Program Planning for Records in Minnesota

By F. W. BURCH

Minnesota State Archives and Records Service

WITHIN the next few years, most public archival and records management agencies can expect to look at their activities in terms of program planning and program budgeting. The recent experience of Minnesota's State agency in participating in an executive branch program inventory may be of some interest, particularly to other relatively small organizations. The initial results of the program inventory are contained in the *State Program and Operations Manual* (1st ed., Jan. 1969), prepared jointly by the Minnesota State Planning Agency and the Minnesota Department of Administration under a Federal grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In Minnesota the State Archives, the State Records Center, and central staff records management programs are all under the State Archives Commission. The commission was established in 1947 as a five-man, *ex officio,* independent body, with the commissioner of administration as chairman and the attorney general, State auditor, public examiner, and director of the Minnesota Historical Society as the other members. Since 1961 the commission's programs, facilities, and staff have been referred to as the State Archives and Records Service, which is directed by the State Archivist and Records Administrator. The appropriation requests for all programs are a little more than $117,000 a year for the next 2 years and will provide for a staff of 12.

Standards for the published program inventory of archival and records management programs included the following: an agency statement of purpose; a list of principal departmental officers; an organization chart; an outline showing the structure of programs, subprograms, and activities; and, for each program and activity, a brief descriptive statement, estimated expenditures from State and Federal sources, the clientele regulated or served, and the unit responsible for administering the activity. The *State Program and Operations Manual* contains 383 pages of departmental information and 90 pages of indexes. There are short indexes listing departments alphabetically all programs under eight major functions, activities in welfare and correctional institutions, revenue collection activities, and activities involving financial assistance to local governments. Perhaps most valuable is a related activity index of 69 pages, with comprehensive cross-references. The *Manual* is essentially a program inventory, limited to what agen-

The writer is State Archivist and Records Administrator for the State Archives and Records Service at St. Paul, Minn.

cies are now doing or what they have explicit legal authority to do. The 43 Minnesota agencies covered by the inventory have 84 programs, 250 subprograms, and 850 activities, excluding general support and departmental administrative activities. The *Manual* is, of course, primarily intended to provide explicit statements of agency objectives, a uniform framework for the comparison and analysis of programs, and a tool for the development of program budgeting and management information systems. But archivists will quickly notice its great potential value for planning and controlling archival appraisal and documentation.

During the course of making a program inventory—that is, of considering objectives, activities, clientele, and measures of benefit—it was found that archival and records management programs sort themselves out quite obviously into different and separate categories. Most of the differences could be discussed by reference to the familiar distinctions between functions that are external or internal to the staff, staff or line, and managerial or curatorial. These differences would exist whether or not archival and central staff records management programs are in the same agency, as they are in Minnesota. The two programs are joined, however, in the agency's statement of purpose, which is a paraphrase of Minnesota's statutory language: to provide and promote the application of efficient and economical management methods to the creation, utilization, and disposal of public records and to select and make available for reference and research use a body of archival materials that is evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, and accomplishments of government or that is otherwise valuable for the information it contains.

In Minnesota, as in many other States, there is no single dominant governmental library, archival or information agency. In the future the specific professional and methodological differences in these separate agencies may be subordinated in favor of grouping many information handling agencies. The grouping may be simply a physical one, which will incorporate similar space requirements in one architectural design and provide more shared facilitative services, greater convenience to users, and easier coordination of reference services. The organizational relationships between archives and records management might then also be shifted. Records management would more likely move into a closer relation with general administration and the management sciences, and archives would move more distinctly toward other cultural agencies oriented to reference and research.

For the moment at least, program goals are phrased in commonly used, if not syntactically elegant, terms. The goal for records management: to establish and coordinate systematic controls over the creation, use, and disposition of the records created or received by all branches and agencies of State and local government. The goal for

archives: to select and make available public records of enduring value for research and reference use by government officials and others and to cooperate with other information oriented agencies. Undoubtedly the phrasing of both the agency statement of purpose and the program goals could be improved. In this respect, some experience with questions from other users of the inventory will help.

No subprogram structure is shown for either the archives or records management program in the *State Program and Operations Manual*. Within the State Archives and Records Service, branches and levels of government are thought of as subprograms—legislative, executive, judicial, county, and municipal—but, strangely enough, these branches and levels were not used by any State agency in its program inventory. Perhaps archival and records management work more naturally leads one to attention to distinctions among government organizations. This may be so in archives particularly because of the principle of provenance and in records management because of the subtleties of regulation, assistance, and cooperation between the management agency and the particular branches and levels of government. Until archival and records management programs are elevated to the status of a fourth branch of government (and other candidates are already overcrowding that position), it will be necessary to take into account political relationships. Though records programs in executive agencies can be regulated, with due consideration for constitutional officers, the legislative and judicial branches at their own invitation are assisted in carrying on their own programs. The objectives of statewide records programs are cooperatively accomplished in local governmental agencies and offices. Irrespective of these considerations, it is likely that a subprogram classification for branches and levels of government rather than for functional components of programs may be of some value in the future.

The activities described for the archival and records management programs in the program inventory were intended to be the essential and familiar ones—numerous enough to stake a firm claim to roles and missions and to include all that may be done with a larger staff, but not so numerous as to hinder a visual or aural span of comprehension. For archives, the activities were these: appraisal, accessioning, preservation, arrangement, description, reference, publication, and exhibit. For records management, the activities were these: standards, surveys, program evaluation, emergency records, disposal, and technical assistance. Each activity is described in statements of 10 to 20 words.

Further experience with the program inventory may lead to further precision in terminology. Practical considerations dictated some of the initial choices. For example, although the term *processing* is fairly widely used in the profession, it was decided to refer to accessioning,

description, and arrangement as separate activities, particularly because for any given body of records these activities are likely to cover a relatively long period of time and require several different kinds of personnel. Appraisal is usually considered the unique, prime, and essential archival activity, and it was separately defined. The emergency records activity rests on specific statutory authority. The disposal activity includes inventorying and scheduling.

Prospective changes in executive branch organization will result in fewer and larger departments and thus will increase the possibilities for more full-time records management work at the departmental level. This, in turn, will influence central staff records management activities. The activities included in standards, surveys, and program evaluation are related to the rule, regulation, and report functions of the central archival and records management authority, wherever it may be organizationally. Technical assistance can be expanded and contracted at central staff, departmental, and local levels through a variety of subactivities, including projects for forms, correspondence, directives, reports, and other specialized records management fields.

Allocating expenditures to each of these 14 activities (actually 12, because there were no expenditures for publication and exhibit) required some prior decisions about how to consider the microfilming, document restoration operations, and the State Records Center. To simplify and to make the best of an object accounting system, the Records Center was included under disposal, microfilming was divided between emergency records and preservation, and all of document restoration was included in preservation. With the exception of separate allocation of major supply items, principally record boxes, the expenditure allocations were derived from staff time converted to salary, plus a supply and expense cost for each staff position. Rough estimates, true enough, but more precise ones might not have told the story any better. If the expenditure breakdown shows anything at all, it is that without sufficient staff no archival or records management organization can be productive enough for the paperwork and information needs of even a middle-sized State. In promoting program development, a good deal can be made of the fact that most parts of the archival and records management job ought to be done concurrently. Dividing too few staff positions among too many activities unavoidably postpones the time when real benefits and accomplishments will be visible to the naked eye—legislative, executive, or judicial.

In this connection it should be mentioned that the forms used to collect program information included a space for possible measurements of benefit or performance. All archivists and records managers can define projects that need doing, and at least some measurements of benefits have been quantified and are widely used—schedules approved, cubic feet accessioned or destroyed, number of persons using records, and

dollar savings in space and equipment. Whether or not projects will ever be completed in time to produce a real benefit is another matter. Many of the problems experienced by smaller archival and records management organizations because of insufficient funding should perhaps more frequently be resolved into time factors. Annual work programs always look more convincing when projected against a known and defined total amount of work to be done over a period of years. In smaller organizations, where there is less division of labor and consequently fewer specialists, ordinary records management staff work may concurrently involve contacts with a wider spectrum of political, administrative, program, technical, supervisory, and clerical positions than is common in larger organizations.

The clientele for all records management activities is described in the inventory as government officials and organizations. Private citizens are added as clientele for the emergency records activity. For all archival activities, the clientele is described as government officials and organizations, private researchers, and scholars. As all public archival agencies have found, there are several choices to make about which clientele should be emphasized. In Minnesota, where the Minnesota Historical Society carries on most of the specialized public historical functions and describes its clientele as the general public, historians, and other scholars, it was thought more useful for the State Archives to emphasize its relationship to government agencies and to general nongovernmental research.
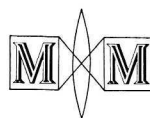
The published program inventory for Minnesota executive agencies is already proving very useful for its principal purpose—a management tool for program planning and budgeting. It would be a mistake to overlook the intangible benefits in self-education experienced by the participating agencies. For Minnesota's archival and records management agency, the program inventory also provides a needed, concise, and widely distributed reference document. It has been well received by legislative committees at hearings. Estimates of future needs for staff and facilities will be related to the inventory's programs and activities. Perhaps all public records agencies need to expend more effort to give a greater sense of continuity to archival and records management programs; the problem is not so much a communications gap as a deficiency in the number of simultaneously operating circuits. The potential value of the program inventory for records appraisal work is obvious; for, among other things, it can serve as a guide and checklist of work to be done; it can make possible systematic inquiry about the existing level of program and activity documentation; and it can give an overview of program relationships.

There is still a great distance between sketching the elements of a program inventory covering major State executive agencies and translating and allocating the daily routine of paperwork into the variables

of law, policy, process, output, and objectives. During the past two decades the evolving technologies, professions, and disciplines in the management sciences and communications management have all tended to spin wider circles around the archivist and records manager. Both professions have experienced a mild identity crisis and consequently have adjusted their primary interests—normal situations for any live professions. Both should benefit from all aspects of program planning and program budgeting. The archivist in particular needs constantly to call attention to the fact that although the physical media he selects and cares for may be of the past, those who benefit from its intellectual content will be of the future. Later changes in Minnesota's program inventory have not been precluded, but during the next few years the inventory is expected to be an administrative anvil on which better records programs can be shaped.