

# A National Response to ISO 15489: A Case Study of the Jamaican Experience

A group of records management professionals in Jamaica joined forces to determine how they could best use ISO 15489, the international records management standard, to advance RIM

**Sharon Alexander-Gooding and Sonia Black**

**B**ecause of its colonial history, Jamaica has had a strong culture of recordkeeping – and here “recordkeeping” was taken literally, as there were few or no efforts at retention scheduling. This culture allowed the volume of records to grow to such overwhelming proportions that it contributed to the breakdown of the British civil registry system. Another indication that the recordkeeping culture needed to change came from a 1997 Jamaica Archives and Records Department (JARD) report on the state of records and information management (RIM) in the public sector. It warned that, due to the rapid growth in information and telecommunications, and the tendency of agencies to prescribe automated solutions in their technical assistance projects, functions and decision-making

processes in organizations were changing and that RIM also needed to evolve and progress if it was to survive in the new paradigm of a “reform- and results-oriented public sector.”

Since then, several records management and archival bodies have made significant contributions in reviewing and strengthening records management in

Jamaica and in the wider 23-island Caribbean region. These include JARD, which has been instrumental in the establishment of a career path for records management professionals in the public sector; the Caribbean Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (CARBICA), which has taken initiatives to devise a framework for developing records management programs in the region; and the Jamaica Chapter of ARMA International (JARMA), which has created a network of professionals actively pursuing solutions to records management issues and challenges, particularly in developing avenues for professional training.

However, despite significant strides, records professionals in the region remained largely dissatisfied with what seemed a slow rate of change. They were mostly frustrated by the lack of recogni-

## At the Core

This article

- ▶ provides an overview of records management in Jamaica
- ▶ presents a case study of Jamaica’s approach to adopting ISO 15489, the international records management standard
- ▶ gives an historical account of Caribbean recordkeeping initiatives and practices

tion of their role as an integral part of strategic decision-making in organizations and the failure of their organizations to integrate recordkeeping requirements in the adoption of new technologies. To remedy this, a small group of RIM professionals in Jamaica joined forces to see how they could best capitalize on the status of the international records management standard, *ISO 15489-1:2001 Information and Documen-*

adopted as Jamaica's national standard. Its approach is to emphasize the responsibility of every RIM professional to "own the standard" by ensuring that its principles and practices are actively supported.

### Initial Steps Toward Adoption

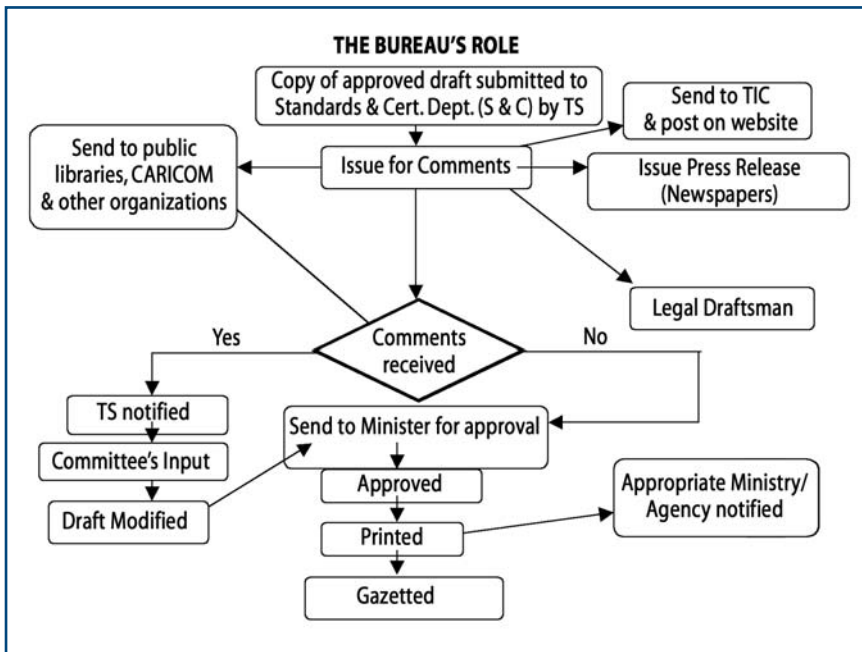
As a first step, the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, in collaboration with JARD and the Bureau of Standards, Jamaica, held a sensitization

workshop. More than 70 people attended and, after being introduced to the components of ISO 15489, they unanimously agreed that steps should be taken to adopt it as a Jamaican national standard.

representatives from the library community, archivists, information and documentation specialist, attorneys, IT professionals, and a facilitator/coordinator from the Bureau of Standards. Representatives of the RIM sector reviewed the standard in light of various other relevant international and national standards to determine if it should be adopted as a Jamaican standard intact or if it needed to be adapted to reflect local conditions. Among the standard's strengths, they noted that it

- is a global standard widely accepted by both the archives and records management professions. As such, it has the legitimacy and weight needed to galvanize the local information industry into positive action.
- establishes world-class best practices. Consequently, the standard provides a framework for assessing and auditing records programs that can be applied to any organization globally. This is especially significant to a developing country like Jamaica whose business community has many multinational corporations that participate in global trade and must conform to international practices. Furthermore, donor agencies are increasingly concerned that countries accessing funds have sound recordkeeping practices to ensure transparency and accountability.
- is generic to all recordkeeping systems, delineating basic principles that can be applied to records in all formats and media.
- It clearly speaks to responsibilities for records and the importance of appropriate policies and procedures. This is a critical area in a culture where compliance and risk management are not of high significance and where records management functions are often not properly identified and assigned. The standard provides guidance in developing policy manuals in which responsibilities for records are assigned not only to records managers but also to system administrators,

Figure 1: The Bureau of Standards' Role in Adopting Standards



tation – Records Management – Part 1: General (ISO 15489), and use it to gain momentum in advancing RIM best practices and developing effective infrastructures for the delivery of records and information services.

The group felt that ISO 15489 provides a strategic platform from which to launch this effort, as it not only presents a model for effective records management practices, but also represents a sterling example of the effectiveness of collaboration between the archives and records management communities – which is especially important in a country with a strong archival tradition. (Editor's note: See sidebar for a historical perspective of records management in the Caribbean.) The group's goal is for ISO 15489 to be

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To begin this process, a technical committee (TC) was convened and the roles of the records management sector and the Bureau of Standards in the preparation and adoption of the standards were outlined. (See Figure 1) The TC was comprised of representatives from a wide cross-section of both public- and private-sector organizations that could – in addition to making a significant contribution to the deliberations – also provide considerable leverage in promoting the standard nationally. The group included

department heads, and all employees who create records. In addition, it highlights the role of senior management and the need to make them aware that although recordkeeping is delegated, they have overall responsibility to ensure that adequate records are created and captured by information and processing systems that support business activities.

- is applicable to RIM in a quality framework. The standard complements the ISO 9000 quality standards that have been implemented by several Jamaican manufacturing and serv-

ice companies. Consequently, it is relevant to the private sector, which lags behind governmental agencies in implementing formal records management programs.

- provides a detailed outline for designing and implementing records systems, specifying requirements for the structure, content, and implementation of records management programs.
- is extremely useful in promoting RIM programs to senior management. Not only does it articulate the benefits of records management, but

as a standard, it is a point of reference for gaining support for system improvements.

The reviewers also noted the following weaknesses and gaps in coverage that need to be acknowledged and for which compensating strategies need to be developed:

- It is a voluntary standard. Consequently, efforts need to be taken to ensure that its principles are fully subscribed to and accepted in order for its imperatives to be reinforced.
- It does not include the management

## The Establishment of Archives and

**T**he Caribbean region is diverse – comprised of some 23 islands that span from Belize in Central America to Suriname in South America – and its recordkeeping development has been influenced by each island’s respective colonial heritage. For example, Curacao was influenced by the Dutch’s perceived importance of archives and The Netherlands’ injection of capital to develop its archives and train archivists. In the English-speaking Caribbean, however, records were either transported to Britain or kept for administrative reasons only and, in some cases, destroyed after active use. Any thrust toward developing an infrastructure for records’ preservation in their natural habitat was postponed for lack of funds. It was not until the 1950s that a strong move toward developing archives on the islands began. During this time an archivist was appointed in Jamaica, and he traveled to Trinidad and Barbados to survey the existing archives and make

recommendations for their storage, the training of an archivist, and for accompanying legislation.

Another milestone occurred in 1965 when the government of Jamaica and the University of the West Indies (UWI) cooperated to convene the Caribbean Archives Conference, bringing together archivists from within and outside the Caribbean to discuss how to make available the source materials needed for the study of West Indian history. An attempt was made at this conference to assess archival development in the Caribbean countries, to reach agreement regarding the care and use of archival materials, and to consider the operation of archival agencies and records management in countries that did not have any archival agency. Among the initiatives that started after this conference were the Reproduction and Exchange of Archival Material relating to Caribbean Countries and the establishment of a Caribbean Historical Association.

Despite the enthusiasm and fervor

displayed at that conference, it was not until the late 1980s that the university reaffirmed its commitment to the promotion of archives and funding was set aside for the recruitment of an experienced archivist. In 1991, the university established an integrated archives and records management certificate program under the direction of a university archivist based at the Jamaica campus, which was followed by similar programs on the Trinidad and Barbados campuses.

The UWI archivist felt that the university’s first thrust should be within the area of records management in order to set the stage for the accrual of records of enduring value. He established a summer school training program that provided an introduction to records management and instruction in managing the records life cycle, administration of records management programs, and records management technologies.

Training was also extended to departments and faculties to ensure that there

of archival records. To avoid a conflict with specific archives standards in development, archival concepts were excluded or are not explicit. However, these concepts are of vital importance to the development of integrated recordkeeping systems that take a records continuum approach. In the context of a culture that does not rely on regulatory compliance to stipulate retention periods, records appraisal is a critical feature of developing records schedules.

- It does not adequately cover electronic records. Although the scope of the

standard is broad enough to include records in any medium, it does not specifically address the unique issues of managing electronic records.

- It does not address vital records and contingency planning. Business continuity planning and contingency measures must be addressed to ensure that records that are vital to the continued operation of an organization are identified, protected, and recoverable.

Despite these concerns, the TC felt that there was an urgent and compelling need to adopt the standard

without making any changes and to provide a Jamaican context instead by developing a companion document. This document will expand some concepts to provide further clarification and will include such things as the local regulatory framework – including any statute or subsidiary legislation that makes reference to recordkeeping requirements and identifying legislation that should refer to the standards, relevant normative references, and terminology. (For example, because the term “disposal” might be interpreted as “destruction,” clarification will be provided that “disposal” means “disposi-

## Records Training in the Caribbean

was efficient control and maintenance of active records and that the records of enduring value of those departments accrued to the archives. So, too, a Heritage Studies program was started on the Cave Hill and Mona campuses that encompassed courses in history, archaeology, museums, and archives.

In addition, staff at all three campuses provide records management and archival consulting and do *pro bono* work to assist government departments, other institutions, and associations.

### The Status of Recordkeeping in the Caribbean

A 2001 survey showed that there were only 10 Caribbean countries with formal records and information management (RIM) programs. Of these, seven had integrated programs covering all or most government records.

However, there are a number of ongoing recordkeeping initiatives in the Caribbean that portend advancements in this area:

- The Caribbean branch of the International Council on Archives has been instrumental in updating archivists about records management and electronic recordkeeping.
- The International Records Management Trust has developed training modules, provided consultants, and organized seminars and video conferences for archivists and records managers in collaboration with the region's archival educators.
- The Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers has also provided seminars and meetings resulting in resolutions being passed to strengthen the profession.
- The Jamaican chapter of ARMA International (JARMA) and the Barbados Records and Information Management Association (BARIM) have been holding educational sessions about standardization and electronic recordkeeping. JARMA, in particular, has worked toward establishing a career path for RIM staff, and BARIM has raised awareness of

the importance of recordkeeping in the community.

Within the Caribbean governments, there have been administrative reform programs that hinge on accountability and transparency in recordkeeping. The regional standards bureau has also agreed to consider adopting the international records management standard, ISO 15489.

With the increasing globalization of the world economy, Caribbean countries will need manpower that is scientifically and technologically equipped, able to effectively communicate with their counterparts around the world, and fully versed in the changing rules that regulate international trade, communication, and financial flows. The dynamic scenario in which records systems are evolving to meet the demands of this environment represent tremendous opportunities for the archives and records management communities to contribute to the Caribbean countries ability to keep pace.

tion,” a broader term that encompasses both transfer and destruction.)

As of this writing, the TC has completed the “National Foreword” to the standard and presented it to the Board of the Bureau of Standards, Jamaica – which has responsibility for approving the draft and piloting it through the certification process as well as for publishing the document for public review and comment. Although there was tremendous interest as indicated by the number of copies requested, no official comments were received. Nevertheless, it was seen as a positive step because it sensitized a number of organizations to the existence of the standard, and the initiative required to obtain copies tangibly demonstrated their interest in it.

### Next Steps in the Process

A delegation is due to visit with the Minister of Commerce and Technology, under whose portfolio the adoption of the standard falls, to ensure his full support of the process. It is expected that the standard will be presented to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Meeting of Ministers responsible for standards, through which deliberation may begin on the adoption of the document as a regional standard.

The TC’s next steps are to

- draft guidelines to the standards
- build capacity for the implementation of the standard by supporting workshops and training sessions and laying the foundation for an integrated records management infrastructure for the Caribbean
- request international assistance through the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) for mutually beneficial exchanges/ attachments of records management personnel from countries with developmental backgrounds similar to Jamaica
- incorporate the standard in policy and procedures manuals
- lobby national and regional support

for integrating RIM standards in relevant legislation

The Jamaican RIM community is firmly behind the standard’s adoption and already several organizations have used the document as a model for developing records management policy and procedures manuals.

If, as a group of professionals, archivists, and records managers – who both

have a vested interest in the acceptance of the standard – work assiduously to promote the guidelines and best practices embodied in ISO 15489, it will establish a common ground in prescribing how business records should be managed and help establish the importance of RIM to the strategic business functions of organizations worldwide. ■

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### Read More About It

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