



Top Tips for Government Agencies Working with Electronic Records

From the Council of State Archivists

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As electronic records rapidly replace paper in government business it is important for agencies to have a plan for dealing with them. These tips highlight where to start the conversation.

- **Consult your records retention schedule:** Know what retention periods have been approved and take appropriate actions (e.g. transfer to the State Archives, destroy, etc.) when the retention period for your records has been met.
- **Plan ahead in ERM system design:** Talk to archivists, records managers, and other stakeholders; determine the possibilities for system adherence to retention and disposition guidelines.
- **You've got to have standards:** Ensure you have a trusted system and that your records are authentic (see ISO 15489, ISO 16363, DoD 5015.02, metadata standards, etc).
- **Organization is key:** Who's in charge of the shared file? Are people using email as a filing cabinet rather than a communication tool? Which copy is the record copy?
- **Make the rules:** Naming conventions, file organization, version control, and disposition strategies all help now and in the long term. Ensure all staff (permanent, full-time, temporary, students, interns, etc.) know and follow the rules.
- **Do you have backup?** Does your backup system work? How well will it actually restore your e-records? Can you retrieve individual items? Test all assumptions.
- **Understand metadata:** It's the information that lets you search, retrieve, access, manage, and preserve your records. Without it a record is just a needle in a pile of needles.
- **A record is more than just raw data:** The content, context, and structure of a record give it meaning and make it usable. Metadata helps preserve these characteristics to ensure ongoing access.
- **Do you have built-in strategies?** No format, storage media, or information system is permanent. Do you have a plan for migrating records to new systems and formats?
- **Does delete mean delete?** E-records proliferate easily. Do you have a plan to manage deletion of all copies that *should* be deleted? E-discovery can grab everything that exists.
- **Think before you scan:** Standards, worthiness, naming conventions, storage, and retrieval (among other things) should be considered before you turn that scanner on for the most efficient and useful results.