



Introduction No. 3

Introducing records, recordkeeping and records management

April 2004

Summary

This guide explains the essential concepts of records, recordkeeping and records management that underpin good practice in NSW public offices. The guide is based on the good practice set out in the State Records' Government Recordkeeping Manual, the Australian standards AS ISO 15489 Records Management (2002) and AS 4390-1996 Records Management. Two earlier publications, *Records and Recordkeeping: An Introduction to New Concepts* and *What is Records Management?* have been withdrawn with the publication of this guide.

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What are records?

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Overview

This section provides an introduction to what is meant by a 'record'. It covers the differences between records and other forms of information and defines records which are also archives.

Definition of records

The State Records Act 1998 defines **records** as '...any document or other source of information compiled, recorded or stored in written form or on film, or by electronic process, or in any other manner or by any other means.'

The Act defines **State records** as '...any record made or kept, or received and kept, by any person in the course of the exercise of official functions in a public office, or for any purpose of a public office, or for the use of a public office...'

The Australian Standard AS ISO 15489 2002 *Records Management Part 1: General* defines records as 'information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business'.

These definitions clearly set out that records can be found in any format, not just the traditional paper correspondence that many of us are familiar with. Records are a part of and result from business activities and provide evidence of those activities.

Example

Developing a project will generate a number of records including policy and planning documentation, reports, background research material, project estimates and costings, budget information, resourcing requirements, etc. These records may be electronic or paper, they may be letters, spreadsheets or audio-visual material they may be captured in a number of different files or systems

and be produced in different business units. If they were used in or resulted from the decision-making process and activities undertaken to develop a project, they are records. And if that project was developed by a NSW public office, then they are State records.

Characteristics of records

To adequately support the business they relate to, records must:

- be made
- be accurate
- be authentic
- have integrity, and
- be useable.

A records is more than its informational content. As well as content, a record must have context and structure. Context refers to who created it, when, how and why. Structure refers to the relationship between the component parts of the record, e.g. in an email the information is structured in an accepted order - the From, To, Subject, signature details, email disclaimer - that enables you to understand the message and the relationships between these different elements.

Together these characteristics distinguish records from other forms of recorded information. See the *Standard on Full and Accurate Records* (Standard No. 7, 2004) for information on what this means in practice.

Records and information

Organisations collect, make, use and manage a wide variety of recorded information, which can be categorised as:

- records
- published information, and
- non-record non-published information.

Records

As described above, records are evidence of business activities and have meaning primarily in the context of those activities.

Published information

Published information may provide important information to support business activities but, unlike records, they are not evidence of such activities. Published information may take the form of books, journals, newspapers, technical literature, DVDs, CDs, videos, etc.

Note: Publications of public offices may be required as State archives where they provide evidence of the activities of the office, e.g. annual reports, corporate plans.

Non-record non-published information

This covers a wide range of unpublished information used to support business activity. Examples include market research data, contact information for clients, purchased news or other information, reports or other information assembled for reporting or other activities.

Again, this type of information does not usually provide evidence of the business activity and is not a record. If it plays an important role in particular business activities, it may need to be incorporated into the records of those transactions. For example, purchased research information that influences a policy decision; the address of the recipient of a letter or email.

Records and knowledge management

Records are an important source of knowledge because they are unique to an organisation: they relate directly to its business activities. People gain knowledge from many different sources of information, including records.

Knowledge management and records management are different yet complementary activities. Knowledge management focuses more on people, while records management focuses on records and evidence. Records management therefore supports effective knowledge strategies in an organisation.

What are archives?

Archives are 'those records that are appraised as having continuing value' (AS 4390-1996 Records Management, Part 1: General) because they meet an ongoing legal, evidential or research need to the organisation or society at large. They are often referred to as 'corporate memory', where corporate could mean a public office, a community or society at large.

The word 'archives' is also used to refer to:

- the organisation or program responsible for the selection, care and use of records of continuing value, or
- the place where they are stored, preserved and used.

There are many users of archives including their creators and successor bodies, students and academics, lawyers, architects, family historians and many other kinds of researchers.

Managing archives

Managing archives is part of every organisation's records management program, whether the organisation manages their own archives or they are in the custody of an archives institution like State Records. By incorporating aspects of archival management into recordkeeping systems, records can be managed throughout their existence in a way that promotes their preservation.

Example

Records identified at the time they are made as being required as State archives

can be created on archival quality paper, electronic records can be carefully migrated through technology changes.

Why do we need to manage records?

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Overview

This section introduces some of the key benefits to an organisation of managing its records. There are many benefits, only some of which are discussed here.

Records as an information asset

Records are a valuable corporate asset that, by their retention and re-use as evidence of decision-making and business activity, can improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of an organisation. There are costs in their management but good management reduces these costs. In addition, the organisation benefits from reduced risks from legal or regulatory challenges by finding and producing the relevant evidence contained in the records.

By making and managing records an organisation can ensure that it has available to decision-makers all the information they need to carry out their roles. This can improve

- the quality of decision-making
- the quality of business activity
- long term planning
- quality reporting, and
- fast and accurate customer service.

Records support accountability

Accountability means being able to provide an explanation or justification, and accept responsibility, for events or transactions and for one's own actions in relation to these events or transactions. Accountability is both internal and external to a public office including delegation of responsibility to staff and reporting to external watchdogs.

Records are evidence of what happened, why and by whom. They underpin accountability and provide an essential means to meet legal, financial and accountability requirements. A number of reports by the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) have identified recordkeeping failures both as impeding investigations and contributing to failures within the subject organisations. Reports by the NSW Auditor-General regularly highlight failures in recordkeeping systems or practices.

Typical failures include:

- not making records in the first place or making incomplete records
- not capturing records into recordkeeping systems
- not keeping records for the length of time they are needed
- not assigning responsibility for recordkeeping so that it doesn't get done
- not being able to find records at all, or in an efficient and timely manner.

All of these have an impact on the ability of an organisation to meet both its internal and external accountability requirements and business needs, such as meeting FOI and financial audit obligations. The new suite of corporate governance standards issued by Standards Australia (AS 8000-4 series, 2003) all include references to recordkeeping and its relation to good corporate governance.

How do we manage records?

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Overview

This section provides an overview of records management and recordkeeping. It introduces the strategies and methodologies used to manage records.

Definitions of records management and recordkeeping

The Australian Standard AS ISO 15489 defines records management as 'the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities in the form of records.' (Part 1: *General*).

Recordkeeping and recordkeeping systems are defined in the Australian Standard AS 4390-1996 as:

- recordkeeping – making and maintaining complete, accurate and reliable evidence of business transactions in the form of recorded information.
- recordkeeping systems – information systems which capture, maintain and provide access to records over time.

Together these definitions set out the framework for managing records throughout their existence, including identifying records of long term value that may become archives.

Establish a records management program

A key obligation under the State Records Act is for all NSW public offices to 'establish and maintain a records management program' (s.12(2)). A records management program encompasses the management framework, the people and

the systems required within an organisation to manage full and accurate records over time. This includes the identification and protection of records with longer-term value that may be required as archives. The program includes:

- records management policies, plans and procedures
- skilled staff
- recordkeeping systems and tools
- advice and training in recordkeeping rules and practices
- recordkeeping performance monitoring and review.

For more information on establishing a records management program, see the *Standard on Managing a Records Management Program* (Standard No. 8, 2004).

Develop and implement recordkeeping systems and tools

Recordkeeping systems help your organisation to meet their recordkeeping requirements, notably the making and reuse of records to support business activities. Recordkeeping requirements will be different for different organisations, and even within different parts of an organisation depending upon the legal and regulatory environment in which they work. Recordkeeping systems make, store and provide access to evidence of transactions over time. They do not just contain data to be reused. There can be a number of recordkeeping systems within an organisation, depending upon its size, its business needs and the types of records it makes.

A recordkeeping system does not just refer to a piece of technology or a software application, but rather all of the parts - people, processes and tools – that make up the whole. The system may be supported by software applications, or it may be paper-based or a mixture of both, e.g. a file register and hard copy files; a records management software package and virtual files, a financial management database with hard copy invoices and printed reports. Note: Many business systems are also recordkeeping systems as they create and maintain records of the business activities which they support.

Tools that are commonly integrated in recordkeeping systems include records titling thesauri and records disposal authorities, listing retention periods and disposal actions.

An outline methodology for developing and implementing adequate recordkeeping systems is set out in AS ISO 15489. State Records' has expanded this in *Strategies for Documenting Government Business: The DIRKS Manual*. Tools that can be developed using the DIRKS methodology include a disposal authority, a keyword thesaurus, an access and security schema, and a specification for recordkeeping metadata.

The eight stages of the methodology are:

- Step A – preliminary investigation
- Step B – analysis of business activity
- Step C – identification of recordkeeping requirements
- Step D – assessment of existing systems
- Step E – strategies for recordkeeping
- Step F - design of a recordkeeping system
- Step G – implementation of a recordkeeping system
- Step H – post-implementation review.

Note: This methodology is not necessarily linear, e.g. steps can be done in parallel, steps can be skipped, etc. See the *Strategies for Documenting Government Business: The DIRKS Manual* for more information.

Implement recordkeeping processes

The records management program provides a framework in which recordkeeping processes can be effectively implemented in order to make and manage records as long as they are needed.

Making of records

People and organisations need to make records that document the decisions they have made and actions that have been taken. Many business processes automatically result in the making of a record and systems should be designed to automate this as far as possible. In other situations, e.g. telephone conversations, instant messaging, people have to deliberately make a record. Records managers can support the making of adequate records by:

- working with other staff to design recordkeeping into business processes
- establishing rules for when and how records need to be made
- providing templates to make sure that records have all the necessary information in them.

Control of records

It is important to establish the physical and intellectual control over the records so that the organisation knows what records it has, where they are and what has happened to them. Using control processes, records can be found and used in support of business objectives.

Control processes include:

- Registration – giving a record a unique identifier (e.g. number or title) to provide evidence that it has been made. This is the foundation of other control processes.
- Classification – categorising records in systematic and consistent ways so that related records are grouped together to facilitate capture, retrieval, maintenance and disposal.
- Language control – using language control tools to title and index records and files, e.g. a thesaurus or lists of standard headings.
- Indexing – attaching searchable terms (from the controlled language tool) to records to help with retrieval.
- Tracking – tracking the physical movement of records to know who has used them and where they are at any one time.

See State Records' guidelines [How to take control of your records](#) for more information.

Maintenance of records

Maintaining records covers the range of processes and tasks for protecting records from unauthorised access, loss or destruction, theft or disaster and protecting their integrity over time. It also covers keeping them accessible for as

long as they are needed as evidence of business activities, particularly important for electronic records. Maintenance processes include:

- Storage of active records – establishing and managing facilities for records in all formats in or close to office or other work areas.
- Storage of semi-active and inactive records – usually involves establishing and managing a warehouse type facility, or outsourcing storage to a commercial provider.
- Storage of electronic records - including online and offline data storage devices.
- Preservation – establishing and monitoring appropriate environmental conditions for storing different types of records, implementing safe handling practices, preventing damage to or misuse of records. May also include transferring records to a different medium, e.g. paper to microfilm.
- Conservation – replacing and repairing damaged records or record containers.
- Migration – migrating records through technology changes to keep them accessible over time. Includes documenting migration actions.
- Vital records – identifying records and recordkeeping systems critical to the functioning of an organisation and developing strategies to reduce the risks to these records
- Disaster management – identifying and assessing the risks of disasters affecting records, developing strategies to prevent them and for recovering from them.

Standards and guidance covering all of these processes can be found in the [Government Recordkeeping Manual](#), available online on the State Records' website.

Access to records

Managing access to records involves making them accessible and useable to users within and outside the organisation, implementing access rules and also access restrictions where necessary. These processes include:

- Managing access – identifying and administering requirements to make records accessible or to protect them from unauthorised access because of security, privacy or other restrictions. In the NSW public sector, access to records is regulated by the State Records Act, the Freedom of Information Act and privacy legislation. Access may also be regulated by specific legislation.
- Retrieval – developing and implementing retrieval tools for records staff and user to identify and retrieve records, e.g. indexes and other recordkeeping metadata tools.
- Delivery – involves delivering records or copies to internal and external users when they need them.

For more information on access rules in NSW, see the [State Records website](#).

Disposal of records

The disposal of records includes the retention, deletion, transfer or destruction of records following appraisal decisions. Disposal processes include:

- Appraisal – appraising business functions and activities to determine whether records need to be made, which of these records need to be retained and for how long. This includes identifying records with on-going value as archives. In NSW appraisal decisions are authorised by State Records through general and functional retention and disposal authorities.
- Sentencing – implementing the disposal authority and applying retention decisions and disposal actions to records. This includes documenting sentencing activities, including transfer and destruction.
- Destruction – the safe, secure and authorised destruction of time-expired records. This includes documenting records destroyed and the authority by which they were destroyed.
- Transfer of records – transferring control of records to new owners or custodians following the transfer of functions. It can also apply to the transfer of archives to an archives institution such as State Records. This includes documenting records that have been transferred.

See the [State Records' website](#) for more information about disposal rules and tools in NSW.

Who manages records?

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Recordkeeping responsibilities of all staff

All staff in an organisation are responsible for making records and capturing these into official recordkeeping systems. These responsibilities should be set out clearly in corporate policy and procedures. This is particularly important when records management systems are rolled out to users and they capture their own documents into the system, and where email is sent direct to the recipients without passing through any central registration system. The timely capture of the record itself and relevant details about the record (metadata) determine the reliability and useability of the records over time.

Nominated senior officer

Under the *Standard on Managing a Records Management Program* a NSW public office must assign responsibility for oversight of the records management program to a senior officer, known by State Records as the 'Nominated Senior Officer'. This person must be at a suitably senior level, have organisation-wide influence and appropriate strategic and managerial skills to be able to direct the records management program.

Records managers

The management of records requires a range of strategic and operational skills. Depending upon the scale of the organisation, these roles are filled by one person or by a number of people.

Records managers work in partnership with ICT professionals, business managers, and other information and knowledge managers to build good recordkeeping into the business activities of the organisation.

Strategic and managerial skills are needed for:

- formulating corporate recordkeeping and records management policies for records in all formats, including electronic records
- setting corporate standards for recordkeeping and records management
- monitoring performance and compliance with standards and other requirements
- providing records management consultancy services to business units
- designing recordkeeping systems (in partnership with ICT and business managers).

This requires a wide range of skills beyond an understanding of recordkeeping. Other skills and knowledge that may be required include:

- strategic planning
- performance monitoring
- project management
- business analysis techniques
- information systems design and documentation
- data management principles and techniques
- high level communication skills, and
- resource management.

Operational skills are required to implement records management processes and tools in an organisation, whether for the whole of the organisation, business unit or workgroup level. These skills include:

- classifying, registering and tracking records in recordkeeping systems
- implementing disposal authorities
- maintaining classification schemes
- inventorying records systems, and
- providing quality records services.

Other skills that are required include:

- good communication skills
- training
- time management and prioritisation, and
- planning.

In smaller organisations, an operational records manager may have a number of other duties.

Further information

Standards Australia. AS ISO 15489. Records Management. 2002

Standards Australia. AS 4390-1996. Records Management. 2002

Note: Both of these publications are available from Standards Australia. See www.standards.com.au

State Records NSW. [Standard on Full and Accurate Records](#). Standard No. 7. 2004

State Records NSW. [Standard on Managing a Records Management Program](#). Standard No. 8. 2004

State Records NSW. [Strategies for Documenting Government Business: The DIRKS Manual](#). 2003

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