (compact disk-recordable) should be the choice for preserving the website. Based on WORM (write once read many) technology, a CD-R is capable of storing large amounts of data that can be read but not altered. If the website is too big for a single CD-R, a DVD-R may be used to capture the website. Do not split the website up on multiple CD-Rs, because it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to view or follow the links. All website preservation CD-Rs/DVD-Rs should be transferred to ADAH for copying into gold CD-Rs/DVD-Rs for permanent preservation.

For local government agencies, a gold non-rewritable CD-R should be used for their website's preservation because local government agencies are responsible for preserving their website CD-Rs/DVD-Rs on-site. The term "gold" refers not only to the color of the CD-R/DVD-R but also to the material used in the composition of the CD-R/DVD-R, which should be made preferably of gold or possibly a combination of silver and gold. Currently, Mitsui CD-R/DVD-R is the only gold CD-R/DVD-R available on the market.

- **Establish Relative Links.** Design a website using "relative" hyperlinks for an agency's pages instead of "absolute" hyperlinks. Relative links such as ".././index.html" use "/" and "../" to navigate among files and folders located on the same server. Each link within an agency's pages should use the relative linking format. This practice means that once an agency's site is preserved on the CD-R/DVD-R and transferred to the Alabama Department of Archives and History, a researcher accessing the files using a web browser will stay within the files on the CD-R/DVD-R and not be sent to the agency's active website on the internet.

An absolute hyperlink is the entire URL for a particular page or site on the web, such as "http://www.archives.state.al.us/archives/index.html." Absolute links are best used for links to pages and sites that are external to an agency's website.

- **Copy folders and files of the web structure to the CD-R/DVD-R.** If the agency has full access to its own server, then it should copy to a CD-R/DVD-R a navigable version of its website, including file structure, to allow for migration to new technology. A user should be able to navigate the agency's website on this CD-R/DVD-R as if on the internet. The CD-R/DVD-R should capture links to external websites and to databases. These links will often automatically open a browser to the current website or database, if it still exists, but these connections will not obtain information as it appeared on the date of preservation.

An agency that does not have full access to its server should work with the

“sponsoring agency or company” to preserve its website in a similar manner. While agency staff members can download the information from the website onto a CD-R/DVD-R, certain software, such as WebWhacker and others, are available on the market to facilitate the process of preserving websites.

- **Pack the CD-R/DVD-R.** After the website is captured on a CD-R/DVD-R, agency staff should place the CD-R/DVD-R in its accompanying jewel plastic case and properly label it with the agency’s name, the date the website was preserved on CD-R/DVD-R, and the name of the front or first page of the website. The CD-R/DVD-R should only be handled by touching its outer and inner edges.

- **Preserve the Website CD-R/DVD-R**

Local Government Agencies:

Local government agencies should store a master copy of the gold CD-R/DVD-R vertically on a shelf in a secure, dark, dry environment with a cool, stable temperature. A copy of the gold CD-R should be made for reference use. As existing technology becomes obsolete, local agencies should migrate information from the gold CD-R/DVD-R to a new preservation medium.

State Government Agencies:

State government agencies should complete the attached Website Transmittal Form and mail or deliver the CD-R/DVD-R with the transmittal form to the Alabama Department of Archives and History for preservation. Please use the following address for such mailings:

Alabama Department of Archives and History
Government Records Division
P.O. Box 300100
Montgomery, AL 36130-0100

For further assistance, please contact the Government Records Division of the Alabama Department of Archives and History at (334) 242-4452 or records@archives.alabama.gov.