

Metadata

Metadata provides the context and controls to allow information to be accessed, protected, used and re-used. With appropriate and consistent application of metadata, digital information gains organisational value and remains understandable and discoverable over time. Simply put, metadata is data about data. Metadata is a flexible and powerful tool. It can be easily created, shared and reused, and enables the automation of actions. If information has the right metadata, we know what it is, we know where it is, and we know how to use it.

Metadata types

Descriptive metadata

Descriptive metadata supplies the business context around the data, such as the title or name, owner or creator, and what business transactions it relates to, as well as the record type itself. Descriptive metadata is essential for access, is a key component in the controls around the protection of records and disposal, and helps us understand at a high level how the record was used by the agency and other stakeholders.

Descriptive metadata also includes document type (spreadsheets, emails, images etc) as well as other descriptors contained in titles (report, letter, budget, correspondence etc). In this context, metadata can help us understand and apply meaning to unstructured records held on shared drives and other storage devices.

Metadata can also describe things other than records and information, such as people, workgroups, organisational structure, business functions and activities, registers, directories, and other structured descriptions of entities within an organisation.

Process metadata

Process or workflow metadata describes specific processes, such as changes to a record's content, structure and appearance. Version numbers, dates of significant actions, workflow authorisations, and audit trails of alteration and access are all examples of process metadata. Process metadata is a key component of trust and accountability in digital processes. Process metadata is captured during the lifecycle of a record, from registration in a recordkeeping system, through migration and disposal:

Few business systems are designed to capture sufficient process metadata. Some case management systems may keep process metadata in audit logs, but even these systems are unlikely to capture disposal and migration metadata. However, this functionality is standard in an EDRMS, which is designed to deliver the security, access, version control and audit functionality required for complete information management.

Process metadata, such as metadata about disposal or migration, can be applied and maintained at an aggregated folder level rather than to individual documents or records.

Technical metadata

This metadata provides technical information about the structure of information and data. It is usually an integral property of data files and other digital items. A database system will contain information about the structure of the data, such as the name of the tables, column names within the tables, and the data type of any fields (e.g. string, integer). Digital image file metadata includes the scan resolution, bit depth, file compression, and may contain GPS coordinates, author information, and even subject fields. Digital documents include information about fonts, word counts, etc. CAD and GIS files may contain considerable specialist information, and links to other files. Management of technical metadata is often an automated function of the software products used to produce digital files and documents.

Mandatory & core metadata elements

ACT Government business systems

All business systems should consider available metadata elements and document them as part of any recordkeeping assessment. The Territory Records Office recommends a minimum metadata set adapted from the [Australian Government Recordkeeping Metadata Standard \(AGRkMS\) 2.2](#) by the National Archives of Australia. This metadata set ensures business systems meet functional and minimum metadata requirements for information management, and will assist in the long term management of business records in the system.

The properties listed in the set may not map to distinct data fields within a business system, but instead may be a wider set of available metadata elements, from which we can derive the required minimum properties.

The Core metadata properties are:

- unique identifier
- creator
- date created.

These properties apply to all business information in systems including, for example, high-volume, low value information in transactional systems. Business information should be uniquely identified and you should know who created it (the agency, work area or the individual) and when it was created.

The Additional metadata properties are:

- title
- disposal class
- format

These properties provide further context and support ongoing management, use of and access to higher value and longer-term business information. They also support interoperability and migration between systems over time.

There is a further metadata element 'Rights' which facilitates the appropriate management and use of sensitive records, or records with particular access and use restrictions. Rights includes non-security related restrictions on access to and use of records.

The minimum set is by no means comprehensive. When assessing a business system, it is recommended that you document metadata that can be used to identify, provide context to, or

Territory Records Office

- Email: TRO@act.gov.au

authenticate business information. This may have been applied at creation or capture, or later to document processes or actions performed on the business information. This is especially important for high volume, high risk records. Large collections of records containing individual information (such as student records) may have extremely long retention periods, combined with privacy requirements and an expectation of ongoing access by the community.

There should also be documented processes to authorise the deletion of records and their metadata, noting that for high volume, low value records, this documentation and approval may occur at system level. Metadata in this context allows us to concisely describe records that have been deleted, for system integrity and accountability purposes.

ACT Government EDRMS

The *AS/NZS 5478:2015 Recordkeeping Metadata Property Reference Set (RMPRS)* describes information about records and the contexts in which they are captured and used. This reference set is intended to be implementation neutral. The document *Electronic Document and Records Management Systems (EDRMS) and Business Systems Recommended Records Management Metadata Fields*, provided by the Territory Records Office, maps the recommended reference set to fields within Content Manager and Objective. Each container/file in HPE Content Manager (aka CM or TRIM) and Objective has the mandatory metadata set available by default when created.

References

[National Archives of Australia - Minimum metadata set](#)

[TRO EDRMS and Business Systems Records Management Metadata Fields Standard \(internal use only\)](#)

[Guideline to Principle 4: Describe Principle](#)

[Territory Records Act 2002](#)

[The value of recordkeeping metadata \(informationstrategy.tas.gov.au\)](#)

[20201130 Standard - Minimum Recordkeeping Metadata Requirements - Final v1.0.pdf \(archives.sa.gov.au\)](#)