

Digital signatures & Authorization

One of the barriers to digital recordkeeping is the perceived need to authorise or 'sign' agreements or approvals using well-worn methods such as 'wet signatures'. The ACT Government Solicitor's Office has produced a fact sheet endorsing the [use of electronic signatures](#), which provides advice and sample text to formally sign many forms of agreements in a manner accepted in common law.

Beyond formal legal agreements, there are many internal business processes and actions that may be authorised or approved with a similar 'digital signature'. There should be no need for a wet signature to approve internal processes. Where a business area believes a wet signature is required, it should be indicated on relevant forms or template where this requirement stems from.

'Digital Signatures' are an acceptable way to authorise or approve an internal action.

A signature acts as a stamp of authentication on a document or other business record. The signature confirms that the information originated from the signer and has not been altered. Digital information, such as email messages or other electronic documents, may contain additional information such as time stamps, audit logs, or proprietary digital signature technology that provide an level of evidence that an approval or authorisation is authentic equivalent to a wet signature.

A Digital Authorisation can come in many different formats. It is important to balance requirements for integrity and compliance with the complexity and resources required for an approval process.

Email Based Approvals

All staff (permanent, temporary, contract, casual), as part of their "new employee information pack" are required to acknowledge that they have read and understood their obligations, specifically, the General Obligations of Public Employees (as outlined in the *Public Service Management Act 1994*), the Workplace Privacy Policy and the [Acceptable Use of ICT Resources Policy](#).

Email approvals have basic timestamps in the headers of emails, and copies can be sent to all parties to the agreement.

Following an approval process, email approvals are to be captured within an EDRMS, where audit logs will provide an additional layer of assurance.

EDRMS Workflows

ACT whole of Government EDRMS - Content Manager (AKA TRIM) and Objective - have the capability to document the approval of business processes through their workflow functionality. Completing a workflow will attach a permanent timestamped log of approval actions to records captured in an EDRMS. This is a robust process with a high level of security and integrity. Workflow approvals are routinely used for timesheets and other employment related agreements. Approval workflows range from simple manager (or other delegate) approvals through to more complex multi-stage approvals. For assistance with using existing workflows, contact [Digital Records Support team](#).

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Version: 1.0

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Last update: 26/02/2021

Product based digital signatures

A number of software products in use within the ACT Government also support digital signatures, such as Adobe Acrobat Pro and the Microsoft suite (e.g. Excel and Word). These products provide business units with a proprietary ability to sign and authorise documents, without using a wet signature. Products may essentially cut and paste in a scanned image of a signature, or they may use more complex security certificate based technology to digitally 'sign' a document. Most products include digital watermarking or other features to prevent tampering with documents after authorisation.

There are some limitations to the use of these types of digital signatures including compatibility across different versions of the products and between vendors. There may be long term issues with the ability to verify a digital signature when the products are upgraded. These options are acceptable for the most part when undertaking transactions outside of ACT Government where the recipient has requested a signed document, and provided that the appropriate delegate is the person applying the digital signature and sending from their own ACTGOV account.