Technically Assisted Review: Some Personal Observations

Tim Gollins
Head of Digital Archiving
National Records of Scotland
Technically Assisted Review (TAR)

- TAR, What is it?
- TAR, Is it real?
- TAR, What is it good for?
- TAR, An operational example
- Other published work
- My View
TAR, What is it?
Breaking it down

- **Technically**
  - Tools and Techniques developed by Information Retrieval (IR) community (largely Machine Learning)
  - System learns from examples what “good” looks like (Lots of different approaches and algorithms)

- **Assisted**
  - HELPS humans be more efficient - does not replace.

- **Review**
  - conceptually “looks” at everything.
TAR, Is it real?

- Yes! - In e-Discovery
  - For reviewing for responsiveness to the “Matter”
  - For reviewing for “Legal Privilege” (Limited Success)
- Significant academic research
- Significant commercial investment
- Economic driver - Money to be made!
TAR, what is it good for? Not Absolutely Nothing!

- Huh - Say it again!
- BUT the detailed task matters!
- e-discovery is NOT
  - e-Archiving selection
  - e-Archiving appraisal
  - e-Archiving sensitivity review!
- Not all dogs can heard sheep
  - Or Sniff out Drugs or Sniff out Bombs
TAR,
A real example of use with Email

- Public release of Email of Governor Tim Kaine (Library of Virginia)
- Total Collection 1.3 Million emails
  - Being (or has been) released in batches
- Reviewing for
  - Privacy & Legal Privilege (some success)
- See Grossman and Cormack
  - University of Waterloo for all complex details
Other Published Work

- **The National Archives (TNA)**
  - Research Report February 2016
    - Largely positive, qualitative, results of applying e-discovery tools on sample records
  - Also “How to read 43,000 cabinet papers” - TNA Blog 20/12/17

- **Papers on “Sensitivity Review”**
  - Graham MacDonald (Glasgow University)
  - Positive, quantitative, results of fundamental algorithmic research
My View:
TAR - Fact, Fiction or Jam Tomorrow?

- Fact – YES (E-Discovery)
- Fiction – YES
  - Significant risk of oversimplification of tasks
  - Significant risk of hype
- Jam Tomorrow – YES (For Archives)
  - No generic solution for archives
    - Little or no work on “Archival” User Interfaces
  - Only a small amount of core research being done
Questions?