

Proposal to ASC

Context

For almost 10 years, we have migrated Amaravati email addresses from the original 'free' gmail accounts to the commercial version of gmail, called Google Workspace, which is free for now for non-profits. Organizations benefit from this service, because all the email addresses belong to one group and can easily share documents within this group. Over the years we have seen many people using collaborative functions where all can edit and create documents together. The use of unlimited file storage and sharing has proven useful for us as a community. However, we have come to a point where there are so many of these files and documents that it's hard to find them or understand where they are filed or saved. Therefore, the system has become like some kind of **information silos**, where a great deal of information is available to all of us, but hidden away in some digital cabinet.

What's missing is comparable to the (very!) outdated hanging file cabinet at the back office that provided information about all kinds of topics within the monastery. By just browsing through, one could access a lot of different types of information that were quite readily available and accessible to our own community. If anyone had more information on a particular topic, anyone was able to add it to the 'file'. Currently, this type of file cabinet is missing in our digital setup. There are plenty of documents, but it is sitting on our own desk so to say, most of it is unknown to the majority of the community.

Proposal

The proposal is to create such a **digital filing cabinet**, where information can easily be found. One of the benefits of the digital world is that some information can be restricted, so that confidential, meeting minutes or agendas can continue to be protected. For instance, a lot of people are not aware of the different decision bodies like the ASC, ABC, ADL, EST to name a few. It would have been helpful to have information that introduced these committees, how frequent they meet, their area of responsibilities, who partakes in those meetings etc. This helps the (new or even old) community members to understand who does what. For those who are familiar and authorized, they can also find more information about more restricted information (such as minutes). There is also a wealth of other resources that Amaravati has, like the photo drive, the audio/dhamma drive, the drive where all the technical drawings of Amaravati are stored, etc. Such a digital filing cabinet would be able to reveal this information more easily. Currently, it's mostly by chance when (some) community members know about it.

This digital filing cabinet is a type of **wiki technology**, where people can access and file the information. Such an online system is a program that is readily available for anyone, it's open-source and frequently updated (www.bookstackapp.com). It can be installed and maintained by ourselves, like our website, or can be outsourced to a commercial party without us needing to worry about it (similar to our email system). Furthermore, there is a complimentary program that can be linked whereby discussions about a certain topic (e.g. suggestions and comments on these wiki pages) can be grouped together within a particular area. We have run a short trial during the Vassa with 5-6 people, and have found this particularly useful for those that hold a lot of information and need to share this information with a wider community (e.g. kitchen, maintenance, site management, transport, building projects etc).

Community wide pilot 2024 (Launch)

We wanted to propose this type of digital filing system to the community. Ideally, starting with the more information 'hungry' areas affecting a larger number of community members, like the transport coordinator, maintenance/site management, the current 7b building projects and the kitchen. This would alleviate the difficulty of constant updates to a wider community. After these initial steps, we could extend it from there if there is a positive response for all involved. The costs are minimal since we will try to use the current digital infrastructure from our websites. Ideally, this trial would be ready for the Vassa, where there is ample time to test it with the community and a review could be done at the end of the year. The preparation would start after the winter retreat. This would involve Tan Cittadhammo spending time to help setting this up with the assistance of Ajahn Narindo. The bulk of the work is to create the right taxonomy and categorisation (structure) for the information, as well as uploading and inserting the relevant information on the system.

Note: This is not a one-size-fits-all solution for all information at Amaravati. Its objective is mainly to make digital information that is already there, more accessible and available. Further trying to reduce the data silos that have since started when using our Google email and documents 10 years ago.

We would like to ask the ASC to consider this and allow us to set this up for the community so information can be more easily shared and accessible in a way similar to when we had paper information filed in a cabinet where community members could refer to.

Best wishes,

Narindo & Cittadhammo Bhikkhu

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