Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit

GUIDELINE 1:
Recordkeeping Capacity Checklist

PARBICA
Pacific Regional Branch International Council on Archives

Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit

Guideline 1: Recordkeeping Capacity Checklist

CONTENTS

The original version of this guideline has been prepared by the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA) for use by countries around the Pacific. This means that the guideline may refer to things that you are not familiar with or do not use in your country. For example, not all governments have an auditor-general who reviews the financial and other records of government departments. You may find that you need to change some of the advice in this guideline to suit your own government's arrangements. To obtain an editable copy of this guideline, contact the national archives, public record office or other records authority in your country, or contact PARBICA at <http://www.parbica.org>.

WHO IS THIS GUIDELINE FOR?

This guideline can be used by anyone who wants to see if their organisation has in place the things it needs to manage records well. This could include:

- senior managers who want to review their current arrangements and set priorities for making improvements
- records management staff who want to make an unbiased measurement of how well they are managing records and where they could do better
- auditors who want to review an organisation's arrangements and make recommendations for change.

The work of assessing and improving an organisation's recordkeeping capacity will usually need to be done by someone who works inside the government, although it may be possible to hire an expert consultant to carry out the work or to hire a temporary staff member who can concentrate on the project.

WHAT DOES RECORDKEEPING CAPACITY MEAN?

An organisation's recordkeeping capacity is the ability of its structures, processes, staff, resources and rules to work together to manage its records well. Usually, an organisation needs a little of all of these things to manage its records at all. There is no point in having well-trained records management staff if they do not have clear procedures to use to do their work. There is not much benefit in having clear records management policies and procedures if there are no staff to carry them out.

In order to have a basic level of recordkeeping capacity, organisations need to have in place the right people, resources, policies and processes to make sure that they can:
- create the records they need
- find the records they need when they need them
- preserve their records for as long as they are needed
- make accountable decisions about which records are no longer needed.

Without adequate records, organisations cannot do their work efficiently or account for their actions. Records are vital for the good governance and efficient management of any organisation. If records are not managed well, records storage facilities can become full, and the records can become increasingly difficult to access.

USING THIS CHECKLIST

Organisations can use this checklist as a monitoring tool to evaluate and review how their records are being managed and to see where they need to make improvements to their recordkeeping arrangements. If the organisation cannot answer 'yes' to all of the questions in the checklist, it does not have the ability to meet its basic recordkeeping requirements, and should begin to make improvements.

Each of the 10 questions in the checklist also includes a description of the kinds of things an organisation needs to be able to do to answer 'yes' to the question. There are also suggestions on what the organisation can do to perform better in that area. This information can provide useful guidance on where an organisation can begin to improve its recordkeeping capacity.

THE CHECKLIST

1. Does the organisation have a records management policy?

Yes ☐   No ☐

A records management policy should:
- be written down
- be signed by the chief executive officer of the organisation or another senior officer
- be issued to all staff
- describe the responsibilities that all staff have for managing records
- include email and other electronic records in its definition of records
- allow for penalties for staff who do not comply with the policy.

Having a records management policy helps staff to understand the importance of managing records well, and sets the broad standards that staff should follow to achieve good records management.

Some governments have adopted a whole-of-government records management policy that applies to all government organisations in their country. If you do not have a policy that covers your organisation, you may be able to write a policy based on a number of 'model' records management policies. Contact PARBICA for more information.

2. Do the senior managers of the organisation support good records management?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Senior management can show their support for good records management by:
- assigning overall responsibility for records management to a senior manager in the organisation, such as the head of corporate services or the undersecretary
- providing adequate budget resources for records management staff and equipment
- ensuring that breaches of the organisation's records management policy are properly investigated and appropriate penalties applied.

Having support from senior managers makes it much easier to keep good records. If senior managers show that they support good records management, other staff will understand that keeping good records is important and will follow the procedures and rules set by senior managers.

3. Is responsibility for records management tasks assigned to a specific area of the organisation?

Yes ☐   No ☐

While all staff are responsible for keeping records of the work they do, someone within the organisation needs to manage the records on a day-to-day basis. If no-one is assigned to manage records, no one will do it, and the organisation will not be able to meet its recordkeeping requirements.

Organisations that assign responsibility for records management usually have a records management unit or registry that is responsible for managing all of the records of the organisation. In small organisations this role might be assigned to a particular position, such as a records manager or administration officer. It is extremely important that every organisation has someone whose job it is to mange the records of the organisation.

4. Do the organisation's records management staff have enough training to do their jobs?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Just as in any area of government business, records management staff need training to do their jobs properly. Staff who are assigned to an organisation's records management unit should:
* know how to identify a record and what makes records different to other types of information
* be familiar with standard records management practices such as file registration and movements, safe records handling, and records disposal
* be able to analyse the recordkeeping requirements of the organisation.

Having well-trained records management staff helps to ensure that the records are managed well, because staff will know how to do the work and will be able to do it quickly and efficiently.

5. Does the organisation have procedures for managing its records?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Records management procedures should:
* be written down
* not conflict with the organisation's records management policy
* state clearly who is responsible for carrying out the work described in the procedures.

Recordkeeping functions and activities need to be properly defined and written down so that people know what steps are needed to manage the records well. Having in place guidelines, procedures and forms can help records management units and other staff who handle records to ensure that they are taking the right steps to manage the organisation's records.

6. Does the organisation know what its recordkeeping requirements are?

Yes ☐   No ☐

A recordkeeping requirement is a need to keep evidence of the organisation's actions and decisions. Recordkeeping requirements are usually documented in rules, procedures or other guidelines that show that an organisation might need to create, keep, provide access to or deal in some special way with a file or other type of record. To understand its recordkeeping requirements, an organisation needs to identify and examine the various laws, policies and procedures it works with and recognise where these documents require it to keep records. Organisations cannot usually understand all of their recordkeeping requirements without conducting an analysis of these sources.

There are guidelines available that can help you to identify your organisation's recordkeeping requirements. Contact PARBICA for more information.

7. Can the organisation find particular records when it needs them?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Organisations will be able to find their records more easily if they:
- keep a file movement register, so they know where each of their files is at all times
- store their records in a secure place, so that they cannot be stolen or misplaced
- have a system for naming and numbering files that all staff can understand.

Keeping good records is an efficient way of making sure staff can find the information they need to do their jobs effectively. There is not much point in keeping good records about the organisation's actions and decisions if no-one can find that information when they need it.

8. Does the organisation abide by the government's rules for deciding when its records can be destroyed?

Yes ☐   No ☐

In many countries, the national archives is responsible for making decisions about which government records can be destroyed and which ones need to

be kept. This is so that the archives can select the records that should be preserved forever as part of the national history. The archives can also act as a neutral decision-maker, making sure that government agencies do not destroy records that need to be kept for public accountability purposes.

If there are no national rules for deciding how long governments should keep their records, organisations will need to make their own decisions. To do this properly, they should develop a written disposal schedule, which is based on the organisation's analysis of its recordkeeping requirements.

9. Are the organisation's records stored securely so that they cannot be stolen, damaged or altered?

Yes ☐   No ☐

To protect records from loss, damage and destruction organisations should:
- keep files in a secure area that only the records management staff enter
- make sure staff in other areas of the organisation return files to the records management unit when they are not using them
- keep their records storage areas clean so that they do not attract rats and other pests that can destroy records
- have back-up systems for any computers that keep electronic records
- make sure staff understand that they cannot take papers from government files, and punish any staff who do this
- have a written plan for salvaging important records if there is a disaster.

Taking steps to keep records safe and secure will help to ensure that the records are available when your organisation needs them and that the information in them is accurate and reliable. If people are able to take papers from files, or take the files away, you will not have all of the information you may need about the organisation's actions and decisions.

10. Does the organisation set performance indicators for its records management unit, report on those indicators, and make improvements when indicators are not met?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Performance indicators are goals that an organisation sets for itself, so that it can see how well it has been doing its job. An organisation might count the number of files it creates in a year or how long it takes staff to create a new file as a way of seeing how well the staff in the records management unit are performing and whether or not they are helping the rest of the organisation to operate efficiently.

If an area of an organisation is not meeting its performance indicators, this could mean that something is wrong and needs fixing. Reporting on whether or not the organisation is meeting its performance indicators is an important way of accounting to the government and the public, and can help to show that the organisation is using public funds efficiently and effectively.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

If you have answered 'No' to any of the questions in the checklist, you should think about making improvements in that area.

Records management policies

If you answered 'No' to question 1, you might consider writing a records management policy for the organisation. There are some 'model' records management policies that you might be able to use to guide you. Contact PARBICA for more information.

Senior management support

If you answered 'No' to question 2, you might consider thinking about ways to convince the senior managers in your organisation to support good recordkeeping. PARBICA has produced a brochure called *Good Records Good Governance: Advice for Senior Government Officials,* which explains some of the reasons why good recordkeeping is important. Contact PARBICA for copies of the brochure.

Responsibility for records management

If you answered 'No' to question 3, you might consider talking to the senior managers in your organisation about setting up a registry, or giving records management responsibilities to a particular staff member.

Records management training

If you answered 'No' to question 4, you might consider looking for some more training for your records management staff. There is a range of training options for records managers, from informal guidelines to university degrees. Contact PARBICA for information on what training options might be available in your area.

Records management procedures

If you answered 'No' to question 5, you might consider beginning to write some simple procedures or developing some forms for records management staff to use. Other government organisations in your country, or in the Pacific region, may have procedures that can guide you on the sorts of things you could consider developing. Contact PARBICA for more information.

Recordkeeping requirements

If you answered 'No' to question 6, you might consider a project to identify your organisation's recordkeeping requirements. PARBICA has developed some guidelines to help you to do this—contact PARBICA for a copy of the guidelines.

Making records accessible

If you answered 'No' to question 7, you might consider taking any of a number of actions to make improvements. File movement registers, file naming and numbering systems, and secure storage can all help to make sure that records are accessible when they are needed. Contact PARBICA for advice on how to develop systems that can keep track of your records.

Deciding what records to preserve

If you answered 'No' to question 8, you might consider developing and writing down a system for deciding which of your organisation's records should be kept. In most countries, you cannot destroy records without the permission of the government or national archivist. Contact the national archives in your country for advice, or contact PARBICA.

Secure storage and handling

If you answered 'No' to question 9, you might consider finding a more secure place to store your records, or providing training for staff in how to handle records so that they are not damaged.

Measuring and reporting performance

If you answered 'No' to question 10, you might consider developing some performance indicators for records management in your organisation, and reporting on these to senior managers. Measuring performance is not only a records management job—it can be used by lots of different areas of government. Areas responsible for overseeing government departments, such as the Public Service Commission, may be able to give you advice on developing performance indicators, or you could think about doing some research in management textbooks in the library.