

# Collecting Dynamic Local Government Information: The Development of the Allen County Code Digital Collection

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This article will describe the process of the Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) Walter E. Helmke Library's acquisition and maintenance of a current digital collection, the Allen County Code, <http://acc.mdon.lib.ipfw.edu/>, to supplement the official print Code (Allen County, Ind. Code, 2006– ) and to provide better access to library users and the public. In this context, code is defined as a collection of local government ordinances and legal principles arranged by subject generated from the various departments within the county government. Codes are updated to incorporate all the laws currently in force—only the sections affected by new laws are changed. Public access to Indiana state and local codes is important in Indiana academic and public libraries for research and practical use by the community. While the Fort Wayne City Code and the Indiana State Code are available electronically through government sources, the Allen County Code was not disseminated electronically by the Allen County government. To remedy this gap, the library, for many years, posted a version of the Allen County Code on the library's Web site in HTML format. The IPFW Library received unofficial copies of the Code from the Board of Commissioners' Office in various formats from print to electronic copies which made the digital version of the code difficult to maintain. For example, agencies such as the Highway Department include images as part of the Code to illustrate standards for construction such as street design. The HTML version only allowed users to browse the through the Code and a search of the complete Code was nearly impossible.

The IPFW Helmke Library has had a long history of collecting and providing access to local, state, and federal government information. In fact, it was through the efforts of IPFW librarian Judith Violette that

the Fort Wayne City Council passed in 1987 a special depository ordinance requiring that at least one copy of municipal publications be preserved in the IPFW library. Ms. Violette had also worked for many years with Allen County government to acquire Allen County documents and, especially an up-to-date electronic version of the Allen County Code.

Fortunately, in February 2009, through renewed efforts the Helmke Library received a complete and up-to-date digital copy of the Allen County Code. The Government Documents Coordinator, Linna Agne saw the opportunity to serve the IPFW community and the general public by adding the Allen County Code as part of the library's digital collections, mDON, Mastodon Digital Object Network (Walter E. Helmke Library, n.d.-a). Helmke Library uses CONTENTdm, digital collection management software, to build, manage and share digital collections with the public. It became apparent that this system could provide a more useful platform to manage the numerous updates to the Allen County Code, support the display of tables and images of the original document, and provide a user-friendly front-end from which library users and the public could search the full text.

## Digital Project Planning for the Allen County Code

Many departments internal and external to the library needed to be coordinated in order to create this dynamic digital collection. As a first step in this project, Helmke Library re-energized its relationship with the Allen County Board of Commissioners' Office and began a discussion of the benefits of IPFW Library providing up-to-date access to the Allen County Code. The County Commissioners' office was mainly concerned that the library would provide a stable link to the online version of the Code. However, the library wanted a written agreement that would formalize the

partnership and outline responsibilities of both parties. To clarify the purpose and scope of the project the IPFW library and Allen County Commissioners' Office developed a letter of agreement. The Commissioners' Office agreed to provide regular updates of the Code to the Library in the Word file format. In turn, the Library agreed to host the current Allen County Code as a searchable digital collection and to provide a stable URL for the collection. In addition, the library needed to coordinate the creation and maintenance of the collection internally between the library's information technology services and technical services departments, so a team of members from both areas and the Government Documents Coordinator was established to manage the project. All of their input contributed to the development of the structure and metadata of the digital collection.

### **Developing Access to the Digital Collection**

Creating the Allen County Code as a digital library collection permitted the addition of metadata to the resource, which would significantly enhance access to its content. Metadata is defined as "structured information that identifies, describes, explains, locates, or otherwise makes it easier to retrieve, use, or manage a resource" (Tambouris, Manouselis, & Costopoulou, 2007, p. 178). The application of metadata to the collection enables best results for search and retrieval. The metadata-enhanced document can easily be harvested by search engines and initiatives such as the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting, [www.openarchives.org/OAI/openarchivesprotocol.html](http://www.openarchives.org/OAI/openarchivesprotocol.html). A key advantage to metadata is that once applied it can be migrated from one system to another (Tambouris et al., 2007).

In developing the metadata structure for this digital collection, the Allen County Code team drew on Walter E. Helmke Library mDON Metadata Dictionaries and Guidelines (n.d.-b), previously developed for other collections. Three types of metadata elements were applied:

- (1) Descriptive metadata which adds elements such as title, author, and keywords in order to improve searching and discovery.
- (2) Administrative metadata which addresses ownership, preservation, and rights

management.

- (3) Technical metadata which describes the digital file, such as file type, bit depth and sample rate.

The Helmke Library uses Dublin Core standards for metadata description. The standard was developed in consensus across many communities including libraries, technology, government, and education (Tambouris et al., 2007). The Government Documents Coordinator supplied the metadata cataloger with the responsibilities and agreements relevant to the project and digital copies of the Code for review. Then as a group, the team further refined the metadata fields. The cataloger was able to draw from metadata dictionaries developed for the Fort Wayne Economic Development and History Center Digital Collections as guides on how to populate each field. After determining the fields, the group had to decide at what level to attach metadata. The Allen County Code is divided into titles, articles, chapters, and sections and metadata can be attached at any or all of these levels. The advantage of attaching metadata to chapters and sections of the Code is to enhance the display and navigation of the document within the digital collection. It was decided that assigning metadata at the title level would be the most efficient way of managing the dynamic properties of the Allen County Code. The group took into account the metadata cataloger's time in the decision to assign metadata only at the title level. In addition, the group wanted to encourage the use of the advanced searching capabilities within the PDF document that allows users to search a title by ordinance number.

While applying metadata to the code was rather straightforward, one challenge was finding a way to link to other documents referred to in the Allen County Code. These include items such as The Indiana Administrative Code (IAC), Indiana Code (IC), county documents, and reports by various authors. The documents are formally incorporated and adopted as part of the Code thereby extending the scope of documents that needed to be included in the collection. The documents incorporated as references needed to be integrated into the online version of the code in order to complete the digital

collection. Many of the documents were primarily hyperlinks to PDF documents in addition to these the library received digital full text of items authored by the county. It was important for the team to consider how to link the referenced documents into the code, while retaining the meaning of their original context. The team arrived at the solution to embed hyperlinks, when available, into the full text of the code as well as include the hyperlink to the reference in the metadata.

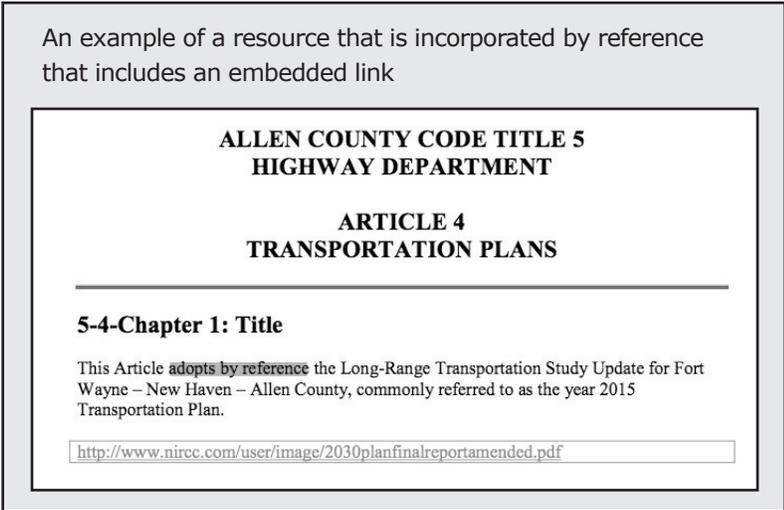
As a result, in the Allen County Code digital collection, the references would be displayed in a multiple ways to increase discovery and retrieval. In choosing a file format for the collection, the group had to balance the needs of providing access along with digital preservation. Many file formats, such as TIFF, PDF, PDF/A, and XML, may be used for digital collections. Every format comes with a range of advantages and disadvantages. The standard file formats most commonly used are:

- (1) TIFF is an early file format used in electronic preservation that provides a quality reproduction of the original document, but text in a TIFF file is not searchable.
- (2) PDF (Portable Document Format) works across platforms and provides added features such as digital signatures and searchable text. The format is subject to proprietary technology.
- (3) PDF/A (Portable Document Format/ Archival) International Standards Organization (ISO) based standard useful for digital preservation that can be implemented by Adobe and other vendors.
- (4) XML (Extensible Markup Language) contains the text of the document and is highly portable between systems (Hodge & Anderson, 2007).

The team limited its assessment of file formats for the Allen County Code to PDF and

TIFF, because the Library has had the most experience using these file formats in its digital collection. For this collection, the Library was more concerned with the need to provide access to the Allen County Code. Access features, such as the ability to embed links into the online documents, was a factor in selecting PDF as the file format for the digital collection. In addition, the PDF format offered advanced and accurate searching that would prove useful to patrons looking for a particular code citation such as 6-1-4.

### **Unofficial or Official?: Authenticating Digital Documents**



The United States Government Printing Office has the authority granted by Congress to authenticate and disseminate official government documents. The Allen County Board of Commissioners’ is the government entity that issues and holds the official copy of the Allen County Code. Any online version of the code must inform

users where and how to locate the official print version. The library designed an online watermark as a disclaimer on the document and digital collection page to advise users that they were viewing an unofficial copy and where to access an official copy of the code.

### **Maintaining a Dynamic Collection**

Normally, digital collections are static composed of a finite set of materials that are not continuously updated. In this case, the goal is to maintain a current collection with the most up-to-date version of the Allen County Code. In library terms, the Code is an integrating or updating resource. The Executive Assistant at the Allen County Board of Commissioners’ Office who oversees updates to the Code reported to the management team that the Code was updated up to 15 times a year. To maintain this collection, the team established a procedure that for each section changed, the entire online title that contains the section would be replaced.

While the changes to the code are often small, occasionally there are amendments of particular interest to researchers and the general public. Local researchers were interested in changes in the Code over time and the management team planned to provide this service. For example, Allen County and the City of Fort Wayne have had multiple iterations of the controversial smoking ban. In order to accommodate community researchers, once a year the library will deposit a complete archival copy of the digital Code in the Fort Wayne Area Government Information digital collection. Researchers could also request older copies of the Code in person, but online access to the Code across multiple years facilitates historical analysis.

## Conclusion

In today's information environment, libraries can serve the community through partnerships with local governments to maintain digital collections of essential government information. For a successful project, the library needs to develop a good relationship with the contributing partner and coordinate with the appropriate areas within the library. Before embarking on this project, the Helmke Library had to work with its government partner to identify the needs of the community and the government agency. Challenges included devising a way to incorporate the documents referenced in the Code as part of the digital collection so that all documents would be accessible at the point of need. The library also had to provide a means of notifying users of the unofficial status of the online version and to inform users where to locate official copies of the Code and other documents (print or otherwise). The library also determined the amount of metadata needed to enhance the searchability of the collection. Finally, the library developed a procedure to maintain updates and archive the digital Allen County Code in order to best serve the public and the library's users. The nature of managing a dynamic collection has required consistent communication with the content provider, strengthening the ties between the library, the local community, and its government. The Helmke Library increased access to and preservation of the Allen County Code through thoughtful analysis of the needs of the community and careful planning in the building

of this valuable digital collection. The Helmke Library Allen County Code Digital Collection, established in 2009, is a successful model for a library/local government partnership.

## References

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## About the Author

Linna R. Agne is a new librarian that received her M.L.I.S from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She completed a year at Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne as a Visiting Librarian (2008–2009) in the position of Government Documents Coordinator and liaison to Political Science and History. She is currently a Metadata & Cataloging Librarian at The American Legion National Headquarters Library.