



Press/Journalists

[Press/Journalists](#)
[Press Releases](#)
[1998](#)
[Press Release](#)

PRESS RELEASES BY DATE

- [FY 2005](#)
- [FY 2004](#)
- [FY 2003](#)
- [FY 2002](#)
- [FY 2001](#)
- [FY 2000](#)
- [FY 1999](#)
- [FY 1998](#)

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- [The Charters of Freedom](#)
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- [The National Archives Experience](#)
- [Featured Documents](#)
- [Online Exhibit Hall](#)
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[Go to the Press Releases Main Page](#)


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Press Release June 17, 1998

National Archives Hosts Start-up of International Effort to Preserve Electronic Records

College Park, MD. . .Archivists from eight nations gathered at the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration on June 10-13 to launch what may be the largest archival research project ever undertaken -- an international study of effective methods for saving valuable records created in computers.

Archivist of the United States John Carlin hailed the conference as a partnership both of countries and of governments with private sector organizations. "The time has come," he declared, "to go beyond theoretical approaches to applied solutions" for preserving valuable records in electronic forms. He described several partnerships in which the U.S. National Archives also is working towards that end.

The initiative, which brings together representatives of government, the private sector, and academia, is called INTERnational Research on Preservation of Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (INTER PARES). The acronym, INTER PARES, which is also Latin for "among equals," reflects the collaborative nature of the initiative. Undoubtedly the largest archival research project ever undertaken, INTER PARES involves representatives of seven national archives and six research teams. The national archives that are participating in this research project, in addition to NARA, are those of Canada, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The research teams are from the U.S., Canada, Northern Europe, Italy, Australia, and the Collaborative Electronic Notebook Systems Association (CENSA). CENSA itself is an association of numerous international biochemical and pharmaceutical corporations.

The project was initially conceived by Luciana Duranti, Associate Dean and Professor, University of British Columbia, Canada. Professor Duranti stated that, "The primary goal of the proposed research is to develop the theoretical and methodological knowledge essential to the permanent preservation of records generated electronically, and, on the basis of this knowledge, to formulate model policies, strategies, and standards capable of ensuring their preservation. This research needs to be international, interdisciplinary and collaborative because of the global nature of the issues it will address. These issues affect every society, every discipline, and every practical and intellectual endeavor, and common solutions are necessary to reduce barriers to research, study, and every sort of communication."

During their four days in Washington, the participants developed agreement on specific lines of research that will be pursued during the next three years, the questions to be addressed in each line, the methods to be used, the products, and the responsibilities of each participating research team and archival institution. The project will first establish requirements for the preservation of electronic records, and then examine appraisal criteria and methods that archivists use to identify records that should be preserved for posterity. This phase of the research will explore whether the technical characteristics of electronic records affect appraisal methods or practice. In its third phase, INTER PARES will examine methods for

satisfying the requirements for preservation of electronic records and determine optimal ways for assigning responsibilities for applying these methods. Finally, the research will focus on defining a framework for the formulation of policies, strategies, and standards for preservation of authentic electronic records. Reflecting the diversity of the INTER PARES participants, the framework, along with reference models and case studies, will be developed at the institutional, national, and international levels.

Dr. Duranti will serve as project director for the research, which will be guided by a steering committee composed of the chairs of each of the research teams and the lead representatives of the national archives of the participating countries. This committee will meet four times a year for the next four years. The research team chairs will bring the results of their teams' efforts to these meetings, and the national archives will test the applicability of these results in their institutions.

Dr. Philip Eppard, Dean, School of Information Science and Policy, State University of New York at Albany, chairs the U.S. team, which includes Su-Shing Chen, James C. Dowell Research Professor and Chair of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Columbia, MO; Fynnette Eaton, Technical Services Division Director, Smithsonian Institution Archives; Anne Gilliland-Swetland, Assistant Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, University of California-Los Angeles; P.C. Hariharan, Director, Systems Engineering and Security, Inc.; Leon Stout, Archivist and Adjunct Professor, Pennsylvania State University; and William Underwood, Chief Research Scientist, Artificial Intelligence Atlanta, Inc. The NARA representative is Dr. Kenneth Thibodeau, Director, Electronic Records Programs.

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98-101