

## Information Management Advice 54 A Records Management toolkit for Local Government

*Local Government is often considered the tier of government 'closest to the people' and is involved in many activities that affect the everyday lives of the community.*

*The Local Government Act 1993 section 20 describes the role of councils:*

- *to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the community*
- *to represent the interests of the community*
- *to provide for the peace, order and good government of the municipal area*

*With such a broad scope of responsibilities, effective records management by Local Government is critical. The purpose of this advice is to provide a comprehensive overview of the essential elements to be considered when implementing (or reviewing) effective records management program operations, whether the organisation is a Council, joint authority or other associated business entity.*

### Introduction

Records management governs the practice of formalised records programs, and of any officer who creates or uses records in the course of their business activities. Records management in a Local Government organisation includes:

- setting policies and standards,
- assigning responsibilities and accountability,
- establishing and publicizing procedures and guidelines,
- providing a range of services relating to the management and use of records,
- designing, implementing and administering specialized systems for managing records, and
- integration of records management principles and protocols into business systems, and organisational processes.

A Records program should not be viewed as simply the mail room – Records management is far more than processing mail!

### Selling the benefits

Records contain information that is a valuable resource and an important business asset. A systematic approach to the management of records is essential for agencies to protect and preserve records as evidence of business activity, decisions and actions. A records management system, whether paper based or electronic, results in a source of information about business activities that can support subsequent

activities and business decisions, as well as ensuring accountability to present and future stakeholders. It also promotes business efficiencies by allowing re-use of existing information – preventing staff from having to ‘reinvent the wheel’.

Records enable organisations to:

- conduct business in an orderly, efficient and accountable manner,
- deliver services in a consistent and equitable manner,
- support and document policy formation and managerial decision making,
- provide consistency, continuity, and productivity in management and administration,
- facilitate the effective performance of activities throughout an organisation (including business efficiencies gained through information resource sharing),
- provide continuity in the event of a disaster,
- meet legislative and regulatory requirements including archival, audit and oversight activities,
- provide protection and support in litigation including the management of risks associated with the existence of, or lack of, evidence of organisational activity,
- protect the interests of the organisation and the rights of employees, clients and present and future stakeholders,
- support and document current and future research and development activities, developments and achievements, as well as historical research,
- provide evidence of business, personal and cultural activity,
- establish business, personal and cultural identity, and
- maintain corporate, personal or collective memory.

## **A Recipe for Records Management**

To be effective, a Records Management program should, at the very minimum, encompass the following elements:

- A senior management ‘champion’ to support and provide strategic Information Management/Records Management (IM/RM) direction to the organisation
- An understanding of the legislation that directly affects and informs LG activities (see Appendix I)
- A Records Management strategy identifying:
  - agency objectives, needs and risks;
  - actions required to achieve objectives and address deficiencies/poor outcomes including timelines;
  - audit/QA and reporting mechanisms;
  - resource requirements (financial and otherwise); and
  - assignment of responsibility/accountability for the agency recordkeeping framework including governance, reporting, key functions and prioritisation of tasks according to risk.
- A documented IM/RM Policy with identified responsibilities and accountabilities for staff at all levels of the organisation. See *TAHO Advice 50 Developing an Information Management Policy*. This policy must be endorsed by senior executive, and reviewed annually.
- An IM/RM clause in all agency position descriptions, and inclusion in performance management processes and/or agreements.

- Adequate dedicated and appropriately skilled resources to support the records management function. The ratio of records staff to general staff can fluctuate significantly, however the required number will largely depend on an assessment of an agency's maturity in terms of culture, existing recordkeeping practice, the model adopted (centralised or decentralised, devolved, etc), allocated responsibilities and required skillsets. It may be that specialist staff can be contracted for particular projects, or at peak periods during the year, to complement core teams.

*Depending on the size of the agency, a "whole-of-agency" Information Management framework outlining agency vision and leadership may sit over the RM strategy, which is the organisation's systematic approach to the management of information and records.*

## Steps for setting up/improving a Records Management program

- Conduct investigation
  - Collect information from documentary sources and interviews; identify and document the role and purpose of the organisation, its structure, its legal, regulatory, business and political environment, critical factors and critical weaknesses associated with recordkeeping. The overall aim here is to gain an understanding of the organisation's role and operations, and an awareness of how recordkeeping is conducted. This information may be used to contribute to the development of a business case for a records program implementation.
- Business analysis
  - The aim here is to analyse the business of the agency in order to gain a thorough understanding of the business activities carried out. It involves identifying and documenting each business function, activity and transaction that dictates the flow of business processes, in order to establish a classification structure known as a **business classification scheme**. A business classification scheme is a hierarchical depiction of the agency's functions, activities and transactions that can be used to support a variety of records management processes.
- Identify Records requirements
  - The aim here is to identify and document your recordkeeping requirements. Recordkeeping requirements are requirements arising from regulatory sources, legislative mandates, business needs and community expectations. They identify the types of records you need to create, and the management framework you need to establish in order to accountably manage all the business information that is necessary for your organisation.
- Assessment of existing systems & processes
  - Identify and analyse existing recordkeeping systems and other information systems to measure their performance against the requirements for records. Determine whether systems are in fact *recordkeeping* systems, capable of meeting requirements for record creation and management. This will expose potential areas of risk, and inform strategies to address, from process/procedure implementation through to potential redevelopment or replacement.
- Identify strategies
  - The aim is to identify strategies for satisfying recordkeeping requirements, which may include development and adoption of policies, procedures and practices; designing new systems; implementing systems in a way which satisfies a recordkeeping requirement, or

adopting standards to mitigate identified risk and transform business systems into adequate recordkeeping systems. Strategies may also include change management, communication and training.

- Design records system (paper, electronic or hybrid)
  - The aim here is to put the strategies into practice to improve or implement recordkeeping systems that meet all legislative and business requirements; ensure that the system supports, and does not hinder, business processes; assess and, if necessary, redesign business processes and operational business and communication systems to incorporate recordkeeping. This is where tangible solutions are developed to address the issues identified in previous steps, and an implementation plan devised.
- Implement
  - Implementing a recordkeeping system should be undertaken systematically using appropriate project planning methodologies and with a view to integrating the operation of the recordkeeping systems with business processes and related systems. Note that an implementation may not necessarily be of an EDRMS, but may involve the introduction of new policies, procedures and tools. If this is the case, this step is where new practices are communicated or distributed to the organisation, and training is conducted. As with all implementation plans, it should involve a communication plan, adequate training, and senior management endorsement and support.
- Review
  - The aim of this step is to measure the effectiveness of the new system, after implementation. This may be undertaken by interviewing key staff; using questionnaires; observing the system in operation; examining procedure manuals, training materials and other documentation; and carrying out random checks on the quality of records and control measures. Review and assess the performance of the system, initiate and monitor corrective action and establish a regime of continuous monitoring and regular evaluation.
- Resourcing & support
  - The aim here is to clearly identify resource requirements, responsibility and accountability for the ongoing operations and performance of the records management program. As the overall business accountability lies with the General Manager or CEO under the *Archives Act 1983*, this may include delegation to a senior manager accountable for performance and compliance. Other considerations may include:
    - Centralisation versus decentralisation of the records management function and operational tasks – with appropriate training and support small agencies *may* be able to manage a decentralised function adequately with nominated information custodians located in discrete business areas. Note this model will require a RIM specialist with day to day responsibility for operational performance of the team, including audit and compliance reporting; performance management, advice and support.
    - allocation of roles/responsibilities and performance measures;
    - tools and technology;
    - allocation of budget (where applicable);
    - modification of existing or development of new position descriptions (statements of duties);

- Requirements for and provision of/access to both specialist and general training for staff on an ongoing basis

## Records Program operations

Daily operations are the basis for the development of a procedure manual for the records team. This promotes consistency of process, and information sharing, in the event of new staff, volunteers or contractors. Procedure manuals should be regularly reviewed and updated as required to allow for organisational and procedural change. Whether paper or electronic recordkeeping systems are in place, key functions include:

- Record identification
- Record capture
- Registration
- Indexing
- Classification
- Distribution & tracking
- Search & retrieval
- Access
- Security
- Storage
- Scheduling, retention & disposal
- Records transfer
- e-Discovery & Disposal Freezes
- Vital Records
- Disaster Management
- QA & Auditing
- Monitoring (program, processes and people) & reporting on activities, performance and compliance
- Resourcing

## Tools you will need

- Supporting IM/RK internal policies, procedures and guidelines for general staff and management.
  - Induction manuals
  - User manuals & procedures
  - RM specific policy framework including other key policies – acceptable use, social media, etc
  - Data-entry standards – acceptable formats for addresses, dates, salutations, etc
  - Standard naming conventions for:
    - Files
    - documents
  - Consideration of RM requirements in regular business activity
    - Requirements planning for new initiatives
    - Corporate governance
    - Risk Management
    - Information Management
    - Information Technology

- Legal
  - Outsourcing requirements – putting together Service Level Agreements (SLAs) & contractual arrangements
  - Inclusion in annual internal audit programs
- Induction & refresher **records management** training for all staff groups (*also see TAHO Advice / Government employees responsibilities in relation to State Records*)
- Specialist training for nominated Records officers within the organisation (visit the TAHO training page for a list of courses available for agency staff responsible for the RM function)
- An operational procedure manual developed for the Records program (reviewed annually)
- Authorised retention and disposal schedules for Local Government records (e.g. DA2200)
- A regular disposal and archiving routine, including the management of an agency Register of Records destroyed; and staff trained in archiving and disposal including management of unscheduled records
- Documented information architecture including an information asset register for the identification and management of information assets. This is developed by assessing the internal business environment of the agency, including the identification of business systems used to store records, their records management functionality, and relationships between systems. (More holistically, information architecture incorporates documented business processes, helps to identify appropriate use of systems, and duplication of information across disparate systems, sets standards for coordinated metadata/terminology use across systems, helps identify deficiencies, etc).
- A business classification scheme/file plan. This is informed by defining the business functions, activities and processes for which records must be created and managed, and also can inform the structure for how information is classified and grouped for ongoing reference and retrieval.
- High level business risk analysis and program specific risk assessments specific to the RM function (see your Risk Management Coordinator and also NAA Check up)
- Vital records program & disaster management plan including a disaster manual or checklist for staff to follow in the event of a disaster or incident
- Approved secondary storage (whether in-house or service provider)
- QA, auditing and review mechanisms
- An appropriate security and access register

## Other Instruments and controls

- Metadata (paper systems are implicit, but electronic systems require metadata to be explicit)
- Barcoding (hard copy physical files) – useful for tracking records between physical locations
- Thesaurus (preferred terms) to assist in the development of record classification schemes, indexing and titling. Examples include Keywords for Councils, a derivative of Keywords AAA based on the classification scheme advocated in the Australian Standard for Records Management AS ISO 15489.
- Glossary/vocabulary of recordkeeping terms

## Further Advice

For more detailed advice, please contact:

Government Information Strategy Unit  
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## Acknowledgements

National Archives of Australia Check Up 2.0 [http://naa.gov.au/Images/Check-UpQuestions\\_tcm16-64667.pdf](http://naa.gov.au/Images/Check-UpQuestions_tcm16-64667.pdf)  
Australian Standard AS ISO 15489.1 & Guidelines 15489.2 <http://www.saiglobal.com/Information/Standards/>  
Public Records Office of Victoria  
VAGO Records Management Checklist – Victorian Auditor-General’s Office  
<http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/publications/2008-09/20080730-Rec-Manage-Checklist-Full.pdf>  
NSW State Records <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/dirks-manual/step-by-step-through-dirks/> and  
<http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/government-recordkeeping-manual/guidance/guidelines/guideline-13>

## Information Security Classification

This document has been security classified using the Tasmanian Government Information Security classification standard as PUBLIC and will be managed according to the requirements of the Tasmanian Government Information Security Policy.

## Document Development History

### Build Status

Version	Date	Author	Reason	Sections
	March 2014	Sam Foster-Davies	Initial Release	All

### Amendments in this Release

Section Title	Section Number	Amendment Summary

Issued: June 2014

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## **Appendix A - Legislation**

- Archives Act 1983 (under review)
- Archives Regulations
- Local Government Act 1993 (Section 83 specifically refers to records)
- Taxation Administration Act 1997
- Right to Information Act 2009
- Evidence Act 2001
- Electronic Transactions Act 2000
- Libraries Act 1984 (under review)
- Limitations Act 1974
- Personal Information Protection Act 2004
- Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993
- Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994
- Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal Act 1993
- Local Government (Building and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1993
- Building Act 2000
- Dog Control Act 2000
- Public Health Act 1997
- Local Government (Highways) Act 1982
- Roads and Jetties Act 1935
- Traffic Act 1925
- Sewers and Drains Act 1954
- Water Management Act 1999
- Waterworks Clauses Act 1952
- Financial Management and Audit Act 1990
- Ombudsman Act 1978
- Judicial Review Act 2000