Retention Management for Records and Information

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Foreword

Publication of this Technical Report has been approved by ARMA International. This document is registered as a Technical Report series of publications according to the Procedures for the Registration of Technical Reports with ANSI. This document is not an American National Standard and the material contained herein is not normative in nature.

Comments on the content of this document should be sent to:
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Rationale

This technical report educates individuals in the establishment and operation of the retention management component of a records and information management (RIM) program, which is central to enterprise-wide, strategic information governance (IG). It is designed for use by archivists and RIM professionals (i.e., educators, practitioners, and vendors), as well as other IG professionals, which ARMA International identifies as privacy and security, information technology, legal, and line-of-business/audit stakeholders. Its content is not industry or sector-specific.

This technical report complements the ARMA International Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles® and may also complement ISO 15489-1 Information and documentation – Records management – Part 1: General.
1 Introduction

1.1 Background

A Cohasset Associates white paper report titled 2013/2014 Information Governance Benchmarking Survey and co-sponsored by ARMA International and AIIM highlighted the state of retention-related activities in organizations. It found that more than 90% of those surveyed had a records retention schedule in place; however, most respondents (i.e., more than half) indicated that the records retention schedule would benefit from improvement.

With these results in mind, ARMA International offers this publication to the records and information management (RIM) community as a tool to enhance practitioners’ quest for quality. Recognizing that retention management is not a “one and done” task and that records retention schedules need updating and ongoing maintenance, this technical report provides education and guidance to RIM and other information governance (IG) professionals.

In addition, the de facto standard known as ARMA International’s Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles® (Principles) outlines the framework of an effective IG program. The Principles comprise eight separate proclamations, including the Principle of Retention and the Principle of Disposition. The former states: “An organization shall maintain its records and information for an appropriate time, taking into account its legal, regulatory, fiscal, operational, and historical requirements.” The latter posits: “An organization shall provide secure and appropriate disposition of information in accordance with its policies and applicable laws, regulations, and other binding
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authorities.” These two Principles, in particular, serve to buttress and inform this technical report. (The complete text of the entire set of Principles may be found at www.arma.org/principles.)

To effectively use and understand this publication, it is essential to differentiate between information and records or nonrecords. While information is a vast universe of varied items (data, files, documents, etc.), records are required in the conduct of business and in the fulfillment of legal/regulatory requirements; they constitute a subset of the organization’s information universe. (Complete definitions of these terms can be found in section 2.)

The goal of retention management is to ensure that records (from within an organization’s trove of information resources) are identified, appraised, and maintained for an appropriate period of time in such a way that they are accessible and retrievable, and premature disposition and/or unauthorized retention or disposal can be avoided. Retention management helps to ensure compliance with business-oriented requirements while identifying records and information of enduring administrative/operational, fiscal, legal/regulatory, and/or historical value.

Retention management must be coordinated with other departments and/or functional areas within the organization such as information technology (e.g., in relation to electronic storage systems design and development) and legal/regulatory services (e.g., to ensure compliance with applicable laws). Such coordination can be effective in facilitating effective recordkeeping systems and practices, documenting needed changes in workflow, and initiating other operational, efficiency-related improvements.

1.2 Scope

This technical report covers activities pertinent to managing the retention of records and information—regardless of media or format—as an organization applies those elements in accordance with the “needs of the business” and associated legal/regulatory requirements. It includes, but is not limited to, records and information stored on paper/physical media or housed via electronic resources. Records disposition is also discussed.

Three appendixes are included in this publication. Appendix A includes resources for retention management policy creation. Appendix B contains sample inventory forms. Such an inventory is helpful when an organization is designing or revising records retention schedules. Finally, Appendix C contains examples of records retention schedule forms.

Note: Throughout the remainder of this publication, the acronym “RIM” denotes “records and information management.”

1.3 Purpose

The similarly-titled predecessor publication to this technical report, originally published in 2005 and re-released in 2009, has been revised to create this 2015 edition. Thus, this current edition supersedes previous editions.

2 Definitions

This section contains only those definitions essential for clarification of this technical report. Unless otherwise noted, definitions are derived from ARMA TR 22-2012, Glossary of Records and Information Management Terms, 4th edition.

active record
A record related to current, ongoing, or in-process activities and referred to on a regular basis to respond to day-to-day operational requirements.

Also referred to as current record.

appraisal
The evaluation of a document’s worth or its value for retention or archival purposes, based upon its current or predicted future use(s) for administrative, legal, fiscal, research, or historical purposes.