

Managing Digital records in Business Systems

What is a business system?

Any automated or manual system that uses, manages or provides access to information and is designed to meet the needs of a certain business is a business system. Information in business systems are territory records and need to be managed in line with the [Standard for records and Information Governance](#).

An electronic document and records management system (EDRMS) is a business system used to manage records; however, not all business systems used by ACT Government organisations have been designed with functionality to meet recordkeeping requirements.

Overview of system information requirements for records management

For a business system to operate effectively as a recordkeeping system it needs to be able to fulfil a few basic criteria. It must be able to:

- Create uniquely identifiable records of business process activities and outcomes.
- Identify the relationship between a record and the business process it represents
- Ensure that when records are deleted from the system this is done accountably and in accordance with documented disposal rules
- Retain metadata about deleted records, including about the circumstances of their destruction, while reliably deleting their contents
- Be able to export current records to a successor or archival system at the end of the system's life
- Capture and maintain records in an accessible format for as long as it is required under legislation.

Sometimes these requirements can be fulfilled administratively, such as by describing the link with business processes in systems documentation. At other times it will be necessary, or at least preferable, to design recordkeeping functionality into the system's design.

Benefits of managing records in business systems

By designing recordkeeping functionality into business systems, you can:

- Ensure business processes are transparent and accountable, by understanding upfront what records should be created and maintained in the system
- Reduce the need to build and maintain links to records storage and management systems
- Reduce data storage costs and performance overheads by ensuring that records are not retained for longer than they are needed
- Increase the accuracy and efficiency of recordkeeping processes, by allowing them to be managed automatically by the system, rather than relying on manual interventions by staff.
- Potentially keep your records in situ, meaning you can manage and maintain the records of your business within the business system, rather than exporting into an EDRMS.

Ensuring recordkeeping requirements are applied

The range of approaches to fulfilling recordkeeping requirements may vary, depending on whether recordkeeping is implemented in the planning and development stage of a system, or if a legacy system is under review. The following are common requirements of all business systems:

- The procurement, design, development, and configuration of business systems must take into account recordkeeping requirements.
- To fulfil recordkeeping requirements it is necessary to understand the business processes that the business system enables. Depending on the scale, stage of development or maturity of the system, this may be self-evident, or require a detailed review of steps taken in a work process.
- Statutory requirements such as Records Disposal Schedules (RDS) and other legislated conditions, as well as expected business use of records throughout their lifecycle, must be documented and communicated to key system stakeholders.
- Documentation of systems must identify the system owner, and administrators. Recordkeeping requirements must be understood at the systems governance level, and communicated to support staff and system vendors.
- Access to records in business systems must be proactively managed from creation and capture to disposal, ensuring records are safe from unauthorised access, alteration and deletion.
- Systems must document the disposal/deletion of records, including capturing authorisation for each disposal event. If a system does not capture a sufficient audit trail of a disposal event, requests and authorisation must be captured at a detailed level as part of administrative procedures. Deletions/disposal of records must not be automated without required authorisations for each disposal cycle.
- Once business use ceases for a business system which holds records with longer retention requirements, plans for migration to a suitable successor system, such as an EDRMS should be in place. New business systems must have the ability to export records as required.
- Migrated and exported records must be human readable, and preserve the contextual relationships between other records and the originating business processes.
- Records that are required as Territory archives must be exported/migrated from business systems to appropriate long term preservation formats and storage.
- Information identified to support recordkeeping in business systems should be aggregated into an agency information architecture register, and an information management plan.

Identifying system recordkeeping requirements

Records should be a natural by-product of business. That means that the recordkeeping requirements for each business activity will be dictated by the business process itself. As a business process is planned and implemented recordkeeping requirements should be incorporated into that process and any supporting systems.

Where this analysis hasn't been done as part of the system's design, a retrospective analysis can identify gaps in recordkeeping capability so that mitigations can be implemented.

To understand the recordkeeping requirements for a business process, systems designers should engage a records and information governance professional to conduct or advise on a recordkeeping analysis.

Conduct a work process analysis

During the design or acquisition of a new business system, agencies should conduct a business/work process analysis, to determine the recordkeeping requirements for that system. The depth of analysis required depends on the complexity of the process and organisation. In most cases a business process timeline will have clear points that can identify where complete records of a process can be captured.

Records managers can also apply these methods to assess the recordkeeping capabilities of existing business systems.

Conduct an appraisal and risk analysis

At each point where a record is created in the system, appraisal decisions need to be made to determine how long that record should be retained. Appraisal decisions take into account the needs of the business, stakeholders and the community at large. An appraisal process is essentially a risk analysis process, and identifies the risks to the ACT Government, individuals, or the community if a record of the process cannot be accessed after a given period.

The appraisal process may identify varying periods of time for which records in a business system need to be retained. For example, a business system that manages a builders' licensing process may need to retain a record of a license applications for a very long time, to account for the qualifications of a builder for as long as the structures they build are in place. However, the record of the payment of a fee for the license may not need to be retained for such a long period. When these requirements are identified as part of the system design the different retention periods can be built into the system. However, in some legacy systems, it may be difficult to identify or apply separate retention needs for the information held, in which case the highest identified retention should be used, to avoid the risk of records being disposed of prematurely.

The Territory Records Office needs to authorise decisions about when records can be destroyed, and you should contact the TRO to discuss the appraisal process. This analysis can also inform other aspects of system design, such as security and access rules and metadata creation and management needs.

Creating an information asset register and information management plan

As part of their responsibilities under the Territory Records Act, all agencies are required to have a Records Management Program, that sets out their policies, procedures and resources for managing their records. The Records Management Program should include an [information asset register \(internal document\)](#) that describes the agency's business systems that contain records and lists key details. Ideally, each system should also be documented in a detailed information management plan, that can be referred to over the lifetime of the system. An information management plan sets out in more detail the business context and contents of the information asset and outlines how the agency will manage it over time.

References

ISO 16175 – what you need to know

<https://www.naa.gov.au/information-management/information-management-standards/iso-16175-what-you-need-know>

Principles and Functional Requirements for Records in Electronic Office Environments.

<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/records-management-advice-business-information-systems><https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/advice/designing%2C-implementing-%26-managing-systems>

<https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/advice/information-management-design>

PROV – Managing Records In Business Systems Draft

https://prov.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/documents/Managing_Records_in_Business-Systems-Policy_Feedback_Draft_2022.doc



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