

Records management in an electronic environment

We applaud the Administration for instituting on day one an e-mail archiving system that preserves and manages the electronic records of the White House, even the President's Blackberry messages. It is time for agencies to do the same with their electronic records.

Short Term:

The Federal Chief Information Officer (CIO) Council, which describes itself as the "principal interagency forum for improving practices in the design, modernization, use, operation, sharing, and performance of Federal Government information resource," should be a natural source of leadership for electronic records management. Yet the National Security Archive awarded the 2010 Rosemary Award for Worst Open Government Performance to the Federal CIO Council because they have yet to step up to the table on the issue of electronic records preservation and management.

In the last year, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) created a link between the CIO Council and the Federal Records Council (FRC) by arranging regular meetings of the bodies. **These meetings should periodically include outside stakeholders – including public interest groups.**

The lack of a common standard and interoperability of agencies' systems are commonly cited as reasons the federal government is currently failing to manage its electronic records. **The CIO Council and FRC, with guidance from NARA, should be directed to identify uniform electronic records management requirements and develop open source software that meets those requirements at least at a basic level.** Agencies will be able to work with vendors to adapt the system for their needs while ensuring that information is saved in a common format government-wide.

Medium Term:

The Administration has directed agencies to increase their use of cloud computing. In September 2010 NARA issued a Bulletin that identified several records management challenges with cloud computing environments, but we have seen little evidence agencies are giving these issues sufficient consideration prior to moving to the cloud. **The Administration should require that agencies certify to NARA that their use of cloud computing meets all NARA requirements before adoption. Agencies that have already moved to the cloud should certify they are meeting NARA requirements within 5 months.**

NARA's reports on agency self-assessments of record management and audits show the extent of the problems agencies face in properly managing and preserving records, especially electronic records. According to NARA's 2010 report,¹ 95% of federal agencies that returned the surveys self-reported that they are at medium to high risk of losing electronic records. **NARA detailees should be placed in each agency to help make sure agencies are properly managing and preserving electronic records.** These detailees will help the agency analyze why an agency fails to meet expectations, provide training and work with the agency personnel to make improvements and build the infrastructure to ensure those improvements are sustained.

1 <http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/pdf/rm-self-assessmemt.pdf>

Long Term:

The Administration should work with relevant Congressional committees to revise and update the Federal Records Act so that the law's requirements are better suited to an increasingly digital work environment. At the very least the Act should provide an expanded role for Inspectors General (IG) in records management oversight, including an automatic IG referral if NARA's audits reveal an agency's records are at risk. We also support creating a third-party right of action.

Improved technology is necessary for the government to improve its electronic records management, but in no way sufficient. Additional attention must be devoted not only to records management, but to records managers as well. **The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) should create a new Federal job title and career track for records managers.** Professionalizing federal records managers by creating the title and track will help agencies more effectively recruit staff focused on records management.

Submitted 30 August 2011 by:

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