



Managing Information to Support Democracy in the Pacific: The Work of the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives

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Abstract:

Good governance requires good information management, so that public officials can account for their decisions and activities with reference to accurate, reliable and accessible information.

Good governance is also one of the key priorities for Pacific Island governments. However in most Pacific countries, the legacy of no tools, guidance, or training on recordkeeping and information management in the post colonial era has resulted in an underlying problem of weak or non existent frameworks that do not the democratic responsibilities of accountability and good governance.

Nevertheless, recordkeeping is beginning to improve across the Pacific. In 2005, 13 countries of the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA) adopted a declaration on recordkeeping for good governance. One result of this declaration is that representatives from many Pacific countries worked together to develop a suite of web-based and printed tools which form the Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit. The toolkit provides practical advice on getting leaders to listen, as well as guidance and practical tools on creating, maintaining, and disposing of government information. It was developed by Pacific representatives in a way that can be easily adapted to meet specific jurisdictional requirements.

This paper uses the Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit and the broader work programme of PARBICA to show how the Pacific is addressing the issues of developing and implementing practical information management solutions across institutional, national, linguistic, and geographic borders; and the leading role that information management

associations play in the democratic process through supporting good governance. The paper will also examine the lessons learned from utilising PARBICA's networks to influence leaders, develop strategic allies, co-ordinate regional initiatives, and leverage the experience of a few to provide professional development opportunities to many.

Introduction

As an archivist who promotes the primacy of context to provide meaning, I will briefly describe what I, an archivist, am doing at an IFLA Congress discussing the management of information to support good governance and democracy.

Like librarians, archivists too suffer misconceptions about what we do – we don't just look after old records – and what role we play in modern public administration. Archives certainly do have a significant and continuing role in protecting the documentary heritage of the countries they serve, so this traditional view of the role of the archivist is still valid. However during the twentieth century, Archives increasingly took on the role of records management regulators, as the skills of the archivist were required to help control and manage records from the point of creation.

Modern archival legislation is framed within this new, broader paradigm. In New Zealand, the *Public Records Act 2005* requires all government organisations to “create and maintain full and accurate records” and mandates Archives New Zealand (the national archival institution) to “promote accountability between the Crown, the public, and government agencies.”

National archives and the professional staff who work in them increasingly use their skills to guide their governments in better recordkeeping as part of good information management, and so assist them in meeting their democratic responsibilities of accountability and good governance.

Good archivists have to understand how records are created. Archivists make decisions about how long records need to be kept, whether they can be destroyed, whether they are required as archives, and what access rights relate to certain records. To make these decisions, archivists need to understand the relationship the records have to legislative, business and community stakeholder requirements.

In the words of the International Council on Archives:

“... archives support administration and underlie the rights of individuals, organisations and states... archives are fundamental to democracy, accountability and good governance.”¹

Terms such as accountability, evidence, and governance are used at the World Bank when it distributes money to assist development. For the World Bank the importance of records in public administration is described thus:

¹ International Council on Archives, *Welcome to ICA*, available at <http://www.ica.org/en/about>, accessed 30 June 2010

“Records document the decisions and activities of governments and private institutions, and serve as a benchmark by which future activities and decisions are measured. They document fundamental rights and obligations, and differentiate the rule of law from the actions of arbitrary states. Without records there can be no rule of law and no accountability.

Without good records, officials are forced to take decisions on an ad hoc basis without the benefit of an institutional memory. Fraud cannot be proven, meaningful audits cannot be carried out, and government actions are not open to review.”²

Many of these terms, such as accountability and governance, may not be familiar to librarians in the context of their work, however they are relevant to the library professions. This relevance is reflected in the core values of IFLA, which embrace:

“the belief that people, communities and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic and economic well-being.”³

So in the broader information context, these are the terms archivists use to communicate with our colleagues who perform accountability functions within modern democracies (Ombudsmen, Auditors-General, anti corruption commissions etc), as well as information technology specialists when developing systems that manage and prove access to information. They are terms that are critical when discussing open information to supporting democratic objectives, so they should also be terms understood and used by librarians and archivists to communicate with each other, and with shared stakeholders, for the purposes of addressing similar information objectives.

Managing Information in a Pacific Context

Inadequacies in governance, accountability and open access to information almost always feature inadequacies in records or information management. In the Pacific, such failures are sometimes the result of deliberate subversions of systems and process, but more commonly they are the result of many years of erosion of records and information management capability, corporate culture and infrastructure within administrations.

In addition, Pacific information has traditionally been created and maintained using a different recordkeeping paradigm. The challenges of creating appropriate controls on written documentation, when it is still a comparatively new form of information transfer is best described by Chief Reklai Raphael Ngirmang, from the Island of Palau, who when speaking to Pacific archivists in 2001 said:

“Our archives does not have written documents and books. Our culture and historical records are contained in oral histories and legends, which are stored in the collective memories of the people of Melekeok and which have been passed down from generations to generations over the centuries.”⁴

² World Bank, *Why Records Management: Records Management as a Key Support for Development Effectiveness*, available at <http://go.worldbank.org/889BWHZPL0>, accessed 30 June 2010

³ International Federation of Library Association, *More About IFLA*, available at <http://www.ifla.org/en/about/more>, accessed 30 June 2010.

⁴ Wareham, Evelyn. ‘From Explorers to Evangelists, Recordkeeping and Remembering in the Pacific Islands’, *Archival Science*, Volume 2, 2002, pp187-207

Far from being legends, these types of histories have held the scientific and technological information required for society to perform its agricultural, navigational, medicinal (and many more) activities. This information has been recorded through dance, songs, craft, and stories. The knowledge is ever-changing and is still plays an important part in how information is managed in the Pacific today.⁵

In addition to the challenge of associating traditional forms of information management with modern methods, most Pacific countries have a legacy of no tools, guidance, or training on recordkeeping and information management in the post colonial era. This situation has resulted in an underlying problem of weak or non existent frameworks that do not support the needs of governments or communities.

However, recordkeeping is improving across the Pacific. The Pacific Islands Forum (the regional inter-governmental organisation) has recently recognised good records and information management as a fundamental pillar of good governance. The communiqué from the Forum meeting in August 2009 in Cairns, Australia, noted that stronger national development and democracy through better governance can be achieved by “committing to sustainable and appropriate... information management and records-keeping to ensure the development and implementation of better informed national policy”. This followed the Pacific Plan Action Committee noting, in Suva Fiji in June 2009, “The importance of good recordkeeping as one way of better assisting the effectiveness and efficiency of governments... and good governance and that these efforts should be integral to the initiatives under the good governance pillar of the Pacific Plan”.⁶

But the recent activity to support good records and information management in the Pacific had an earlier genesis than the statements made by heads of governments. They grew out of the commitment and actions of the member countries, states and territories of The Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives.

The Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives

The Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives – known as PARBICA – has begun to raise awareness and build information management capacity throughout the region. It is developing tools that will help archivists and information managers support Pacific Island governments’ efforts to achieve good governance.

PARBICA was established in 1981. It is a professional organisation that comprises government archives, non-government archival institutions and associations, and individual members.

These members represent more than twenty nations, states and territories, from the Federated States of Micronesia in the North Pacific, to the Cook Islands in the South Pacific, as well as Australia and New Zealand. The current President of PARBICA is Setareki Tale, the National Archivist of Fiji.

⁵ Tale, Setareki. *Canoeing in Cyberspace: Recordkeeping in the Pacific: A Fiji Case Study*. Australian Society of Archivists Conference 2006

⁶ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. *Final Communiqué of 40th Pacific Islands Forum, Cairns, Australia 2009*. Annex C. *Recommendations for Progressing the Pacific Plan*. Retrieved from <http://www.forumsec.org.fj/pages.cfm/newsroom/press-statements/2009/final-communique-of-40th-pacific-islands-forum-cairns.html>

Three of PARBICA's more important goals are to:

- establish, maintain and strengthen relations between archivists in the region and between institutions and professional organisations concerned with the custody and administration of records;
- provide and assist with formal and informal professional training; and
- cooperate with other organisations or institutions concerned with the documentation of human experience and the use of that documentation for the benefit of mankind.⁷

PARBICA is one of thirteen branches of the International Council on Archives, covering the most diverse and largest geographic area. PARBICA publishes a regular newsletter called *Panorama*. It has commissioned reports on significant issues for archives throughout the Pacific including reports on education and training and on low-cost storage options for archives and records.

Perhaps PARBICA's most significant achievement has been its programme of regular biennial conferences. Beginning in Fiji in 1981, PARBICA has held 13 conferences.

A landmark PARBICA conference was held in Nadi, Fiji, in 2005. It had the theme *Reinventing Archives – Supporting Recordkeeping for Good Governance*. This theme recognised the importance of well managed recordkeeping systems as a fundamental pillar for good governance. It also acknowledged that the creation and management of records as evidence of decisions and actions is essential to accountability, transparency, efficiency and democracy.

The conference heard from speakers from the International Records Management Trust, Transparency International, the Fiji Human Rights Commission, the Fijian Auditor-General, and national archivists from around the Pacific. Many of these speakers emphasised the importance of records in ensuring the accountability of governments and other organisations.

Of particular note, the Deputy Auditor-General of Fiji, Mr Kaveni Takalevu, had the following to say about the importance of recordkeeping to his work:⁸

“Authentic and trustworthy records – and convenient access to them – provide the fundamental means by which the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of government ... can be accomplished, demonstrated and measured. Governments keep records as a fundamental basis for conducting business, serving the public, measuring progress and outcomes and protecting their own and others' rights.”⁹

At the Nadi Conference members accepted that the recordkeeping and information systems in some Pacific countries were inadequate. They requested PARBICA develop basic templates, guidelines and tools for recordkeeping in Pacific organisations. These tools should cover

⁷ PARBICA Constitution, available at www.parbica.org.

⁸ Wickman, Danielle. 'Recordkeeping Legislation and its Impacts: The PARBICA Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit', *Archives and Manuscripts*, Volume 36, Number 1, 2008. pp 32-46

⁹ Takalevu, Kaveni, "Key Issues for Recordkeeping in Good Governance – Presentation on Assessing the State of Recordkeeping: Measuring Progress Towards Better Systems", paper presented at the 11th Conference of the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives, Nadi, Fiji, 19 – 23 September 2005, p6.

recordkeeping capacity assessment, benchmarks, basic manuals for recordkeeping, and training packages and modules.¹⁰

A Toolkit for Managing Government Information in the Pacific

The resolutions from the Nadi conference are what prompted the project that forms the case study of this paper - the *Pacific Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit* (the Toolkit).

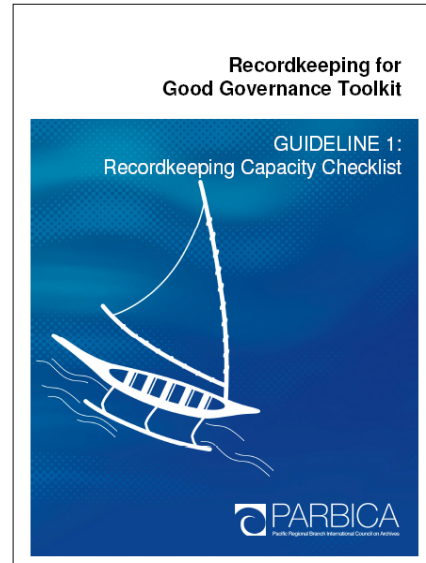
The objective of the Toolkit is to provide a suite of practical tools that can be used by Pacific Island governments to improve the state of information management in their administrations. This in turn will help to underpin public sector efficiency and accountability. It will also assist Pacific Island governments to ensure that they meet their legal obligations, and protect the rights and entitlements of their citizens.

Since 2005, PARBICA members have developed a suite of printed and web-based material that highlights for government officials the importance of good recordkeeping and their recordkeeping responsibilities. It includes guidelines for Pacific archivists and records managers on how to identify, document, communicate and fulfil public sector recordkeeping requirements in government agencies.

To date the Toolkit has grown to include a brochure for use in raising awareness with senior officials, an introductory booklet and eleven separate guidelines:

- 1: Recordkeeping Capacity Checklist
- 2: Identifying Recordkeeping Requirements
- 3: Model Recordkeeping Policy
- 4: Administrative Record Plan
- 5: Adapting and Implementing the PARBICA Administrative Record
- 6: Developing and Implementing Record Plans for Core Business Functions
- 7: Disposal Schedule for Common Administrative Functions
- 8: Implementing the Disposal Schedule for Common Administrative Functions
- 9: Adapting the Disposal Schedule for Common Administrative Functions
- 10: Starting an Appraisal Programme to appraise the closed records of core functions.
- 11: Training Pacific Island Government Official in Using PARBICA's Toolkit - *Train the Trainer*

¹⁰ Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives, *Resolutions of PARBICA's 11th General Conference, 2005*. Available at <http://www.parbica.org/conf11>, accessed 30 June 2010



The Brochure for Senior Officials and the Recordkeeping Capacity Checklist

I would like to describe the purpose, content and uses of each guideline. However that would double the length of this paper. For those who are interested, please note that all guidelines can be found on the PARBICA website at:

<http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm>

The Toolkit was developed using a highly consultative process. This process has been the single most critical factor in its success. The National Archives of Australia and Archives New Zealand have led the development of the above guidelines, with financial support from AusAID and NZAID. However the content of each guideline is decided through a collaborative series of workshops, facilitated by Australian or New Zealand representatives, and participated by a reference group comprising representatives from many Pacific Islands, from a range of information management backgrounds, national archivists, ombudsmen, information managers, technology specialists, and public service commission representatives.



Toolkit Reference Group outside Archives New Zealand, December 2008

Risks and Mitigations

The guidelines promote best practice and contain model templates for implementing each activity within government organisations. However there was an identified risk to developing generic guidelines that cross many jurisdictions and government activities. The risk was that the guidelines may not be sufficiently relevant to specific localities and administrative settings.

The strategy for mitigation this risk was to utilise the diverse reference group mentioned above to identify areas of jurisdictional differences and devise appropriate solutions. A good example of this in practice was determining an appropriate disposition action for personnel files (sometimes called personal files) for government employees as part of *Guideline 7: Disposal Schedule for Common Administrative Functions*. The issue was that most representatives came from small countries and recommended that all personnel files be retained as an archive. The justification for this recommendation was that the governments in their countries employ the vast majority of citizens, so the coverage of that group of information provided a comprehensive genealogical record for most citizens, as well as helping to ensure that appropriate rights and entitlements to government employees were accessible through access to evidence of employment. This recommendation made sense for countries like Niue (population 1,200) or Palau (population 20,000). However in countries like Papua New Guinea (population 6.5 million) or Fiji (population 800,000) such a recommendation to retain every personnel file was simply not feasible. So a compromise was reached which utilised the model nature of the guidelines to provide options for disposition actions, and used the adaptation guidelines to articulate the risks and issues to be considered before making a decision.

The second main risk that was identified related to the lack of influence that archival institutions have within their respective governments and how that could limit the impact of the Toolkit on public administration in the region.

The strategies for mitigating this risk included creating (as part of the Toolkit), some practical awareness and promotion advice and tools (posters, brochures, template presentations etc) for each country to use within their administrative context. In addition, good information management, and specifically the Toolkit can (and is) being promoted by other regional bodies and strategic partners, for example, the Pacific Islands Ombudsman's Alliance, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and other regional bodies mentioned above. These collaborative relationships are integral to ensuring the ongoing sustainability and relevance of the Toolkit project.

Training, Collaboration and Sustainability

To date, training in the use of the PARBICA Toolkit has been provided at PARBICA Biennial Conferences in New Caledonia in 2007 and Brisbane in 2009. In addition there have been in-country training courses run in Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Palau, Fiji, Cook Islands and Vanuatu.

While using AusAID and NZAID money to fly trainers from Australia around the Pacific is very useful, it is not a sustainable way to address the underlying challenge of information management capacity over time. PARBICA is of the view that the Toolkit can only be sustained if each member country develops its own training courses and has the internal capacity to deliver those training courses to government agencies. To that end Guideline 11 of the Toolkit is important, as it is a *Train the Trainer* guide for PARBICA members and others wishing to develop and deliver their own in-country training courses on good records and information management.



In-country training using the Toolkit. Cook Islands, 2009

Irrespective of organisational size and capacity, it is very difficult to implement business changes and organisational behaviour (as better information management requires) without strategic high level support. Developing and maintaining

PARBICA's relationship with strategic partners and regional bodies was mentioned above – Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Pacific Ombudsmen's Alliance, Pacific Public Service Commissioner's Network, and the United Nations Development Programme Pacific Centre – and has been critical to the success of the project and ensuring it is sustained past any external aid funding cycle. These organisations all have a reliance on good information management to achieve their objectives. PARBICA has noticed this, and offered the resources in the Toolkit and our growing pool of regional expertise to provide training and raise awareness of good information management utilising these important strategic networks. Over the last eight months PARBICA has run workshops at regional Human Resource Managers conferences, and a conference with Pacific immigration officials. The key message every time is - good information management is fundamental to efficiency and accountability, and the PARBICA Toolkit is a practical suite of resources that can be used in all jurisdictions across the region.

Successes

The work of PARBICA and its members, utilising the *Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit* has started to address the awareness and capacity issues that have undermined good information management supporting democracy in the Pacific.

It has always been the intention that the PARBICA Toolkit would be a model or set of templates that would be adapted and revised in each Pacific Island nation to reflect the particular circumstances and issues of that country. Feedback from workshops and through surveys has shown that the components of the Toolkit are making a real difference and is starting to be used as part of implementing recordkeeping frameworks in several countries. The future of the Toolkit lies with in embedding itself as a natural and organic part of public administration in our region. For example, components of the toolkit have been adapted for use in Papua New Guinea, implemented in the Cook Islands and Fiji, is being promulgated as regulations in Palau, and used to assist with training in Niue and the Solomon Islands. I am pleased to report that work has already commenced to translate the Toolkit into Fijian, Samoan and Palauan.

I am also delighted to report that other branches of the International Council on Archives have been paying close attention to the PARBICA Toolkit. Many of our global colleagues see the Toolkit as a strategic solution to common records and information management problems around the world. Our French speaking colleagues have translated the Toolkit into French for use in francophone territories in Africa.

Perhaps most significant and exciting of all for PARBICA, good recordkeeping and information management has been cited as a priority in the Pacific Plan Action Agenda and in the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Communique that was issued after the Forum Leaders meeting in Cairns last year (mentioned in the Introduction).

PARBICA is now working with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to explore the availability of funding for the development of permanent records management training courses either through the University of the South Pacific or in-country through the Public Service Commissions of Forum member states.

Conclusion

Librarians and archivists are natural allies in addressing information management capacity issues, so that governments can make good decisions, be accountable, have access to information to protect the rights and entitlements of its citizens, and support their democratic objectives. We can both be important champions for change in the area of information management supporting open access and good governance, as well as our shared heritage responsibilities.

In the Pacific, the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives has developed (and continue to develop) practical guidelines on good information management for small nations, states and territories. The guidelines are modular in nature and can be easily adapted to different jurisdictional requirements.

I urge you to make full use of the *PARBICA Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit* products within your own organisations where they are appropriate, and to encourage your colleagues at home to do the same. There are two key things you may be able to do immediately to begin to make improvements in your information management arrangements.

- Spread the word about how information management can protect the interests of the government and the community, and can help officials to be more efficient.
- Support the work of your National Archives, particularly in territories where the National Archives is struggling financially or in terms of its ability to influence the behaviour of government departments.

Biographical Information

Mark Crookston works at Archives New Zealand as a Senior Advisor in the Government Recordkeeping Group. Mark is also Secretary General of PARBICA – The Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives. His work with PARBICA has included project management of the appraisal and disposal guidelines for the Pacific wide *Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit*.

Mark has a Masters Degree in Library and Information Studies from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He has previously worked at the BBC Film and Television Archive in London, and the Victoria University of Wellington Library, and has researched and published several articles on the use and preservation of digital information in New Zealand.