

Guideline to Principle 3: Assess Principle

A resource for implementing the Standard for Records and Information Governance

INTRODUCTION

Records are evidence of business activity. The *Territory Records Act 2002* (the Act) defines them as ‘information created and kept, or received and kept, as evidence and information by a person in accordance with a legal obligation or in the course of conducting business.

Within the context of the Territory Records Act, to be understandable, usable, and reliable as evidence of an ACT Government business transaction or event, a record must have the following properties:

1. Content – Text, data, symbols, or images that convey information.
2. Structure – Arrangement of this information into understandable formats, such as designated fields for required information.
3. Context – A direct relationship to the technical and/or business environment that created the record, for example through software applications or metadata.

The Act allows the Director of Territory Records to approve standards for records management, which ACT Government organisations must comply with. The ACT [Standard for Records and Information Governance](#) (the Standard) sets out seven principles that must be applied to ensure that data and information can be managed in ways that allow them to function as records when this is required to support business and accountability requirements. This Guideline is intended to assist organisations to comply with the Assess principle.

While the term ‘record’ has a specific meaning, in practice it can at times be difficult to distinguish between records and other types of information or data. The Standard is explicitly designed to meet the requirements of the Territory Records Act 2002 in terms of records, but is also a guide to good practice approaches for managing information and data for the ACT Government. The Data Governance and Management Policy Framework is *complimentary to the Standard, with the common aim of providing a framework in which information assets can*

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be made, kept and used by the ACT Government.

The Assess Principle

The Assess Principle means ACT Government organisations must use processes endorsed by the Territory Records Office to assess and understand their records, information, and data management requirements.

The assessment involves the analysis of business activities to determine which records, information and data must be created and kept to meet the organisation's business needs, accountability requirements and community expectations.

This assessment process, known in the recordkeeping profession as appraisal, results in decisions about which records an organisation needs to create and capture, and how long those records must be maintained. These decisions have serious implications for organisational accountability, efficiency, and continuity, and it is important that the process is carried out consistently, objectively, and accountably.

The assessment process will, most importantly, also identify those records that have enduring value to the Territory – referred to as Retain as Territory Archives (RTA). It will also result in a business classification scheme and records disposal schedule or schedules.

By adhering to the Assess Principle, ACT Government organisations will ensure that they can create and manage their records, information, and data to meet business, accountability and community needs in both the short and long term.

Complying with the Assess Principle

There are three aspects to complying with the Assess Principle:

- 1 establishing processes for identifying which records, information and data must be created and kept: an organisation has certain responsibilities to ensure it appropriately manages records, information, and data in accordance with legislation, and stakeholder and community expectations. A formal assessment process needs to be undertaken regularly and consistently
- 2 ascertaining the significance of records, information, and data: the assessment process must identify the retention requirements for all an organisation's records, information, and data – this includes, most importantly, those information assets that need to be retained in perpetuity.
- 3 managing records, information, and data in accordance with their significance and other factors: significance, risk, security, and privacy considerations must

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be taken into account when making decisions about the management of records, information and data. This can include decisions about metadata capture, security, storage, retention and access.

For an organisation undertaking a comprehensive assessment of their records, information, and data management, use the Territory Records Office's Records Management Maturity Assessment Tool in association with this and other guidelines to implementing the Standard for Records and Information Governance.

Further information

This guideline should be read in conjunction with the Standard for Records and Information Governance and the Guidelines which support each of its seven principles.

Along with the seven guidelines, further information can be found in the following resources:

- *Territory Records Act 2002*
- International Standard: ISO 15489—Records Management
- International Standard: ISO26122—Work Process Analysis for Recordkeeping
- International Standard: ISO 30300 series Management systems for records
- International Standard: ISO16175—Requirements for Records in Electronic Systems
- Australian Standard: AS 5044—AGLS Metadata Standard
- Australian Standard AS/NZS 5478—Recordkeeping Metadata Property Reference Set
- ACT Government records disposal schedules
- Territory Records Office *Records Advice* series

ESTABLISHING PROCESSES FOR IDENTIFYING WHICH RECORDS, INFORMATION AND DATA NEED TO BE CREATED AND KEPT

ACT Government organisations must make assessments of what records, information and data about their activities should be created and how they must be kept. These assessments can have profound effects on:

- business efficiency;
- the quality of decision-making;
- the rights, entitlements and obligations of individuals and organisations;
- the ability of the Government to account for its actions; and
- the ability to meet the expectations of citizens for access to

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government records, information, and data.

The processes for identifying recordkeeping requirements must be carried out to a high standard to make sure that resulting decisions to create, keep or dispose of records, information and data are reasonable and defensible.

The analysis of an ACT Government organisation's business seeks to provide an understanding of its particular business functions and the major influences on its need to make and keep records. The assessment process is also used to develop a hierarchy of business functions and their associated activities.

Accountability

Accountability refers to the general principle that individuals, organisations and the community are responsible for their actions and may be required to explain their actions to others. Demonstrating accountability encompasses acting within appropriate delegations and authorities, setting, and adhering to standards for ethical behaviour, applying sound risk management principles to decision-making, establishing and following authorised policies and procedures, and enabling inspection and review of decisions and outcomes. Records are vital for accountability, and appropriately captured and managed records, information and data are fundamental to providing evidence of an organisation's actions and decisions.

Equally, the organisations must also be accountable for the process they use for determining the information assets they must create and keep.

Consistency

Consistency is an important principle of equitable and accountable public administration. The assessment of which records, information, and data to create and keep must follow the general principle of consistency.

Consistency is achieved by all ACT Government organisations adopting processes mandated by the Territory Records Office for identifying their recordkeeping requirements. These processes must be compatible with the better practice methodologies identified in the International Standard for Records Management ISO 15489. The Territory Records Office supports and encourages the use of the Business Classification Scheme (BCS) and the authorised Records Disposal Schedules, to classify business processes and to sentence records, information, and data those processes generate. This appraisal methodology takes into account:

- business operations and administration needs;

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Version: 1.0

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Publication date: June 2022

- legislative and regulatory requirements;
- the rights, entitlements and obligations of the Government, individuals, organisations, and the community; and
- significance of any records, information, and data to the Territory.

Records, information, and data management requirements that are identified consistently and objectively will result in meaningful and accountable retention and destruction decisions across the Territory, so that each function of government is appropriately represented in the archival resources of the Territory.

Objectivity

Organisations must, as far as possible, be objective in their decision-making about the creation, management and disposal of their records, information, and data. This means taking into account and balancing many different perspectives on the use or value of the information assets being assessed. Organisations can improve the objectivity of their assessment processes by:

- ensuring that suitably qualified and experienced records, information and data management professionals are involved in the process;
- involving and seeking the views of a variety of different business areas within their organisations;
- incorporating the views of customers and other stakeholders, including through direct consultation where appropriate; and
- considering and incorporating the advice of the Territory Records Office and the Territory Records Advisory Council.

The Territory Records Advisory Council is established under the Act to advise the Director of Territory Records on a range of issues, including the disposal of ACT Government records.

The Council does this by considering the retention periods proposed by organisations for their records, information, and data.

Comprehensive

A business system is any system that assists an organisation to perform its business and manage information. Examples include electronic document and records management systems (EDRMS), case management systems, staff management systems, pay systems, finance systems, legacy systems. Records can also exist in unstructured environments, such as e-mail folders and networked drives.

The assessment process should include the records, information and data contained within all of the organisation's business systems and unstructured environments, so these

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information assets can be managed appropriately – see the Strategy Principle for further guidance.

Context

The legal, administrative, and social context in which an organisation operates will influence its need to create and keep records, information and data. When assessing the organisation's records, information and data, the identification of recordkeeping requirements should include an assessment of particular areas of activity that are vital to its ongoing operations or represent its highest areas of risk. These assessments should inform the organisation's decision-making about the protection and management of certain categories of records, information, and data.

Records, information, and data that relate to the vital business of an organisation include those that, if lost or inaccessible, could prevent an organisation from continuing to operate because they contain information needed to re-establish the organisation in the event of a disaster.

Vital records, information and data are those that protect the assets and interests of an organisation, as well as those of its clients and stakeholders, and require special management – see the Protect Principle for further guidance.

High-risk business includes areas that:

- receive a high level of public and media scrutiny;
- instigate or are subject to litigation;
- allocate or spend large amounts of money;
- relate to issues of community or national security;
- are outsourced;
- relate to the health, welfare, rights and entitlements of citizens or staff; and
- relate to employment conditions of staff.

Records, information, and data in high-risk business areas require a more rigorous approach in their identification and management.

ASCERTAINING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RECORDS, INFORMATION AND DATA

Once a requirement to create records, information or data is identified, decisions should be made about how to manage those information assets, including how long they must be retained. Retention and disposal decisions are influenced by the significance of the information assets for current and future users. They can often be framed as a risk

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management decision: what is the risk to the organisation, the Government or the community if an information asset is not available in one, ten, 50 or 100 years' time? The most significant records of the ACT Government are selected to be retained in perpetuity as Territory Archives.

Business requirements

The Act requires ACT Government organisations to make and keep full and accurate records of their activities. To do this, and to identify the requirement to create and keep records, information and data, the assessment process must include consideration of an organisation's:

- functions, business requirements and what it does within the context of the ACT Government;
- legislative requirements, including what is required by applicable notifiable instruments;
- internal and external ACT Government policies;
- Australian or international standards relevant to the business; and
- stakeholder and community expectations.

Organisations can implement the Assess principle by working with the Territory Records Office to make an assessment of these factors and the resulting requirements to retain records, information and data. This process involves the development of a hierarchy of business functions and associated activities. This hierarchy provides a framework in which to identify and document the significance of information assets relating to those functions and activities.

Significance criteria

It is particularly important to assess and identify those records that have enduring value to the Territory – referred to as Retain as Territory Archives (RTA). The criteria for selecting Territory Archives are:

- 1 Records, information, and data that provide concise evidence of the deliberations of the Territory and Territory institutions, relating to key functions and program, and significant issues faced in governing the Territory. Examples of information assets meeting this criterion are those that document:
 - development, implementation and review of Territory legislation;
 - development, implementation and review of major government structures, policies, and programs; and
 - government responses to the most significant issues of the day.

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- 2 Records, information, and data that contain information which is considered essential for the protection and future wellbeing of Australians and their environment, including the protection of their significant rights and entitlements. Examples of information assets meeting this criterion are those that:
 - register births, deaths and marriages;
 - detail long-term environmental hazards or significant environmental change;
 - detail elements of Territory heritage such as heritage places registers; and
 - document rights to land.
- 3 Records, information, and data that have a special capacity to illustrate the impact of government activities on individuals, groups, and the environment; the interaction of people with the government; and especially the influence of the Territory community on government decision-making. Examples of information assets meeting this criterion are those that:
 - detail cases of significant government intervention in the lives of individuals or classes of people such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were separated from their families;
 - detail the high-level planning and execution of major public works such as main roads and residential developments;
 - document land-use and zoning plans; and
 - document significant community opposition to government actions or policies.
- 4 Records, information, and data that have substantial capacity to enhance knowledge and understanding of the Territory's history, society, economy, culture and people, especially as these are influenced by government activity. Examples of information assets meeting this criterion are those that:
 - detail concise Treasury and economic data;
 - document statistical data on the Territory's population and its circumstances;
 - detail the planning and production of major cultural events and historical celebrations; and
 - detail major social, economic, cultural, or scientific discoveries or developments of significance to, or having a special relationship with, the Territory.
- 5 Records, information, and data that provide evidence of the source of authority, foundation and machinery of government and Territory institutions sufficient to document the administrative and legal context of other Territory Archives. Examples of information assets meeting this criterion are those that:

- document formal instruments or authorities, including legislation, Administrative Arrangements Orders and delegations under legislation, which establish, maintain, alter or review the functions, powers, responsibilities and jurisdictions of Territory Government Organisations;
- detail judgements that have bearing on the jurisdiction or powers of the ACT Government; and
- document agreements with other governments.

Records disposal schedules

Records, information, and data that do not meet any of the significance criteria will have varying levels of importance and will therefore require different retention periods. All retention periods must be ascertained during the assessment process through consultation with staff of the organisation, stakeholders, and other sources, including the Territory Records Office and the Territory Records Advisory Council. Those retention requirements are documented and their application authorised through instruments known as records disposal schedules.

Records disposal schedules set out:

- the types of records an organisation should make in relation to its business activities;
- how long those records must be kept to meet business and accountability requirements; and
- which of those records have ongoing value to the community as Territory Archives and must be preserved indefinitely for the benefit of present and future generations.

A records disposal schedule follows on from the development of a business classification scheme and includes:

- function names, and function descriptions;
- activity names, and activity descriptions; and
- records disposal class descriptions, actions and triggers.

Territory records can only be destroyed according to the provisions of a records disposal schedule that has been approved by the Director of Territory Records. All draft schedules are submitted to the Territory Records Advisory Council for consultation before they are approved.

For further guidance about the destruction or other disposal of Territory records see the [Retain Principle](#).

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MANAGING RECORDS, INFORMATION AND DATA ACCORDING TO THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

The assessment process must also include the identification of specific management requirements to satisfy particular business or community needs. These should include requirements to capture and manage particular formats of records, information and data, or to implement particular security or storage arrangements.

Significance

Assessments of significance should influence management decisions about an organisation's records, information, and data. Information assets that have high significance are likely to be required for a long period of time. This means that they are likely to outlive the systems in which they are created and managed. These information assets may need more rigorous security, handling and protection arrangements to ensure that they survive in a useable form for as long as they are required. For physical records this may include particular handling and storage requirements. For digital records, information, and data this may include data migration plans. See the Protect Principle for more information.

In addition, records, information, and data that is retained for more than 20 years may become available to the public. These, information assets will need to be understandable to people outside of their immediate business context and over long periods of time. Generally speaking, information assets that must be retained for more than 20 years are subject to more stringent metadata requirements than those which can be destroyed before they are available for public access. See the Describe Principle for further guidance.

Risk

Organisations' assessments of their business requirements, including risk assessments and identification of vital records, should inform decisions about the management of those records, information, and data. These assessments of the organisation's information assets must be reflected in organisational security plans, information risk management plans, business continuity plans, privacy plans and other relevant documents.