

Records Management EXPLAINED

Recent revelations about the unauthorized disposal of e-mail records at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and other federal agencies reveal a serious problem with records management policies, practices, and responsibilities within federal agencies. Managing information strategically is important. Many of these terms are not well known or are being misused. Let ARMA International help you understand their meanings.



Generally Speaking:

The Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles®

ARMA International's framework of factors that are critical to strategic information governance. It helps organizations decide whether they are giving employees enough guidance and provides a means for measuring employee conduct and overall compliance. All organizations in all industries can use it: large or small, public or private, for-profit or non-profit.

Information Governance

A strategic framework composed of standards, processes, roles, and metrics that hold organizations and individuals accountable to create, organize, secure, maintain, use, and dispose of information in ways that align with and contribute to the organization's goals. This includes recordkeeping policies and procedures.

Electronic Mail

Electronic communications sent between networked computers (a.k.a. e-mail). As a key business tool, e-mail messages must be governed and managed according to records management principles. You have to capture and preserve the content of the message, embedded links, attachments, and metadata that identifies the sender/receivers, transmission, and security details, etc.

The Basics:

Recordkeeping /Records Management

Records management is a combination of policies, procedures, and technologies that direct how the organization meets its records and information requirements. It's at the core of good information governance; you don't have good information governance unless you have good records and information management.

Record

Any recorded information, regardless of medium, made or received and retained by an organization in pursuance of legal obligations, value to the government, or in the transaction of business.

• Permanent Record

In the federal sense, this is a record that has been determined by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration to have sufficient value to warrant its preservation in the National Archives of the United States. According to NARA, 3% of records are determined to be permanent.

• Temporary Record

Any records that have been determined by the Archivist of the United States to have insufficient value (on the basis of current standards) to warrant its preservation. This determination may take the form of: (a) A series of records designated as disposable in an agency records disposition schedule approved by the National Archives of the United States; or (b) A series of records designated as disposable in a General Records Schedule.

• Transitory Records

Records that are of short-term interest (180 days or less) and have little or no documentary or evidential value, as defined by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

Retention Schedule

A retention schedule defines the organization's policies for how long records must be kept. The overall retention and disposition of records is controlled by defined approval processes that prevent records from being destroyed prematurely.

Preservation

The process involved in ensuring the technical and intellectual survival of authentic records through time. For electronic records, preservation is facilitated through technological solutions.

Disposition

For a record, the final action taken per the retention schedule and legal obligations, concluding with destruction, transfer, or permanent preservation.

Backup

A duplicate copy of a computer file that is created as a precaution in case the original file is lost, damaged, or prematurely destroyed. Backups are designed for restoring files to a system; therefore, it is difficult to locate specific files on them. They usually have short retention periods.

Guidelines for Success:

NARA

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the United States' record-keeper and serves as the primary agency for federal records management oversight.

Federal Records Act of 1950

The act, as amended, establishes the framework for records management programs in federal agencies.

Presidential Memorandum: Managing Government Records

Signed by President Obama in 2011, the memorandum directs the Executive Branch to reform records management policies and practices for the following purposes: (1) promote transparency in government; (2) increase agency efficiency in managing records and information; and (3) improve agency performance and accountability. It also directs the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration to coordinate these efforts.

Managing Government Records Directive

Required by the Presidential Memorandum, the Managing Government Records Directive provides more specific steps to improve agency records management. A major focus of these efforts is the use of technology to improve records management - including e-mail, electronic documents, etc.

Capstone

An optional approach to classifying and managing federal agency e-mail records, based on the work and/or position of the e-mail account owner. This method largely avoids manual and individual record decision making.