Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit

GUIDELINE 19:

Implementing a Digital Recordkeeping Strategy

PARBICA

Pacific Regional Branch International Council on Archives

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TRANSITION FROM PAPER TO DIGITAL SYSTEMS

Making the transition from a paper recordkeeping system to a digital recordkeeping system is a major project and should be approached in a strategic, whole-of-organisation way. A transition involves:

- intensive project planning and management;
- identifying functional requirements for recordkeeping in your organisation;
- reviewing and assessing existing and proposed systems against those requirements;
- developing a business case for approval by your organisation's senior management;
- implementing the new system; and
- a major commitment to organisational change management.

Before implementing a digital recordkeeping strategy you will need to decide what strategy is most appropriate for the needs and circumstances of your organisation for the present time and for the coming five to 10 years. Users of this guideline should first make use of digital recordkeeping Guidelines 12, 13 and 14 in this Toolkit to help them make this decision. It is also strongly advised that other more general recordkeeping guidelines in this Toolkit such as Guidelines 2, 3 and 6 have also been used and, as far as possible, implemented.

It is important to address fundamental records management issues in your organisation before undertaking the risky and potentially expensive process of transition to digital recordkeeping.

Importantly, deploying or setting up a software application is only a small part of the process of implementing a successful digital recordkeeping strategy. Other components include:

- **Policy frameworks** – as well as deploying software with records functionality, it is necessary to review existing information management and security policies and laws to identify areas where policies may need to be revised. Policies that should be reviewed or developed include those relating to records responsibilities for different categories of employees, and records retention and disposal policies. Associated with the policy frameworks that guide and support good business information management software may be tools such as classification schemes and metadata models.
- **Business process analysis** – includes identifying and potentially reallocating staff roles and responsibilities, and should ideally occur before any IT deployment.

- **Project management** – any IT deployment requires careful planning and monitoring through a number of different stages. Project management techniques are powerful tools that provide guidance and structure regarding the timing and cost of the project.
- **Change management** – deploying digital technologies within an organisation changes not only the way in which business processes are carried out, but also the roles and responsibilities of users of the system. Users need to be well prepared for these changes. When recordkeeping software implementation fails, it is usually due to poor change management, rather than any failings in the technology.
- **Risk management** – business records contain critical business information. Therefore, the decision to change to automated records management should be informed by analysing the risks associated with both the recommended approach and other approaches that were considered (for example different software options, different strategies) as part of the business case. Ongoing risk assessment following implementation should be incorporated into an organisation’s overall risk management framework.
- **Sustainability** – the business case for automated records management should outline how the system will be operated and maintained over time.
- **Capability development and training** – when organisations deploy new software, they need to train the staff who will use the software. Often these staff will be unfamiliar with the new technology. Organisations must also develop the technical capabilities of the staff who will support and maintain the new digital system.
- **Quality management** – when organisations deploy digital systems, they need to be able to evaluate software performance according to various criteria. They also need to be able to evaluate the impact of software deployment on business processes.
- **Configuration management** – it is necessary to make sure that the software not only has the necessary recordkeeping capabilities, but also that these are configured correctly and allow the software to operate appropriately within the organisation’s IT infrastructure.
- **Corporate culture** – it is vital that the culture of an organisation reinforces the value and importance of good recordkeeping and that it is something that is expected of all employees. These expectations need to be regularly reinforced by the chief executive and conveyed to all staff.

PROJECT PLANNING

Key steps in implementing a digital recordkeeping strategy include:

- Gain high-level support – this is vital to project success.

- Establish a project management team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, governance and reporting arrangements and with representation from all major stakeholder groups, including ICT staff.

- Develop and have approved a communications strategy for keeping staff, senior managers and other stakeholders informed, interested and involved in the progress of the project.

- Plan the necessary phases over an identified period of time. (It is better to plan and progress in small steps, consolidating the records management gains as you go, rather than attempt to achieve too much at once). These phases may include:

    - developing the records management strategy (see Guideline 14: Digital Recordkeeping – Choosing the Best Strategy);
    - writing the business case, which will include information on change management, project management, communication and consultation with stakeholders, implementation, deliverables, risks and benefits (more than one business case may be required to gain management approval for each new stage of the project);
    - reviewing, identifying, documenting and/or revising recordkeeping requirements and policy frameworks;
    - conducting an audit of the organisation’s existing information assets and its formal and informal information management systems;
    - reviewing the existing systems against organisational requirements;
    - writing functional, technical and user specifications;
    - evaluating, selecting and procuring software (see Guideline 16: Systems and Software Checklists);
    - implementing the system (including design, configuration, testing, piloting, user training and roll out);
    - maintenance and ongoing support; and
    - post-implementation review.

MAKING A BUSINESS CASE

Implementing a digital recordkeeping strategy is a major and often expensive and risky undertaking for organisations. It is necessary to prepare a business case to gain the necessary project approvals, funding allocations and senior management support. In fact, it may be necessary to do more than one business case over the full life of the project. For instance, once you have used Toolkit Guideline 14 (Digital Recordkeeping – Choosing the Best Strategy) to determine your best digital recordkeeping strategy, you should seek formal approval for that strategy before going any further. Later, when you have evaluated and selected a suitable software product or suite of products, you may need to develop a second business case to get the funds to purchase and deploy the software and to pay for staff training.

Business cases need to present a clear and compelling argument for investing in the proposed project. The cost of investing in the project has to be justified by the tangible and intangible benefits the organisation will enjoy as a result of committing to the project.

Commonly business cases will address the following topics:

- The issues/areas of business improvement that the project will address;
- Legal and other obligations that the project will help the organisation to meet;
- Risks associated with doing nothing;
- The advantages and disadvantages of different options considered and why the recommended option has been chosen;
- Strategies adopted by other similar organisations;
- Scope of the project – inclusions and exclusions;
- Budget with credible costings. Do not underestimate the costs as an insufficient budget will probably result in project failure. Remember that the costs of IT hardware and software acquisition and licensing are usually only a small proportion of the overall costs of implementing a digital recordkeeping strategy. Most of the costs will be associated with change management, software integration and configuration, testing and user training;
- Cost-benefit analysis, explaining why the expected benefits justify the requested expenditure. Assumptions made for the purposes of the cost-benefit analysis should be stated explicitly;
- Project management plan, including time frames, personnel, project milestones and deliverables;
- Change management and training plan;
- Risk management plan, including analysis of the sustainability of the proposed strategy; and
- Benefits realisation plan.

Business cases should also include an executive summary together with a summary of recommendations.

Identifying and applying figures to the expected benefits is a particularly important part of the business case process. Benefits may include:

- more effective decision-making
- better compliance with legal and accountability requirements
- better customer service
- avoidance of litigation/enhanced ability to successfully defend the organisation when faced with litigation
- better retention of corporate memory and support for knowledge management
- staff time savings in:
    - Searching for records
    - Retrieving records
    - Filing
    - Reworking/reusing information
- better integration of recordkeeping processes into business processes
- enhanced organisational reputation with a showcase system
- reductions in the use of paper and other office consumables
- reduced storage costs
- reduced risk of embarrassment caused by not being able to find information when needed
- enhanced ability for staff to collaborate on preparing documents and to share information.

RISK MANAGEMENT – IT'S MOSTLY CHANGE MANAGEMENT!

Digital recordkeeping projects often fail to live up to expectations. Sometimes they can even be complete disasters! Project failure may be due to technical faults with the chosen product or with the organisation's ability to integrate the recordkeeping software into its IT infrastructure and network. More often, digital recordkeeping projects struggle because of inadequate change management and/or an inhospitable organisational culture.

With any automation project it is vitally important to acknowledge and relieve the legitimate fears of staff. Staff are very likely to be afraid of unfamiliar new technology. This fear of the unknown may be due to a belief that the new technology may make them look unskilled if they do not fully understand it, or they may be concerned that the new system may mean that they lose control over their information and methods of working. It may simply be a vague fear of the unknown. Such fears are natural and to be expected. Before project implementation these fears have to be addressed and relieved by emphasising the benefits of the system and by providing training that will enable staff to feel positive and confident about the new system.

Some of the more common risks and strategies for preventing or dealing with those risks appear in the following table.

Risk	**Risk management strategies**
Software does not perform as expected	• Rigorous testing and evaluation of the software before procurement, involving IT staff. • Speaking with other organisations that have used the software being considered. • Request vendor support for trouble-shooting during the contract negotiation.
Staff reluctant to change from paper-based system	• Communications strategy that emphasises the benefits/efficiencies the digital system will deliver. • Training courses and user-friendly system documentation (for example user manuals and 'cheat sheets') that help staff become comfortable/confident with the new system. • Maintaining a help desk to support users. • Create a network of 'super-users' in the organisation who have high-level training in the system and who can act as local advocates, champions and trouble-shooters in their work teams. • The roll-out of the new system could include a well-publicised 'cut-off date' after which no further paper documents may be registered, or only certain approved classes. Monitor this change process and discuss staff concerns as they arise.
Confusion about how to use the system leads to staff reverting to	Configure the user-interfaces in the system to be as user-friendly and intuitive as possible.

personal records stores (email pst files, or box files of paper printouts)	• Training courses – preferably ‘hands-on’. • Network of super-users and trouble-shooters. • Records staff to do ‘walks-around’ in work areas, asking staff about their use of the system. • Listen to the concerns of users and respond to those concerns helpfully and constructively.
Specialist staff who see themselves as being outside of the system	• Ensure that the system is configured to accommodate their legitimate special needs. Training that emphasises how the system will make their lives easier. • Strong support for the system from the top of the organisation, where expectations of staff compliance are made clear and enforced.
Reluctance by users to fill in metadata fields properly when capturing records	• Configure the system to automatically capture as much metadata as possible, thus minimising the demands on the end-user. • Issue clear and simple guidance to users on naming/titling conventions and on the creation/capture of other important metadata elements. • Training that emphasises the benefits of having good metadata, including faster and easier searching for records. • Centralised quality assurance mechanisms, whereby records staff sample and monitor newly registered records, correct any mistakes with the metadata and politely explain to users the issues involved.
Lack of after-sale technical support from vendor	• Define technical support service standards during the contract negotiation and include financial penalties for non-delivery of service. • Ensure that vendors have a local presence or agents in your city or territory.

Changing mindsets and organisational cultures

Adopting a digital recordkeeping strategy involves changing people’s mindsets from:

- having paper minds to having digital minds;
- being secretive to being open sharers of information;
- regarding information as their personal property to regarding information as corporate property.

Successfully changing mindsets involves winning the hearts and minds of your staff so they understand that good recordkeeping will benefit both the organisation and themselves. Successful change also requires that an organisation clearly communicates and enforces from the top down expectations that staff will be good recordkeepers.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

Approaches to rolling out the new system
When rolling out new software applications across an organisation there are several different approaches.

- Phased roll-out
  A phased roll-out has different work teams being introduced to the software at different times. Phased rollouts can be more complex to manage, but are generally a lower risk for larger organisations.

- Immediate changeover
  An immediate roll-out is a 'big bang' approach where you roll-out across the whole of an organisation on a single day. An immediate changeover approach is recommended for smaller organisations.

- Parallel operation
  A 'parallel operation' approach is where both systems operate in tandem during an identified transition period, with the old system to be discontinued on an identified future date or when the organisation is satisfied that the new system is operating correctly. It may also be an option to combine a phased roll-out with a parallel operation approach. While a parallel operation approach to roll-out is lower risk than other approaches it can be confusing to users and also resource intensive if all transactions have to be recorded twice, once in the old system and again in the new system.

Piloting the system
Whichever approach to roll-out you decide to use it is important that the new system has first been thoroughly tested and piloted. Piloting the system with one or two small teams of users will help identify problems and issues that must be addressed before roll-out, but which were not identified during the software testing phase.

Training
As a general rule user training should be scheduled immediately before roll-out, so that the training is fresh in the minds of users when they have to first use the new system. If you have a large number of users to train it might be more practical to have a phased roll-out so that the training for each new group of users can be scheduled to coincide with the different phases of the system rollout.

Training activities should not cease at the end of the project, but rather should be ongoing, both for new staff and also to provide refresher, update and advanced training for existing staff.

Recordkeeping during the transition
If using a phased roll-out or an immediate changeover approach, you will need to decide how the organisation should handle recordkeeping for incomplete business at the time of the changeover(s). One approach is for the implementation team to make sure that all records relating to incomplete business are immediately available in the new system, for example through scanning the paper records affected into the digital system.

If your strategy involves implementing an EDRMS, attention to such questions as what will happen to any shared drives following transition to an EDRMS will be needed. One option may be making shared drives read-only or amending access controls. A digitisation plan, which involves the scanning of paper records either retrospectively or from the point of implementation of the digital system, may also need to be implemented (see Guideline 15: *Scanning Paper Records to Digital Records*).

Filing systems
There is a temptation for many organisations to create a digital filing system by replicating an existing paper system in the digital environment. For some smaller organisations or business units this may be a cheap and efficient way to build all or part of a filing structure, but it is not always appropriate to organise digital records in the same way as paper records. The volume of digital records, variety of file formats, and the ease of creation make digital records a very different entity to paper records.

Before replicating any part of a paper filing system in a filing structure an organisation must assess if it is fit for purpose in its current state. One of the case studies below show how poor planning and inadequate management of a paper system can be carried over to a digital system, frustrating users and possibly leading to failure of the system.

Filing system case studies – Transition from paper to digital systems

An organisation’s paper filing system developed in an ad hoc way with little or no controls. Users and business units created their own ways of filing paper records with no central approach, and there were no requirements to keep current finding aids. As a result, users could only search for, find and retrieve paper records from within their own work area.

In an effort to keep costs down, the organisation decided that each business unit should copy their paper filing structure into a filing structure on the digital filing system. This led to an impossible system where users were unable to locate or retrieve any digital records where they did not have specific knowledge of that part of the filing structure.

Another organisation’s paper filing system was well maintained and had been developed over time to give users easy access to records by function or activity. The supporting finding aids were readily available and up to date, which meant that any user could quickly find and retrieve paper records.

As this approach had been successful, the organisation designed the digital filing structure along similar lines with a view to keeping as much information open as practical and sensible. The well-managed paper system proved to be a successful template for the digital filing structure.

REALISING THE BENEFITS

Your business case will have identified a range of benefits that the organisation expects to experience as a result of adopting a digital recordkeeping strategy. It is important that these benefits are, as far as possible, measurable. Performance indicators can then be developed to enable the organisation to monitor the success or otherwise of the strategy. If the strategy is not succeeding, or delivering the expected benefits, corrective action will need to be taken at the earliest opportunity. If the strategy is succeeding, being able to provide senior management with evidence of success will assist in raising the profile of recordkeeping in the organisation and help secure ongoing high-level support.

In order to assess whether benefits are being realised you will need to have baseline data about the state of recordkeeping in the organisation before the start of the project. Baseline data will enable the development of ‘before and after’ comparisons. For instance, you should gather data about storage costs and document retrieval times before the commencement of the strategy, so that valid comparisons can be made with similar data gathered after the start of the strategy.

Examples of some of the benefits that might be measured as performance/success indicators include:

- volume of records filed in the digital system;
- percentage of staff filing records into the digital system;
- percentage of users regularly retrieving records from the system;
- number of staff who have received training in the system;
- average amount of time each week spent by staff in searching for corporate information.

Some of this performance measurement data will be able to be generated from the digital recordkeeping system software. Other data may need to be gathered through surveys of staff and system users. Surveys should gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Examples of the latter include opinions and impressions of the staff about how easy they find the system to use, whether or not it has made it easier for them to do their jobs, things they like and dislike about the system and whether or not they feel that they have received adequate training and are provided with adequate user support.

These performance measurements should be conducted at regular intervals – perhaps every three to six months during the early phases of the strategy, and every six to12 months afterwards.

The *Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit* was produced by the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives with assistance from the National Archives of Australia and AusAID.