

Texas state library & archives commission turn to the cloud to launch Texas digital archive

Using Preservica hosted on AWS GovCloud has enabled TSLAC to meet the legal mandate and ensure essential government records remain accessible into the future.

Background

One of the primary obligations of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission is to take custody of, preserve, and make available for public use state records and other historical resources that document the history and culture of Texas as a province, colony, republic, or state. This is a role the agency has fulfilled since 1909 for records created in paper-based formats.

In February of 2014, it was announced that the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) would receive the records of outgoing governor Rick Perry, the longest serving governor in Texas State history who served from December 2000 to January 2015. This was the first transfer of electronic records to the State Archives.

The records needed to be securely preserved for the future, and made accessible to the public.

Governor Perry's records comprised some 7 terabytes (TB) of data and 4,000 cubic feet of paper); in addition, TSLAC had an additional 26 TB of important electronic records it needed to securely preserve. These included 18 TB digitized audio cassettes from the state Senate as well as a diverse array of video files and still images.

Challenge

The team at TSLAC faced the challenge of not having a suitable system in place to digitally preserve and make accessible the important and historical state electronic records from Governor Perry's tenure.

"Most of the records created today are born-digital," says Jelain Chubb, State Archivist and Director, Archives and Information Services Division at TSLAC. "Although much of this digital information has short term retention requirements, there is still a significant amount that we are required to retain and preserve permanently. Given our legal mandate, it was vital for us to expand and enhance our digital preservation efforts to ensure these essential government records remained accessible into the future."

The critical role of digital preservation in protecting long-term digital records is fast rising up the information governance agenda. With the challenge of maximizing long-term value and mitigating risk of non-compliance, regulation and legal challenge becoming ever more complex, forward thinking corporate and government organizations like TSLAC are using digital preservation systems to ensure digital records remain accessible and trustworthy long into the future.



Solution

Jelain explains further “Defining our requirements and selecting a standardsbased digital preservation system for our electronic government records was a yearlong project involving an extensive formal tendering process. Preservica’s software hosted in the AWS Cloud stood out as a clear choice based on the company’s reputation and track-record with the other state archives.”

The new system needed to provide a secure and easy way to provide public and internal access with minimal local IT overheads. “The physical cost of server space in our own state data center was prohibitively high and unsustainable for our agency,” says Mark Myers, Senior Electronic Records Specialist at TSLAC. “A Cloud deployment frees us of needing to have onsite software, servers and IT maintenance – all patches and updates are done by Preservica - it’s all web based.”

In addition, the system needed to accommodate the stringent requirements of the Texas Department of Information Resources including encryption of data in transit and at rest, and hosting on AWS GovCloud. The AWS GovCloud (US) Region is designed to address the specific regulatory needs of United States federal, state and local agencies. It is an isolated AWS region purpose built to host sensitive data and regulated workloads in the Cloud.

Mark continues “Using cloud storage also gives us geographic dispersal of multiple copies of our data which is a key digital preservation requirement.”

All this, together with the fact that the Preservica Cloud Edition conforms to the OAIS (Open Archival Information Systems) reference model (ISO 14721) gave TSLAC the confidence that it was making the right choice for a trusted digital repository for the permanent historical records of the State of Texas.

Once safely stored in the Preservica system, files can be automatically migrated to newer formats over time to ensure vital and often unique digital records remain findable, useable and readable into the future.

Using the Preservica digital preservation platform hosted on AWS GovCloud has enabled TSLAC to step up to its mandate to provide greater public access to state records with the launch of the Texas Digital Archive (TDA) - which also includes unique online collections of photographs.

The Future

Jelain is confident that using the Cloud is the best solution for TSLAC: “You don’t have to be afraid of the Cloud.” Says Jelain, “Many government agencies are looking into Cloud solutions because it means that they don’t have to build something from the ground up or worry about hardware and software, or have in-house IT support. It is one of the reasons we are now sharing our original Request for Proposal (RFP) with other state governments interested in leveraging the Cloud to preserve and provide access to their own long-term and permanent digital records.”

Jelain added that the level of technical support and the relationships with the people at Preservica were a model of a true partnership. “We’ve always felt like partners, not just clients,” she said. “The team at Preservica were extremely helpful, and responsive to our questions and needs. They really listened to our feedback and made sure any issues were resolved.” TSLAC is now working with other state agencies to transfer additional series of permanently valuable records into a central repository and improve access for the general public. Going forward, these records will be made available through the TDA making it a portal of information for people interested in Texas, and the state’s government and history.



“TSLAC has a statutory responsibility to collect, preserve and make records accessible for the future.”

Jelain Chubb - Texas State Archivist