



Future Proof

protecting our digital future

News for NSW Public Sector Chief Executives

State Archives and
Records NSW
Issue 08, November 16

From the Executive Director



It has been a busy year for the Authority, full of challenges and opportunities.

I am very pleased to announce that the Authority's name officially changed to the State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales on 25 October 2016. This change added "Archives" back into the Authority's name.

Our new name is the State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales.

This is great news as it now means we have a much easier way to describe who we are and brings focus to our identity and purposes in what we do. This change further

emphasises the important role the Authority plays in providing advice on good records and archives management practices to public offices.

The NSW Government transition to digital business continues and my staff are working hard developing guidance for agencies to ensure the proper planning and management of digital State records is done at source before records are created. We call this "Records By Design".

As a society, we have adopted digital business with gusto, but I am concerned that without careful thought about the long term management and preservation of important digital records, we could be plunging into a digital dark age. Technology is changing rapidly and as system lifecycles contract, we need to effectively migrate digital records to proven platforms enabling long term preservation of digital records which need to be retained or risk losing essential evidence of government business.

This is a serious issue confronting us all for which the State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales is taking a leading role. I am working closely with Damon Rees (Government Chief Information and Digital Officer) on this as part of his Digital Agenda and Strategy due for release in 2017.

I also invite you to work with me to tackle it. Please don't hesitate to contact me directly to discuss this or any other matter which you would like help with.

Geoff Hinchcliffe
Executive Director,
State Archives and
Records Authority of
New South Wales

Text messages are State records

Recent media coverage has raised the question of whether or not you can destroy text messages. Under the *State Records Act 1998*, text messages sent or received in the course of official business

Future Proof is a State Archives and Records NSW initiative for the NSW Government

Blog: <http://futureproof.records.nsw.gov.au/>

<http://twitter.com/FutureProofNSW>

are State records. Like any other State records, they can be evidence of your work and need to be managed accordingly.

Part 8 of Schedule 2 of the *State Records Regulation 2015* explicitly addresses SMS messages and provides guidance on what can be destroyed as a normal administrative practice. If a text message has continuing value, you cannot destroy it as a routine process. You need to assess continuing value based on the information a record contains, not its format.

Records with continuing value have administrative, business, fiscal, legal, evidential or historic value to your agency.

Have a policy on messages

All public offices should have a policy on how to manage text messages. The policy should cover which types of messages must be kept and which can be destroyed and under what circumstances. Feel free to contact my staff for assistance in developing a policy.

Your records help you manage risk

Records are the foundation of the open government

principles of accountability and transparency. Good records will help you and your agency to withstand scrutiny and to justify your decisions. Not having the records you need could leave you in an awkward position where you aren't able to demonstrate why a certain course of action was taken.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recently released a consultation paper reminding us that recordkeeping is everyone's business. Cultivating a culture of accountability starts with you. You can demonstrate your commitment to the NSW Government's ethical framework by ensuring that records of your deliberations and decision-making are captured and maintained appropriately.

Making GIPAA requests easy for your agency

The NSW Government's Digital+ 2016 ICT Strategy emphasises the importance of our systems being digital by design. It's important to consider how your systems will manage records and information for both current business and into the future.

For example, you want to be confident that your agency will be able to process a *Government Information (Public Access) Act* request for information managed in your business systems.

If your systems aren't capable of maintaining information for as long as you need it, you are creating an unnecessary complication that you could have resolved by considering records management during the design or procurement stage. Identify the system's recordkeeping requirements early and make sure they are included from the start.

Don't pay unnecessary storage costs

One of the benefits of the transition to digital business is the potential to make savings on long-term storage costs for physical records. Records that have passed their minimum retention period can be lawfully destroyed.

If you are paying for physical records storage, find out if any of your records are due for immediate destruction. Aside from the ongoing storage costs, as long as a record exists you will need to pay for retrieval costs in response to GIPAA requests

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and legal discovery – costs you can avoid by destroying time-expired records as soon as it's lawful to do so.

Reducing your paper holdings also has the added benefit of making the remaining records easier to search and manage.

Similarly, your agency should have processes in place to ensure that you are not storing digital records for longer than you need them. More so than paper, keeping long-term digital records means regular maintenance and migration activities to ensure that the records remain accessible when needed. Establishing a program to manage and dispose of your digital records can go a long way to preventing the unnecessary accumulation of digital holdings and avoiding excessive migration costs.

Digital government, digital accountability

On 1 July 2016 the State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales moved into the ICT and Digital Government Group under the Government Chief Information and Digital Officer. This move signals the NSW Government's recognition of the importance

of the Authority and the role we are playing in leading work on digital records and information management. My staff are working in tandem with the information management policy team at the Department of Finance, Services and Innovation to ensure that your records and information requirements can be seamlessly met.

Your records management SRO

The *Standard on records management* requires each agency to have a designated Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for records management. The SRO supports the Chief Executive by providing oversight of the agency's records and information management. To assist you as a Chief Executive in your responsibilities under the Act, I would recommend that the SRO should be your most senior Chief Information Officer. If you haven't nominated a SRO or your designated SRO has changed, please let me know at govrec@records.nsw.gov.au.

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