

Long-Term Preservation

Key Issues to Consider

The foundation of your preservation plan should be your needs analysis, as well as an analysis of the costs, benefits, and risks involved with each of the options you are studying. Your records management, information technology, and legal staff should all be involved in the process to make sure your plan meets your business requirements and fits in with your general electronic records management strategy. Be sure to document your decision-making process in addition to your choices and plans for implementation.

At the minimum, your preservation plan should include the following items:

- Rationale and requirements for your preservation program.
- List of relevant records series and their retention and access requirements.
- Explanation of the selected preservation technique(s), including schedules for preservation actions, quality assurance testing, backups, etc. and instructions for documentation.
- Pointer to a business continuity or disaster recovery plan.

Once completed, your preservation plan should not gather dust on a shelf. Rather, it should be a reference document for all preservation activities, and it should be kept up to date as your situation changes (e.g., changes in use needs, hardware, software, media, security/access requirements, retention periods, legal mandates).

Discussion Questions

As you move from your needs analysis to the development of your preservation plan, you will face many choices. These are just a few of the questions you should ask during the process.

- How long do we need to keep these records? What will be the costs associated with such preservation tasks as migration and conversion over time?
- What best practices can we identify and apply to our situation? Can we cooperate with other agencies or organizations to share expertise or save money?
- Do we need to keep the records in electronic format or is another format, such as paper or microfilm, more appropriate? How much functionality do we need to retain over time?

Electronic Records Management Guidelines

- How often are these records accessed? What is the best storage solution (e.g., online, nearline, offline)?
- What is the most appropriate storage media for the records? How will we ensure that we retain the hardware necessary to handle the media? What documentation should we collect and maintain regarding the media and hardware?
- How will we ensure that the content of the records is accessible and readable over time? Is the format and necessary software proprietary or non-proprietary? What documentation should we collect and maintain regarding format and software?
- How will we perform periodic quality assurance checks to ensure accessibility and trustworthiness over time? How will we document these checks?
- What indexing and metadata schemes should we employ to ensure that the records can be easily located and evaluated for use?
- How will these records be used? Will they be shared with others inside our organization? Outside? Would XML enhance the use-value of the records?
- Have the records been compressed or encrypted? If so, how does this fit into our management plan?
- Are there data access issues that require special security measures?
- What hardware and software configurations are we moving to in the foreseeable future? How do these records fit in with that plan?
- What staff training is necessary to ensure compliance with the preservation plan?