

Categorization of Government Information (CGI) Working Group of the Interagency Committee on Government Information

A work planning session was held on January 20, 2004 at the White House Conference Center in Washington D.C. The session was convened to discuss ideas on how to plan the work required of the working group on Categorization of Government Information (CGI). CGI is charged to execute requirements of section 207(d) in the E-Government Act of 2002 (44 U.S.C. Ch 36).

The task of CGI is to provide recommendations to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on:

- the adoption of standards, which are open to the maximum extent feasible, to enable the organization and categorization of Government information in a way that is searchable electronically, including by searchable identifiers; and in ways that are interoperable across agencies;
- the definition of categories of Government information which should be classified under the standards; and
- determining priorities and developing schedules for the initial implementation of the standards by agencies.

CGI is part of the Interagency Committee on Government Information (ICGI). Bob Haycock of OMB is a member of the ICGI Executive Committee and the Executive Sponsor of the CGI Working Group. Eliot Christian has been appointed by OMB to be the chair of CGI.

Participants in the work planning session were: Eliot Christian, Federal Geographic Data Committee; TC Evans, Government Printing Office (representing Judy Russell, Superintendent of Documents); Wally Finch, National Technical Information Service; Bob Haycock, OMB (Chief Architect of the Federal Enterprise Architecture); Woody Horton, National Commission on Libraries and Information Services; Kate Kase (representing Gladys Cotter, CENDI); Patrice McDermott, American Library Association; Davis Roberts, Industry Advisory Council; Gretchen Schlag, Navy.

Discussions during the session focused first on CGI "products" and then on CGI "process".

Section 207(d) implies that recommendation products in five areas are expected:

1. Open, interoperable standards for categorizing Government information
2. Open, interoperable standards for electronic searching
3. Open, interoperable standards for searchable identifiers
4. Definitions of which Government information to be categorized
5. Determinations of priorities and implementation schedules

Each CGI recommendation is proposed to be a concise document that states the specific recommendation and provides background discussion of implications, alternatives considered, and the review process used.

There was strong agreement that the scope of CGI encompasses all Federal Government information, including tangible resources (e.g., books, paper documents, compact discs, museum artifacts) as well as intangible resources (e.g., electronic information, databases, Web site contents). Several participants emphasized that governments need to address the public's quandary: "you don't know what you don't know". That is, government needs to present a descriptive cataloging picture that is comprehensive of the full range of holdings, although access to any particular holding may be subject to various constraints and indirect referrals.

There was strong agreement that government information will always be highly distributed among many resources that are separately maintained. The CGI challenge, therefore, is not to define standards to be implemented at any one site but to define common standards that support interoperability. CGI should enlighten government efforts both to organize information for its own uses and to address the public need for cross-agency coherence in describing "how to get it".

It was agreed that CGI itself is not concerned with describing the operation of any particular portal, noting that the ICGI Content Management Working Group has certain responsibilities in that arena. CGI focuses rather on standards supporting referrals to and among portals and other means of access to government information. Such standards are useful in situations where multiple resources are logically aggregated to achieve "intellectual co-location" (sometimes known as a "federation" or a "loosely coupled system").

Participants agreed that CGI needs to define the target user community. Discussion centered on a proposition that CGI might focus especially on addressing the needs of intermediaries, although attending also to the needs of end-users who bypass intermediaries (e.g., researchers who need direct access to primary sources). It was noted that standards recommended by CGI must be sensitive to the needs of Federal agency users as well as external users, including governments at other levels and in other nations.

The session included several discussions about process. The participants were in strong agreement that inclusiveness and openness are the most important features of the CGI process. It was agreed that CGI meetings should be public.

Recommendation products should be published in draft for public input. It was noted that non-government organizations such as public advocacy groups typically need long lead times to provide input.

There was agreement that coordination with the commercial sector is a matter of concern for CGI. The Industry Advisory Council (IAC) will be approached about setting up an IAC committee that would parallel ICGI, and thereby be useable as a resource for gauging commercial sector interest in specific technology directions.

The membership composition of the CGI Working Group was the topic of some discussion. The chair noted that a large number of nominations had been given to OMB during the initial formation of ICGI, and that CGI might want to tap that wealth of expertise and variety of perspectives. The chair also noted that the CGI could create a substructure with specific assignments within the overall charge of the CGI. However, participants asserted strongly that the CGI Working Group should be limited to about 6-8 members and should not create subgroups. External input and sub-tasking would be achieved through "white papers" on specific areas of interest.

There was strong agreement that the group should include all three branches of the Federal Government and include a representative to seek coordination with other levels of government. The need for integration with the Federal Enterprise Architecture (FEA) is a key issue that warrants a full member. Key constituency groups should also be included, and three were identified: Federal libraries, CENDI, and FGDC. Also, there is a need for a member representing each of the two other ICGI Working Groups.

Accordingly, a recommendation of CIG membership by represented organization was agreed, as follows:

- CIG Chair (Eliot Christian)
- Office of Intergovernmental Solutions ([to be designated])
- Superintendent of Documents (Judy Russell)
- Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts ([to be designated])
- Federal librarians (Gretchen Schlag)
- Federal Enterprise Architecture (Stuart Rabinowitz, Eliot Christian)
- CENDI Principal (Gladys Cotter)
- FGDC (Eliot Christian)
- ICGI Electronic Records WG liaison (Susan Sullivan)
- ICGI Content Management WG liaison (Joann McGovern)

The first meeting of the CGI working group is planned for February 9, 9-11 at the White House Conference Center. To assure adequate space, anyone planning to attend should send an e-mail note to Eliot Christian <echristian@usgs.gov>.