

Creating a User- friendly Records Management Program

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For most businesses, a “records management program” strikes up images of an outside policy that adds additional procedures yet offers no benefits to current business processes. As a matter of fact, this could not be any further from the truth. In simple language, “records management” is simply a means to clean up a cluttered mess and make things (information, documents, folders, files, etc.) ready at hand and not shoved into a corner taking up valuable space.

The first hurdle for implementing a records management program is securing buy in at the uppermost level of the organization. If the CEO doesn't care or think that it's important, this attitude will almost immediately trickle down to every level of the organization.

The upper management is becoming increasingly held responsible for records management, whether a program exists or not. Courts hold upper management responsible for retrieving and producing records during litigation, and an organization that is unable to do so faces heavy fines and sanctions, a costly mistake for sticking one's head in the sand. As a result, an organization wondering if they can afford to “take on” a records management program will quickly realize that they cannot afford to not have one.

The purpose of this white paper is to outline at a high level the framework needed to begin a records management program. While many private vendors exist to manage records either in physical form or in an electronic format, the fact remains that responsibility for the actual management of those records lies with each person working for the organization.

What are the common drivers for creating a records management program?

Litigation

During the Discovery period, the opposing side or the judge in a case will request documents. Failure to produce them can result in fines or a judgement against your organization.

Audits

Whether internal or external, auditors request records for an accurate accounting of any activity. For a business holding a government contract, the entity will request periodic audits of how funds are being spent.

Public Information Requests

If your company holds a contract with a government entity, every document you create is subject to open records or public information requests. The law holds that although the

records were created by your organization, if they pertain to public business they are “public records.”

Life Cycle of Records:

In order to get a handle on records, it is useful to think of them having a “life cycle,” that begins at a definite beginning point and ends only with a definite death or immortality. Viewed from the widest perspective, this lifetime falls into three different categories.

- ◆ Birth: the record is either created or received into your organization. An example of creation is the creation of a new form or a new accounts payable document. Incoming mail is an example of receiving a record.
- ◆ Use: this is the point where the record is most heavily used by your organization. The frequency can be once a day, once a week, but usually more than once a year.
- ◆ Inactive use: as records age, many of them will go into inactive storage,
- ◆ Disposition: disposition can be as simple as destroying the record or placing it permanently into an archival collection.

Starting a program on a shoestring budget.

The beginning steps of

- ◆ Survey of Records
- ◆ Appraisal
- ◆ Creating a record retention schedule

Education

- ◆ Records Liaisons
- ◆ Signoff by upper level management
- ◆ Standardize file systems
- ◆ Software based records management system?
- ◆ E-mail policy

Storage

- ◆ Considerations
- ◆ Transport
- ◆ Retrieving records

Disposition

- ◆ Holds on records
- ◆ Medium and method
- ◆ Documentation of destruction

- ◆ Archives

Summary

When trying to get a handle on the ever increasing

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The Association of Records Managers of America