

OPEN DOCUMENT FORMAT

ODF ALLIANCE

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Alliance Applauds New York State's Call for Proprietary Vendors to Directly Support ODF

NY Report on Electronic Records Affirms Multiple Formats Do Not Lead to More Choice

Washington, DC, May 22, 2008. The ODF Alliance today welcomed the findings and recommendations contained in a report – "A Strategy for Openness: Enhancing E-Records Access in New York State" – published by the New York State's Office of the CIO and the Office for Technology.¹

"The New York report and the introduction of legislative bills in several states reflect growing national recognition of the importance of open standards for electronic records," said ODF Alliance managing director Marino Marcich. "To give meaning to this important public-policy goal, e-records must be contained in a truly open format like ODF so that they can be accessed, now and in the future, without regard to the software in which they were created."

The study resulted from legislation sponsored by Assemblywoman RoAnn Destito calling on state IT officials to report on how the state can provide choice, interoperability and vendor neutrality in document creation while ensuring the resulting electronic records remain publicly accessible. The Alliance noted several aspects of the report that feature prominently in the growing public debate about document format standards, including choice, cost and mandating in procurement.

"As the report's findings make clear, increased numbers of formats for doing the same office tasks do not increase choice. To the contrary, multiple formats increase complexity and add to costs," said Marcich. "The quickest way to remedy this problem is to ensure that ODF is the default file format for office productivity software. The marketplace is demanding a single, standardized format around which multiple software vendors can compete on features and price – competing software products, not competing formats."

The report calls for harmonization between ODF and OOXML, as the Alliance has also requested, concluding that "the use of single, standardized formats increases efficiencies and furthers compatibility and interoperability. Choice comes into play in two ways: (a) the choices made by vendors to directly support accepted standards; and (b) the ability of the State to

¹ <http://www.oft.state.ny.us/Policy/ESRA/erecords-study.htm>

choose among vendors who support accepted standards."

The report requests that New York State "be added to the list of those who are asking proprietary vendors to directly support document formats such as ODF or other formats that maintain the same level of ODF's openness."

In accordance with the legislation's requirement for public input into the report, the state issued a Request for Public Comment (RFPC) in December 2007 which generated 114 responses totaling 600 pages of written comments, including nineteen responses from other governments. An overwhelming number of the individual responses called on the state to adopt ODF as the preferred format for office document exchange between government agencies and with New York citizens. As the report noted, "Despite expressly being asked, not one of the 114 commentators cited a single study finding higher costs after migration to open format solutions."

The report recommends a process culminating in April 2009 that will determine specific changes to procurement policies to "integrate openness... as one of the most desired features" and other requirements to allow state agencies to begin accepting office suite documents in open formats.

"The ODF Alliance commends the authors of the study for having conducted the most in-depth public analysis of the issue to date," said Marcich. "We look forward to working with the State to implement the specific recommendations for mechanisms to incorporate openness features into the state technology planning and procurement processes."

About the ODF Alliance:

The OpenDocument Format Alliance is an organization of governments, academic institutions, non-government organizations and industry dedicated to educating policy makers, IT administrators and the public on the benefits and opportunities of ODF.