

Presentation of the 2007 Leahy Award to Anne Thurston

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Presentation of the Recipient
Christine Arden

This year's winner of the Emmett Leahy award is no stranger to pioneering. Our winner has been committed to the growth and development of records management for over 30 years. As an educator, practitioner, publisher, director and development specialist, this person is recognized internationally as a leading authority of records and information management.

As an archivist and researcher in the 1970s, this year's Leahy award winner recognized early on the need for records management support and education. Her experience with government records led to the recognition that records are fundamental in underpinning good governance, the reduction in corruption, the protection of individual entitlements and human rights, and the effective and efficient administration of government programs. This recognition led to a study of the state of recordkeeping systems in over 32 countries across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. The study, which she conducted on her own over a four year period, looked at the state of records management in those countries and identified requirements for training and education. The findings of the study encouraged our winner to boldly go forward and create a masters' program and post graduate research program in records and archives management. Five of the PhD students went on to become university lecturers. Many of the graduates of the program took senior positions in government departments and academic institutions where they expanded the growth of records management through their respective responsibilities. Many became national archivists thus fostering the establishment of a network of international archives and records leaders that would not have been in place otherwise. Our Leahy award winner recognized the need to build the records management capacity to establish records programs that would be relevant, effective, and, above all, sustainable. Relevant tools and techniques were lacking and in-country training programs designed to build the required human capacity were poor or non-existent. Recognizing that there was a continuing need beyond the university program for ongoing records management tools development and staff education and training, a new initiative, designed to create additional education and training opportunities and delivery methods was developed. To support that initiative, a non-profit organization was created in 1989. Nothing like it had existed before and today it continues to be the only one of its kind in the world. Its three programs are closely interrelated. Its research and development program develops the records management tools and techniques which are then fed into the training and development program and employed in the 'country projects' program where the learnings from these on-the-ground implementation efforts are used to inform the direction that should be taken by the research and development and training programs. Funding for these programs is drawn from a range of sources but primarily from development agencies. Through our winner's diligence, skill - and charm - she has managed to personally secure over \$30 million dollars from multiple funding streams based on collaboration and partnerships with government and non-government organizations.

Today the now almost 20 year-old organization continues to foster educational programs, establish opportunities for partnership and collaboration and design and deliver on-site technical assistance projects to build sustainable records management in developing country governments. A 60-member consultancy team, committed to furthering the direction of the organization supports the full-time administrative staff in the development and implementation of the products and services.

Among the products and services, she has led the production of seven videos related to the issues surrounding the role and importance of records and good governance and what can be done to ensure that records management serves this role effectively, especially in an electronic environment. Through the Trust she has also led and

contributed to the development of assessment tools to measure the adequacy of records management within the context of government administration, e-government, and information technologies such as those supporting financial management systems.

Our winner has a strong appreciation for the power of networks. Given the interest in electronic records, this year's recipient led a major video conference project to examine electronic records issues in 38 English speaking developing countries. Nine video conferences provided an opportunity for 292 people to discuss these important issues and to lay the basis for finding solutions. Additional information was obtained from 770 participants who joined four electronic discussions.

Another major product of this individual's tireless efforts is a series of 26 publications which cover a myriad of records management related topics. In addition, over 4000 pages of study materials are available free of charge to anyone who wants to access them. Countless copies of these publications have been downloaded and they have provided the basis for the development of new education programs such as those in Uganda, Zimbabwe, Eritrea and Tanzania .

Our Emmett Leahy recipient is committed to the principle that good record keeping results in good governance, integrity and accountability.

So let's take a quick look....development of an MA and PhD program which prepared individuals to become university professors and national archivists; establishment of an organization that has raised over \$30,000,000 to support records management training and education resources that are free to those who require them, establishment of research initiatives leading to the development of records management tools and techniques that are sensitive to developing country requirements (and that I suggest are just as relevant to the developed world as well), and leadership of on-site records management improvement projects in numerous developing countries around the world. Is that it? Well, just a couple of other things.

To support all these international activities, our 2007 Emmett Leahy winner established the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers in 1984 and has fostered its development and growth ever since. She continues to work closely with ACARM. Recognizing, as we all do, that there are benefits in collaboration, she has also worked with ICA and ARMA in pursuing joint international endeavors and in 1997 was a signatory to the ARMA/ICA/IRMT accord.

She has presented at numerous conference and seminars and has truly made inroads through her networking and partnerships on behalf of the profession in areas where no-one else thought to go. Her fund-raising efforts are second to none internationally and for those of us who know her well, we are always amazed at her ongoing stamina, passion and commitment to the International Records Management Trust, her brainchild, to good records management and its role in protecting the rights of citizens through good governance. Her tireless efforts were recognized by the Records Management Society of the United Kingdom when it bestowed a life time achievement award in 2006 - the first time that anyone has been given such an award. And she is the only person I know personally who has been recognized by Queen Elizabeth as a member of the Order of the British Empire, an honour she received in 2000. I am now proud and honored to be able to present the 2007 Emmett Leahy Award to my good friend and colleague, Dr. Anne Thurston.