

Information Governance 101

The task of creating a records management program from the ground up can be daunting, even for the most experienced of managers. Despite the operational efficiencies, streamlined compliance with regulatory standards, and tighter controls over information storage methods that come with a correctly implemented program, many organizations are confused about what it takes to optimize their practices. The following is a quick guide to help your company begin the process:

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START THE CONVERSATION

Because not all organizations have a records department, gathering representatives from IT, legal, finance, and operations to discuss records management is critical to your success. Identifying project stakeholders and ascertaining the problems surrounding management of physical and electronic information can give you a roadmap for achieving the desired goals of the program.

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MAKE SOMEONE ACCOUNTABLE

According to ARMA International, every information management program should be headed by a senior executive. Empower a responsible party to oversee, enforce, and ensure the success of your organization's records management program; with a key emphasis on information as an asset.

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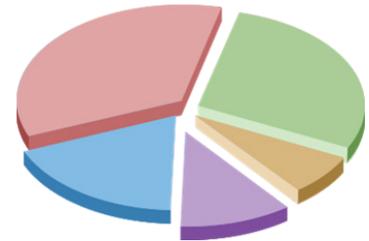
TAKE INVENTORY

Before you start the planning process, it's important to know what kind of inventory your company has on hand. This process includes indexing the volume, scope, and complexity of your organization's information; both physical and electronic records. This can be completed in-house or by working with a partner like The Data Vault to log document types, locations, owners, and security controls.

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IDENTIFY COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS

How businesses handle information is increasingly under legal scrutiny and governmental regulation, with significant penalties for organizations that do not comply with the framework. Depending on the industry, this can entail employee training, access control, retention timelines, and other specifics. The first step towards ensuring conformity with these standards is to understand what records your organization must retain. Leverage your inventory to determine what information is present within your organization and research what is required to maintain compliance.



Tips & Tricks

Even companies with a existing records management framework can benefit from examining their plan for modifications and improvements

Managers need to have an understanding of how comprehensive practices are mission critical

It's impossible to find a solution that fits your needs without identifying the problems first, and front line staff are often the best sources for quality feedback and suggestions

Setting aside time at least once a year to review your records against a retention schedule will save you money by identifying any that can be disposed of and destroyed

Changes to legal requirements can occur rapidly with current events, so having quality legal counsel available is crucial for any business in today's modern economy

Employee education is a critical step in reducing risk, as training can stop problems before they ever get started

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STANDARDIZE NAMING

Create a logical naming system that will clearly distinguish each individual record from the others. Doing so is an easy way to simplify storage and retrieval, while saving time during filing. Elements to consider when building your index are date of creation, name of creator, description of content, functionality, and department code. Retention schedules also benefit when there is common naming patterns from year to year, but make sure to separate your records by age and destruction deadline.

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CONDUCT A RECORDS MANAGEMENT EVALUATION

This is an opportunity to formalize your records management goals and analyze any pre-existing policies, procedures, workflows, and disaster recovery plans if they are in place. If not, the outcome of this evaluation will show you vulnerabilities or gaps in accountability that may exist in the organization. Don't skip this step! Outside consultants that have experience in your industry can help if the necessary expertise isn't present.

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TALK TO THE EXPERTS

Once you've cataloged your records inventory, identified basic legal requirements, and analyzed your current practices to emphasize areas of improvement, reaching out to information management professionals like The Data Vault can help you find a solution that fits your needs. Whether it's tying together separate policies into a comprehensive plan or helping you build a new system from the ground up, having a trusted partner is a crucial component to the records management puzzle.

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IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

With the preliminary steps concluded, the final stage is execution of the new records management blueprint. Quality advice on logistical challenges can ease the transition to off-site storage or digitization, creating less hassle and disruption in the office environment. The benefits of improved records management will become immediately observable, and as time passes will result in cost savings and increased efficiency.

About The Data Vault

The Data Vault is a service-driven information management provider that has been partnering with clients in the Louisville community to offer secure, accessible, and reliable solutions since 1984. Membership in NRC (National Records Centers) and PRISM (Professional Records & Information Services Management) presents our customers with the best of both worlds; the quality of comprehensive local service combined with national coverage and resources.

Consistency is the key to efficiency, with the ability to find documents making a huge difference in the amount of time spent searching for the right information

Mixing records on different retention timelines together can lead to confusion and extra costs when it comes time for destruction. Keep similar files together for a streamlined process

The Data Vault has forms and checklists available online that can help with the evaluation process

Documentation is one of the most important aspects of any program. With a clearly written plan, there are fewer errors and deviations from the original practices over time

Specialty associations or trade groups (such as ARMA International or PRISM) can also provide sound advice and guidance when it comes to finding examples of solutions

Expert consultants are able to answer any questions and concerns that may arise during implementation

Most organizations see instant benefits from improved records handling processes in everyday situations