

**REPORT OF THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA**

**DATABASE INDEXING  
GUIDELINES**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



**SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 17**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND  
1998**



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State Librarian  
Nolan T. Yelich

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## Preface

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December 15, 1997

TO: The Honorable George F. Allen, Governor of Virginia and  
Members of the General Assembly

Senate Joint Resolution No. 370 of the 1997 session requested the State Librarian and the State Archivist, in conjunction with the Council on Information Management, the Department of Information Technology and representatives of the doctorate-granting universities and the Virginia Press Association, to study the development of guidelines for the compilation of indices of computer databases held by public bodies of state government.

The attached report outlines the steps that transpired to achieve this mandate. Additionally, this document summarizes reporting results by various state agencies in response to the 1996 changes in the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

I am pleased with the efforts of those individuals who worked long and hard on negotiating a response to the legislation that is in keeping with the spirit of the amendment and yet achievable by state agencies. This was the first year for the reporting requirements of the FOIA amendment, so much of our effort has been focused on educating Commonwealth employees of this new obligation. Although numerous individuals contributed to the development of the Database Indexing Guidelines, I specifically wish to acknowledge the efforts of Art Phaup, Department of Information Technology; Ginger Stanley, Virginia Press Association; Forrest "Frosty" Landon, Virginia Coalition for Open Government; Hudnall R. Croasdale, Council on Information Management; Chip German, University of Virginia; Nolan T. Yelich, C. Preston Huff and Mary Clark, the Library of Virginia.

Sincerely,



Serf L. Guerra  
Chairman, The Library Board

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## Executive Summary

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In response to Senate Joint Resolution No. 370, the Library of Virginia is submitting this report. The Resolution requested that the State Librarian and the State Archivist, in cooperation with the Council of Information Management, the Department of Information Technology and representatives of the doctorate-granting universities and the Virginia Press Association, to study the development of guidelines for the compilation of indices of computer databases held by public bodies of state government.

Senate Bill 326 of the 1996 session of the Virginia General Assembly amended Section 2.1-342, Code of Virginia, pertaining to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, to include the requirement to index certain computer databases. In summary this legislation stated that "Beginning July 1, 1997, every public body of state government shall compile, and annually update, an index of computer databases which contains at a minimum those databases created by them on or after July 1, 1997..."

Senate Joint Resolution No. 370 ensured that the above parties, with the increased level of assistance by the Library of Virginia, would work toward a set of guidelines that could be utilized to implement the amended provisions of FOIA. Much progress was made in the days leading to the passage of SJR 370 in February of 1997. However, the guidelines were not quite ironed out when SJR 370 was passed. Senator Edd Houck (D-Spotsylvania) agreed that an extensive study would not be necessary if the guidelines would indeed be worked out to the satisfaction of the effected parties. Negotiations continued on the development of the guidelines and they were soon ready for implementation. Most parties involved in these discussions indicated that the guidelines were a step in the right direction but would certainly not be the final chapter on this issue.

This report outlines the background associated with the development of the guidelines; the results of the first years' response to the guidelines; and copies of the 1996 FOIA amendment; SJR No. 370; and the Database Indexing Guidelines are included in the appendices section.

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## Background

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The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was amended pursuant to SB 326, enacted as Chapter 469 of the 1996 Acts of Assembly, to require that computer databases of public bodies of state government be indexed, effective July 1, 1997. This amendment also included a specific charge to the Department of Information Technology to develop guidelines for compliance with this requirement. The applicable section reads:

*Beginning July 1, 1997, every public body of state government shall compile, and annually update, and index of computer databases which contains at a minimum those databases created by them on or after July 1, 1997. "Computer database" means a structured collection of data or documents residing in a computer. Such index shall be an official record and shall include, at a minimum, the following with respect to each database listed therein: a list of data fields, a description of the format or record layout, the date last updated, a list of any data fields to which public access is restricted, a description of each format in which the database can be copied or reproduced using the public body's computer facilities, and a schedule of fees for the production of copies in each available form. The form, context, language, and guidelines for the indices and the databases to be indexed shall be developed with the State Librarian and the State Archivist. The public body shall not be required to disclose its software security, including passwords.*

Also passed during the 1996 General Assembly Session was SJR 68 which directed DIT to study the feasibility and costs of creating the index, described in somewhat different language. The applicable section reads:

*RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Director of the Department of Information Technology, in cooperation with the State Librarian and the State Archivist, be requested to study the feasibility of and costs associated with requiring public bodies to compile, and annually update, an index of computer databases maintained or created by them before, on, or after July 1, 1997. "Computer database" means a structured collection of data or documents residing in a database management program or spreadsheet software. Such indices shall include, at a minimum, the following information with respect to each database listed therein: a list of data fields, a description of the format or record layout, information as to the frequency with which the database is updated, a list of any data fields to which public access is restricted, a description of each form in which the database can be copied or reproduced using the public body's computer facilities, and a schedule of fees for the production of copies in each available form.*



In response to this mandate, the Department of Information Technology issued a report entitled *Analysis of Feasibility of and Cost Associated with Requiring Public Bodies to Compile indices of Certain Computer Databases SJR 68*". This document is also referred to as *Senate Document No. 10* and is dated 1997. *Senate Document No. 10* contains copies of letters from various agencies expressing concerns about the proposed database reporting requirements.

The Department of Information Technology was charged with creating the *Database Indexing Guidelines* in conjunction with the State Librarian and the State Archivist. Art Phaup of DIT developed the initial working draft of the *Guidelines* that served as a good starting point for an ad hoc group of interested parties to participate in critiquing the document. A meeting was held at the Library of Virginia of this core group on February 13, 1997. Only the Council of Information Management was unable to attend this meeting. Significant progress was made at this meeting on the remaining steps required to complete the *Guidelines*.

A draft copy of the *Database Indexing Guidelines* was sent to State agencies in mid-March for comment. Some agencies provided good comments and some changes were incorporated into the *Guidelines*. Many calls were received during this time from localities, which are not impacted by the *Guidelines*, but were still concerned about the legislation and wanted assurances that it did not pertain to them. A meeting was held on April 3<sup>rd</sup> to update the State Agency Advisory Committee (CIM) on the ramifications of the *Guidelines*. Later in the month, a widely advertised meeting was held at the Library of Virginia to explain the proposed *Guidelines*. The attendance for this meeting was approximately 50 people, mostly from State agencies.

By late May, the final *Guidelines* were ready for distribution to the State agency heads. A letter signed by Nolan T. Yelich, State Librarian and Charles L. Livingston, Director, DIT was distributed on May 30<sup>th</sup>. Attached to this letter was a copy of the *Guidelines*. This letter also provided specific instructions for returning the forms and the deadline for receiving this information.

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## Summary Information

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Numerous calls were received asking for clarifications about the provisions contained in the *Guidelines*. Numerous representatives from State agencies called and stated that they had read the *Guidelines*, understood them, and would not have anything to report this year, but would probably have something to report next year. Some representatives indicated that because of extensive re-working of some databases due to the year 2000 compliance issue, they would likely have something to report in the near future.

The results of the first year's response to the *Guidelines* are summarized below. The agency reporting the most databases was the Library of Virginia with 51 separate databases reported. As expected, there were no new databases reported. Fourteen agencies responded that they had no databases, subject to reporting requirements, to report.

#	State Agency	Comments
1.	Agriculture and Consumer Affairs	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
2.	Alcohol Beverage Control, Dept. of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
3.	Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance Department	Cover Letter / 6 databases
4.	Christopher Newport University	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
5.	Clinch Valley College	Cover Letter / 2 databases
6.	Commission for the Arts	2 databases
7.	Commission on Local Government	Cover Letter / 1 database
8.	Community College System, Virginia	Cover Letter, reported for themselves and reported for the 29 community colleges
9.	Conservation and Recreation, Dept. of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
10.	Criminal Justice Services	11 databases
11.	Dabney Lancaster Community College	No databases
12.	Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Dept. for the	See Rehabilitative Services, Dept. of
13.	Economic Development Partnership	Cover Letter (no databases to report)

14.	Environment Quality, Dept. of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
15.	Governor's Employment and Training Department	5 databases
16.	Housing Development Authority, Virginia	No databases
17.	James Madison University	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
18.	Juvenile Justice	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
19.	Labor and Industry, Dept. of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
20.	Library of Virginia	51 databases
21.	Longwood College	3 databases
22.	Lord Fairfax Community College	No databases
23.	Medical Assistance Services, Dept. of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
24.	Milk Commission, State	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
25.	Port Authority	No databases
26.	Rehabilitative Services, Dept. of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
27.	Richard Bland College	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
28.	Rights for Virginians with Disabilities, Dept. of	See Rehabilitative Services, Dept. of
29.	Secretary of the Commonwealth	7 databases
30.	Social Services, Dept. of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
31.	State Police, Dept. of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
32.	Treasury, Dept. of	1 database
33.	Virginia Army National Guard	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
34.	Virginia Commonwealth University	4 databases
35.	Virginia Board for Persons with Disabilities	See Rehabilitative Services, Dept. of
36.	Virginia Institute of Marine Science	3 databases
37.	Virginia Tech	Cover Letter (no databases to report)

38.	Visually Handicapped, Dept. for	See Rehabilitative Services, Dept. of
39.	William and Mary, College of	Cover Letter (no databases to report)
40.	Woodrow Wilson Rehab Center	See Rehabilitative Services, Dept. of

The forms returned by the agencies were compiled into a document that is available for public use at the Library of Virginia. The compiled forms were also copied and distributed to a network of libraries throughout the Commonwealth.

When you consider that few databases actually met the criteria for reporting this first year, the above results were probably about as good as to be expected. Each upcoming year should result in an increase in the number of databases reported. The Library of Virginia will continue to send annual notices and copies of the *Guidelines* to State agencies in order to coordinate the compilation of this information.

It is the consensus of the parties involved in the development of the *Guidelines* that a new formal study is not required since significant improvements had been achieved through negotiations. The *Guidelines* will be changed as needed, but no substantial change is anticipated for 1998. The Library of Virginia intends to eventually set up electronic reporting of agency databases.

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## Appendices

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**Appendix A**  
**(SJR370)**

## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 370

*Requesting the State Librarian and the State Archivist, in cooperation with the Council on Information Management, the Department of Information Technology and representatives of the doctorate-granting universities and the Virginia Press Association, to study the development of guidelines for the compilation of indices of computer databases held by public bodies of state government.*

Agreed to by the Senate, February 4, 1997

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 1997

WHEREAS, the 1996 Session of the General Assembly passed Chapter 469 of the Acts of Assembly, which amended the Virginia Freedom of Information Act to require public bodies of state government to compile and update indices of computer databases beginning July 1, 1997; and

WHEREAS, in Senate Document No. 10 (1997), the Department of Information Technology has identified a number of issues which require greater consideration and additional input from knowledgeable individuals and industry representatives; and

WHEREAS, the State Librarian and the State Archivist are prepared to increase their respective levels of assistance; and

WHEREAS, other states, including North Carolina, have recently enacted and implemented similar legislation and have developed guidelines accordingly; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the State Librarian and the State Archivist, in cooperation with the Council on Information Management, the Department of Information Technology and representatives of the doctorate-granting universities and the Virginia Press Association, be requested to study the development of guidelines for the compilation of indices of computer databases held by public bodies of state government.

The Secretaries of Administration and Education are requested to provide necessary assistance to the State Librarian and the State Archivist. The State Archivist is requested to consult with the North Carolina Archivist to review North Carolina's legislation and guidelines pertaining to the compilation of its indices of computer databases. All agencies of the Commonwealth are requested to provide assistance to the State Librarian and State Archivist for this study, upon request.

The State Librarian and State Archivist shall complete their study in time to submit their findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1998 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Services for the processing of legislative documents.

**Appendix B**  
**(Letter by Yelich and Livingston)**





# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

CHARLES C. LIVINGSTON  
Director

## *Department of Information Technology*

110 SOUTH SEVENTH STREET  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23219  
(804) 344-5000

TDD VOICE - TEL. NO  
371-8076

May 30, 1997

### Heads of Public Bodies of State Government:

This letter distributes the Commonwealth of Virginia Guidelines for the Indexing of Databases. Jointly developed by DIT and The Library of Virginia, these Guidelines provide implementing instructions for the statewide indexing of databases in compliance with Section 2.1-342 of the *Code of Virginia*.

In order to enhance access to the indexing information by the public, as well as state and local officials, please send the completed forms (Appendix B) to: The Library of Virginia, 800 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, Attn: Mary Clark, to arrive by July 18th. Copies of these forms will be placed into a bound compilation and distributed throughout the state via the Virginia State Documents Depository Program.

Questions related to the indexing process may be directed to Art Phaup of DIT, (804) 225-2486, or Preston Huff of The Library of Virginia, (804) 692-3607.

We extend our sincere appreciation to those who have contributed to the development of these Guidelines.

*Sandra G. Treadway*  
for Nolan T. Yelich  
State Librarian

*Charles L. Livingston*  
Charles L. Livingston  
Director

Attachment

Appendix C  
*Guidelines for the Indexing of Databases*  
May 30, 1997

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Commonwealth of Virginia

# Guidelines for the Indexing of Databases



Prepared in compliance with Section 2.1-342, *Code of Virginia*,  
by the Department of Information Technology  
in consultation with The Library of Virginia

May 30, 1997

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## Guidelines for the Indexing of Databases

1. **Purpose.** The purpose of these guidelines is to provide implementing instructions for public bodies of state government in the creation and maintenance of database indexes in compliance with Section 2.1-342, Chapter 21 - Virginia Freedom of Information Act, *Code of Virginia*. The goal of these guidelines is to provide maximum flexibility to, and minimal burden on, public bodies of state government while complying with the legislative intent of the *Code*.

2. **Scope.** These guidelines are applicable to all public bodies of state government, and become effective on July 1, 1997. There is no intent that these guidelines supersede or modify procedures for responding to requests for official records that are currently in place at the public body level.

### 3. Background.

Senate Bill 326 of the 1996 session of the Virginia General Assembly amended Section 2.1-342, *Code of Virginia*, pertaining to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, to include the requirement to index certain computer databases. In summary this legislation stated that "Beginning July 1, 1997, every public body of state government shall compile, and annually update, an index of computer databases which contains at a minimum those databases created by them on or after July 1, 1997..." The full text of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act may be found at the General Assembly home-page... "legis.state.va.us" under the Legislative Information System.

For context, this amendment immediately follows... "Official records maintained by a public body on a computer or other electronic data processing system which are available to the public under the provisions of this chapter shall be made reasonably accessible to the public at reasonable cost."

4. **Basic Steps in Indexing.** Fundamentally, the process of indexing databases consists of four basic steps:

#### Steps

- 1- Determine if the computer file meets the criteria for indexing.
- 2- Complete the Database Index Reporting Form.
- 3- Submit the Database Index Reporting Form to The Library of Virginia, annually.
- 4- Consolidate individual forms; publish compilation for general public use (The Library of Virginia).

**Step 1- Determine if the computer file meets the criteria for indexing** as discussed in Questions 1-3 of the Database Indexing Decision Tree, Appendix A. (See Paragraph 5, Page 2 of these Guidelines, for a discussion of the Questions to be asked.) If all questions are not answered "Yes," there is no current requirement to index the item.

However, if the answer to each question in the Decision Tree is "Yes," the database must be indexed as discussed in Step 2.

**Step 2- Complete the Database Index Reporting Form** at Appendix B. (See Paragraph 6, Page 3 of these Guidelines, for assistance in completing this form.) The Library of Virginia will use information provided by this form in the publication of the state-wide compilation.

Public bodies are required to maintain greater detail pertaining to data fields and how the data is structured to assist in servicing requests for information. In this regard the *Code* specifically states that the following will be a part of the index:

- a list of data fields,
- a description of the format or record layout, and
- a list of data fields to which public access is restricted

Most likely system-generated data dictionaries will serve this purpose; however, should this not be the case, a possible format for collecting and maintaining this information is provided at Appendix C.

**Step 3- Submit the Database Index Reporting Form to The Library of Virginia** for each applicable database at least annually, to arrive by July 18th.

**Step 4- The Library of Virginia will consolidate the individual forms and publish a state-wide compilation** for general public use.

**5. Application of the Database Indexing Decision Tree.** Using the decision tree at Appendix A, three questions are asked to determine if a file meets the criteria for indexing. If the answer to any of the questions is "No," you have the option to stop or proceed.

**Questions**

- 1- Is the file a database?
- 2- Does the database support the core business of the public body?
- 3- Was the database created on or after July 1, 1997?

**Question 1- Is the file a database?**

Section 2.1-342 of the *Code* defines a "computer database" as a structured collection of data or documents residing in a computer. Although the *Code* provides a definition for "computer database," the definition itself presents an ambiguous term, "structured collection." The *Code* does, however, subsequently use the terms "data fields" and "record layout," and as such it can be construed that a "structured collection of data or documents" is meant to refer to the structures employed by database management applications.

Hence the term "computer database" might be thought of as a structured collection of data, consisting of one file or a group of integrated files (documents), maintained as an information system, consisting of data fields and tables, with a specific record layout, managed by a database management system.

The function of database management system is to provide the software programs that control the organization, storage, and retrieval of the data in the database, as well as providing for the security and integrity of the database.

**Question 2- Does the database support the core business of the public body?**

The *Code* requires that the index of databases be updated annually. The inference is then that databases to be indexed are those which support the repetitive core business of the public body and are thus likely to be present from year to year. These databases probably would be mission related, or support activities required of the public body by statute. From a practical perspective, the databases to be included are not just casual collections of data on ad hoc projects, but rather are collections expected to be in existence during the period covered by the index.

**Question 3- Was the database created on or after July 1, 1997?**

All databases, as defined above, created on or after July 1, 1997 must be indexed and reported annually. Although the *Code* requires, at a minimum, the reporting of those databases created on or after July 1, 1997, public bodies may elect to index and annually report all or some of the currently existing databases meeting the definition above.

For the purpose of indexing, a database is considered to have been "created" when the decision is made that the project, or system, with which the database is associated will proceed to the Design Phase in "structured approach for information systems development and maintenance." (Refer to CIM Model Standard Guidelines 91-3, for Large-Scope Projects; 91-4, for Small-Scope Projects; or 91-5, for Maintenance and Enhancement Projects, depending on the nature of the application.)

**6. Instructions for Completing the Database Index Reporting Form.**

a. Each computer database meeting the criteria of Paragraph 5 will be indexed in accordance with the Database Index Reporting Form at Appendix B. The following is intended to assist in completing the reporting form:

**Item 1- Public body name and numeric code.** Provide the name and numeric code of the public body of state government that maintains and controls access to the database.

**Item 2- Database title.** Provide the complete title of the database. This title should serve to distinguish this database from all other databases owned by this or other agencies.

**Item 3- Database acronym.** Provide the acronym, if any, by which the database is commonly known.

**Item 4- Point of contact.** Provide the name of the office or individual that is to be contacted when seeking information relating to the database.

**Item 5- Phone number.** Provide the phone number, with area code, of the above office or individual.

**Item 6- Signature & date.** Please sign and date the form.

**Item 7- General description of the database and its contents.**

Provide a brief narrative summary of the purpose for which the database is maintained in support of the business of state government and a description of the general contents of the database. If there are data fields to which public access is restricted they should be noted in general terms here, and in more detail on Part B (Appendix C) or within the data dictionary.

This requirement to list restricted access fields is not a requirement to anticipate every possible exemption from disclosure or confidentiality, but rather is intended to provide the public with notice of fields which in and of themselves are protected from mandatory disclosure.

**Item 8- Date the database was last updated.** Note the date upon which the contents of the database were last updated.

**Item 9- Frequency of update.** Note the frequency with which the contents of the database are routinely updated. This can be daily, weekly, monthly, as needed, etc.

**Item 10a- Forms in which the database or its contents may be made available.** Provide a description of each form in which the database can be copied or reproduced and made available. These forms will most likely include various digital as well as hard copy formats.

**Item 10b- Schedule of fees.** Provide a schedule of fees, if any, for the production of copies in each available form described above, be it digital or hard copy. The schedule of fees cannot exceed the charges authorized in the Code, i.e., a reasonable charge to reimburse the cost of copying, research time, and computer time to supply the records.



b. Once completed, the Reporting Forms are to be forwarded at least annually, to arrive not later than July 18th, to:

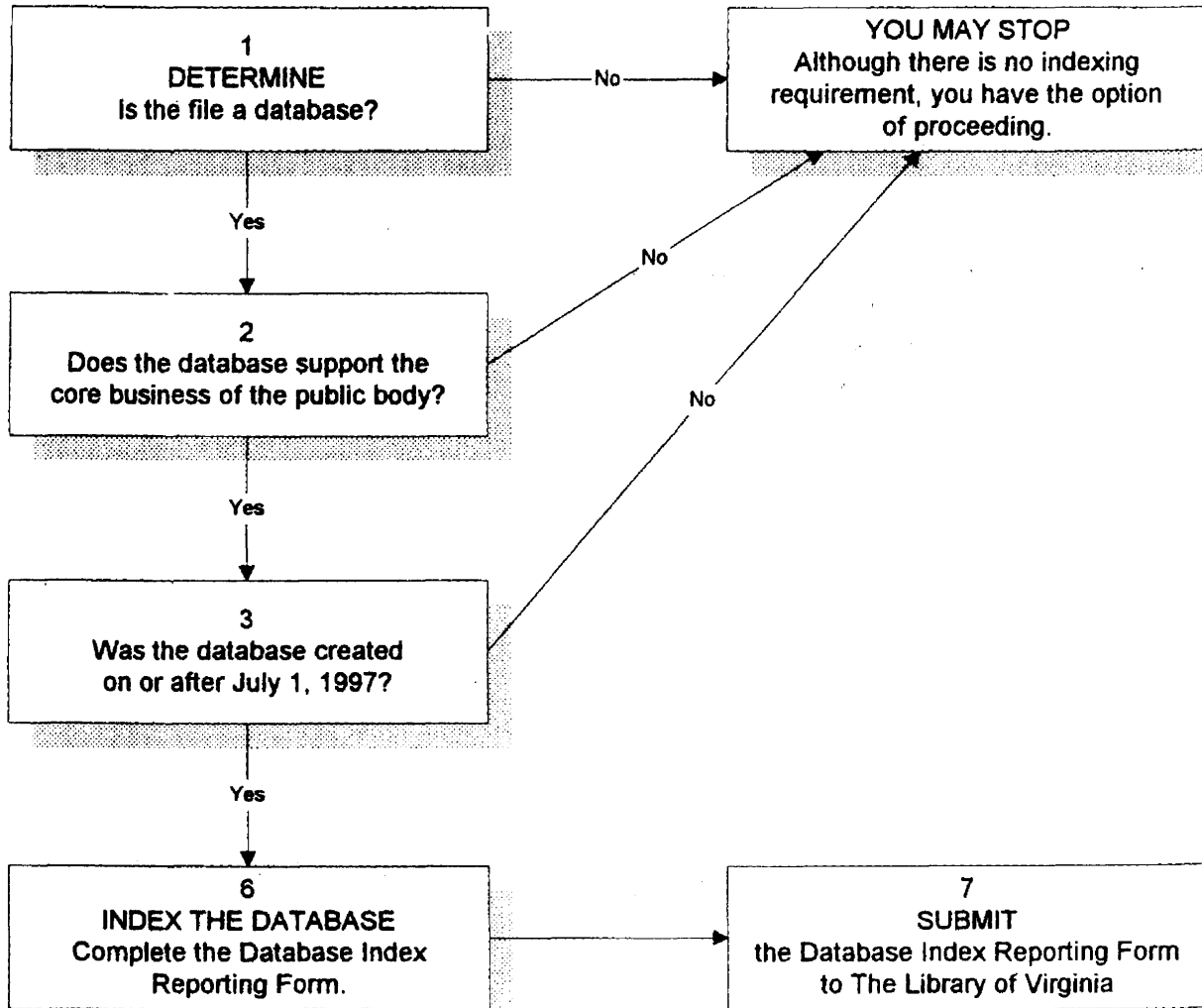
Mary S. Clark  
The Library of Virginia  
800 East Broad Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-1905

**7. Suggestions for Improvements.** Suggestions for future improvements to these Guidelines should be sent to:

Art Phaup  
Department of Information Technology  
101 South 7th Street  
Richmond, VA 23219  
Email: [aphaup.dit@state.va.us](mailto:aphaup.dit@state.va.us)  
Phone: (804) 225-2486

Appendix A

**Database Indexing Decision Tree**



**Commonwealth of Virginia  
Database Index Reporting Form**

1. **Public Body Name & Numeric Code:**

4. **Point of Contact:**

2. **Database Title:**

5. **Phone Number:**

3. **Database Acronym:**

6. **Signature & Date:**

7. **Database Description and Contents:** *(Provide a brief narrative summary of the purpose for which the database is maintained in support of the business of state government and a description of the general contents of the database. Indicate known restrictions to public access.)*

*Note: Specific information relating to data fields, record/table layouts, and known restrictions to public access is maintained by the public body. Please contact the point of contact noted in Item 4 for further details.*

8. **Date of Last Update:**

9. **Frequency of Update:**  Daily,  Weekly,  Monthly, Other:

10. **Formats Available and Schedule of Fees:** *(Provide a description of each format in which the database is made available, and the cost, if any, of each format.)*

a. Format

b. Cost

Send completed form to The Library of Virginia, 800 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219-1905 (Attn: Mary Clark).





