

Information Management Advice 63 Part 2 - Government Administrative Change: Advice for Senior Management

Introduction

This Advice is to assist agencies with the increasingly complex task of transferring records, information and knowledge in the event of a Government administrative change.

Best practice in government administrative change recognises the need to ensure that paper and electronic records are transferred to a receiving agency as soon as possible.

This should be factored into the initial planning phases of government administrative work, because the inability to access required information would represent considerable risks to the conduct of business.

This Advice is for senior managers overseeing government administrative change, and hands on practitioners responsible for carrying out the transfer. It should support you to take the actions you need to transfer and receive records, information and knowledge effectively, without impacting on business continuity and service delivery.

Overview

Transferring and receiving bodies should have a clear understanding of their separate and joint roles and responsibilities, and should jointly analyse the steps needed for the transfer.

As much information as possible should be made available to staff in both organisations, at the earliest opportunity. Planning communication with customers and end-users to meet their need for information on the changes, must also be a priority.

Senior management have an important role to play in the transfer process. They should be informed of the action required to carry out the transfer without loss of information, interruption to business continuity, or reduction in customer or end-user services provided. They should be kept informed of progress on the tasks, and should set a specific budget to meet the costs of transfer.

This Advice outlines the key lessons and guiding principles to be applied in transferring records, information and knowledge in the event of a Government administrative change. It is designed to be particularly relevant to senior management, and those with oversight responsibilities.

Key Recommendations

- Any potential problems likely to affect the transfer of electronic records to an incompatible system must be identified in advance.
- Requirements for the continuity of digital information should be identified in advance to enable impact assessment, risk management, and the identification of savings and efficiencies.
- Opportunities to manage records and information more efficiently and effectively should be identified and acted upon.
- For any substantial government administrative change, a joint Information Transition Team should be set up to carry out the work required.
- Each stage of the transfer should be planned and documented, with all parties understanding their responsibilities.
- The agency Record Managers/Officers of both organisations should sign a formal transfer agreement once the transfer has been completed.
- Training in new information and other systems must be provided, as appropriate, for staff at all levels.
- Maximum use should be made of existing knowledge management tools, such as staff directories and Intranets, to ease the transition between the two organisations.

What is a Government Administrative Change?

Elections or decisions of the Tasmanian Government, such as ministerial portfolio reshuffles, agency/portfolio mergers, or new legislation, can result in administrative changes to Tasmanian Government agencies. An administrative change refers to a change in the responsibilities for the administration of government functions. These changes can occur as a result of:

- the transfer of a function between Tasmanian Government agencies
- the transfer of a function to another government, either from Tasmania to another government or into Tasmania from another tier of government, e.g. the Commonwealth
- the creation of a new function
- the abolition of an existing function
- the amalgamation of agencies into a larger agency
- the closure or privatisation of an agency

Why is Advance Planning for Records Transfer Important?

Advance planning for the transfer of records is critical, as the consequences of mistakes can be far-reaching. Failure to transfer information and knowledge effectively between agencies, can make it impossible to maintain business continuity.

The consequences have included the loss of vital information and substantial additional costs. During transfer, departments can also easily lose the ability to use digital information to support business requirements. Loss of vital functionality can render information useless; thus becoming a liability rather than an asset.

TAHO has developed guidance on maintaining the continuity of digital information. See:

- *Advice 37 Keeping Digital Records Accessible*
- *Advice 38 Information Custodians and Digital Continuity and Checklist: Testing for continuity of a digital information asset*

Additional problems may arise in the longer term. Personnel files, for example, may need to be traceable in case of occupational health or other issues emerging many years later.

The move away from traditional paper files to a complex, and potentially incompatible, range of electronic means of capturing, storing and using information underlines the importance of focusing appropriate resources and attention on the task. A wide range of information needs to be transferred between the transferring and receiving organisations, including:

- Paper files - relevant paper records, including personnel and index files.
- Electronic information – e.g., documents held on shared drives and contacts databases; messages and attachments held on email systems; information stored in Electronic Records Management Systems (EDRMS), Geographical Information Systems (GIS), case management systems and datasets; or made available via wikis, websites or Intranets
- Relevant publications, guidance or training manuals and procedural information, whether in hard copy or electronic format.

All Agencies have a responsibility to develop a project plan setting out the key tasks that are required for a successful transfer of functions. This can then be put into action immediately when government administrative change is announced.

What Guiding Principles need to be applied?

Senior management and other senior staff should apply the following guiding principles in overseeing the government administrative change:

- The process must be jointly owned and managed by both organisations.
- Both should approach the change in a spirit of openness and co-operation.
- The outcome must enable both bodies to comply fully with legislative requirements e.g. Right to Information.
- There must be a focus on effective communication with the end-user or customer.
- Opportunities for realising savings and efficiencies, or managing records in innovative ways must be seized.
- Adequate resources must be made available to ensure business continuity, especially in high-profile and customer-facing areas.

What are the Issues and Risks?

Administrative change carries issues and risks to the function of an agency and its records. Matters to consider include:

Senior Management Support

Senior management ownership and support is crucial to the success of the transfer of the records, and their associated function. The transfer of functions and their records is part of wider organisational change that may affect people and how they work, for example, through a change in role or office relocation. There is a risk that the records of transferred functions are overlooked during this organisational transition. For more information see *State Records Guideline 3 Managing Recordkeeping Risks during Government Administrative Change*, particularly Checklist of actions and expected outputs for Agency Senior Executives.

Organisations must ensure that senior managers are aware that records must be transferred with their function. **TAHO must be contacted as early as possible. This should be included in the brief to senior management from the transition team.**

Resources

The transfer process is often a significant, resource-intensive undertaking. In some cases, trained personnel may be required to carry out specialised work such as electronic data migration. Resourcing for storage and relocation activities may also be a consideration.

The cost of these activities can vary and will require some budget allocation. Management and technical experts from both agencies should be involved early on.

Transferring Electronic Records

Agencies should not underestimate the technical implications and time involved with transferring electronic records and their metadata. If the context of the records (e.g., metadata and links) is not appropriately managed upon transfer, there is a risk the agency will not be able to access or use the information and knowledge in its business operations.

Consult with the system(s) vendor and staff with responsibility for information technology (IT) as early as possible, to identify and agree a migration strategy. Managers with budget allocation responsibility should be involved during the process, particularly where migration costs are a consideration.

The migration strategy should be documented in a plan which is approved by all parties.

Unauthorised Disposal

Records belonging to functions undergoing administrative change are vulnerable to unlawful disposal, including illegal destruction and loss. If there is limited time for planning prior to the change occurring, do not dispose of any records without the authority of the State Archivist. Advise the administrative head of your agency about the records as soon as possible. Ensure all staff understand the organisation's policies and guidelines on information management.

Contact the the Information Policy and Strategy Unit team with any questions on unauthorised disposal (see contact details on page 7).

Vital Records

The integrity of any vital records, records that are essential to the ongoing business of an agency, need to be maintained once transferred. This is so business can continue in the event of a disaster. Identify these records early with the transferring agency and deal with them as a priority.

For more information refer *TAHO Advice 52 Identifying and Managing Vital Records*.

Information Security

Unauthorised access to sensitive records can occur if permissions are not managed appropriately. Consider what security levels, caveats or classifications are currently in place on the records, and whether additional security measures are necessary. Make sure they are appropriately maintained.

For more information refer TAHO Information Security resources available on the TAHO website.

Who should do the work?

For any substantial government administrative change, both the exporting and receiving organisations will need a Change Management Project Team to manage the change and oversee the transfer of people and functions. The two Project Teams should establish a joint government administrative change Information Transition Team to manage the handover of information and records in accordance with TAHO Advice and Guidelines. The Information Transition Team should be represented at Project Team meetings and should include the Agency Record Managers/Officers and other records management and knowledge management staff, as well as in-house and external IT personnel. Both organisations should make adequate budgetary provision for this work.

The Information Transition Team will take charge of identifying and arranging for the transfer of relevant paper and electronic records. It should also ensure the carry-over of the informal knowledge and information which, while more difficult to pin down, can be vital to the effective conduct of business. Maximum use should be made of existing knowledge management tools such as staff directories and Intranets to ease the transition between the two organisations.

Best Practice Basics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarity about responsibilities and commitments is essential.• Transfer of records and protocols specifying action to be taken must be documented.• All decisions on the movement, disposal and destruction of records and information must be documented.• Although staff will normally transfer with the function and hence provide a source of expertise and experience, a function statement and handover notes should be prepared to ensure continuity.• When records are transferred, they should be accompanied by whatever has been used to identify and retrieve specified information from them, such as indexes (original or copy as applicable) or, for electronic records, copies of relevant databases used to describe and track such assets.

Recommended Reading

- State Records Guideline 3 Managing Recordkeeping Risks during Government Administrative Change
- TAHO Advice 55 Change Management: Preparing for Change
- TAHO Advice 52 Identifying and Managing Vital Records
- TAHO Information Security Toolkit
- TAHO Advice 37 Keeping Digital Records Accessible
- TAHO Advice 38 Information Custodians and Digital Continuity and Checklist: Testing for continuity of a digital information asset

TAHO Guidelines and Advices are available from the GISU website.

Further Advice

For more detailed advice, please contact:

Government Information Strategy Unit
Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
91 Murray Street
HOBART TASMANIA 7000
Telephone: 03 6165 5581
Email: gisu@education.tas.gov.au

Acknowledgements

This advice is largely based on:

- Machinery of Government: Guidance on Transfer of Records, Information and Knowledge, The National Archives of the United Kingdom.

Also referenced:

- Guide to Managing Records during Administrative change in Public offices and Local Authorities, Archives New Zealand, Recordkeeping Guide G13, December 2008

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

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Amendments in this Release

Section Title	Section Number	Amendment Summary
		This is the first release of this document.

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Ross Latham
State Archivist