



# Top Tips for Government Agencies Working with Electronic Records

From the Council of State Archivists

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**As electronic records rapidly replace paper in government business it is important for agencies to have a plan for dealing with them. These tips highlight where to start the conversation.**

- **Consult your records retention schedule:** Know what retention periods have been approved (both minimum and maximum) and take appropriate actions (e.g. transfer to the State Archives, destroy, etc.) when the retention period for your records has been met.
- **Plan ahead in ERM system design:** Talk to archivists, records managers and other stakeholders; determine the possibilities for system adherence to retention and disposition guidelines.
- **You've got to have standards:** Ensure you have a trusted system and that your records are authentic (see ISO 15489, ISO 16363, DoD 5015.02, metadata standards, etc).
- **Organization is key:** Who's in charge of the shared file? Are people using email as a filing cabinet rather than a communication tool? Which copy is the record copy?
- **Make the rules:** Naming conventions, file organization and disposition strategies all help now and in the long term. Make the rules known and follow them.
- **Do you have backup?** Does your backup system work? How well will it actually restore your e-records? Can you retrieve individual items? Test all assumptions.
- **Understand metadata:** It's the information that lets you search, retrieve, access, manage and preserve your records. Without it a record is just a needle in a pile of needles.
- **A record is more than just raw data:** The content, context and structure of a record give it meaning and make it usable. Metadata helps preserve these characteristics to ensure ongoing access.
- **Do you have built-in strategies?** No format, storage media or information system is permanent. Do you have a plan for migrating records to new systems and formats?
- **Does delete mean delete?** E-records proliferate easily. Do you have a plan to manage deletion of all copies that *should* be deleted? E-discovery can grab everything that exists.
- **Think before you scan:** Standards, worthiness, naming conventions, storage and retrieval (among other things) should be considered before you turn that scanner on for the most efficient and useful results.