



The newsletter of the Virginia Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators

VAGARA

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President's Letter

Greetings Members! Spring has come and gone and now the July 4th holiday as well. I hope that many of you have had the opportunity to go on vacation or just have some time off to rest and rejuvenate!

All of us on the board have been working steadily to move VAGARA forward and to provide the right kind of tools to help you with your records and archives skills such as redeveloping our website to include a members only section with helpful links and documents as well as partnering with the Library of Virginia to bring training out to you! If you have any ideas for the board, let us know what we can do for you – contact any board member!

Caroline Walters has agreed to be the 2010 Conference

Chair and she is busy planning the event and working with the hotel to make the 26th Annual VAGARA Conference another success! Caroline conducted a survey back in May asking the members to give an indication on whether they could attend the conference and if so, how many days would they prefer to have for training. An overwhelming number of members responded and based on the response, we are returning to the traditional format for our conference! So mark your calendars for November 4-5, 2010! The program is being designed around the needs identified by our members in the survey and a more flexible registration will be available as well. We will continue to keep everyone posted via email and the website.

I will continue to keep you posted on the progress of the many projects that your board members are working on and as always, I seek your comments, both positive and constructive. Have a safe and wonderful summer!

Nancy



The 26th Annual VAGARA Conference is coming soon!

**Westin Town Center,
Virginia Beach
November 4-5, 2010**

**November 4 – One-Day
Conference (8:30 a.m. –
4:30 p.m.)**

The one-day conference focuses on the management of electronic information, with sessions on email management, cloud computing, social media and e-discovery. The day also includes vendor showcases to hear about the latest technology and services available, and a networking session to discuss issues related to your specific

agency or industry, or on specific topics.

**November 5 – Half-Day
Workshops (9 a.m. –
12:30 p.m.)**

The Friday half-day workshops topics include disaster preparedness and recovery, and archival theory and preservation of historical records in all formats.

Registration opens August 15th with early reduced registration for either day or both at an even lower rate. So keep checking the VAGARA website (www.vagara.org) for the complete schedule of

exciting sessions and registration information. Not sure you can attend? Check out the website to review sample justifications for VAGARA 2010 being the conference to attend this year!!!

An awesome hotel rate of \$109 (plus tax) per night is available for attendees at the Westin Town Center, and can be continued over the weekend to extend the conference into a mini-beach escape. Links to online hotel registration will be available on the VAGARA website (www.vagara.org). **Mark your calendars now!!!**

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Why Records Mangement? By Priscilla Emery

This article is excerpted from the Records Management Report published by CMS Watch

To some, managing records represents one of the most boring and onerous business functions that anyone could possibly undertake within an organization. Of course, most people don't even understand what records management is -- making it easy to malign an activity that is so misunderstood.

Indeed records management crosses numerous disciplines. Did you know...

- That categorization and indexing are two elements that are critical to the success of a records management program? Sounds a little like knowledge management.
- That vital records preservation is one of the key steps in developing a disaster recovery plan? Sounds like infrastructure management.
- That by ignoring records management policies employees and their companies

can potentially end up facing criminal penalties? Sounds like a legal profession.

- What led to Arthur Andersen's downfall? Shredding — inappropriate shredding — shredding of records that should have been retained according to the policies of both Andersen and Enron.

Despite what people may say, what you don't know can hurt you and, in the case of records management, what you choose to ignore can cripple you and your organization. Recent dramatic headlines have made it quite apparent that records management (or the lack thereof) is an essential activity to ascertain and confirm the credibility of many business transactions and government activities. The proliferation of electronic documents (especially e-mails) and the potential litigation exposure that they cause

are becoming the bane of legal advisors and records managers in many corporations and government agencies. Microsoft, Texaco and other Fortune 500 companies have taken hits from "runaway" e-mails introduced as evidence in high stakes cases. But, to records managers e-mail is just another record type in the scheme of things (not a trivial record type but a record type just the same). They know that in fact, "smoking guns" can come in many different guises, including: paper, electronic image files, video tape, voice recordings, etc. It's all potential evidence and therefore potential deposition fodder. Making sure that all the relevant information is accessible in a timely fashion, should an organization need to defend itself in a lawsuit, is also what records managers are responsible for. These days a records manager's job is anything but

About our Members

Ginny Jones has completed the second half of her research paper on privacy laws – **Personal Privacy Protection Requirements for the 50 US States**. It has been published and is available for free download at <http://www.armaedfoundation.org/>.

Mabel Washington Jenkins, MMC, City of Newport News, has been named the "2010 Clerk of the Year" by the Virginia Municipal Clerks Association (VMCA).

Congratulations to both of our members from the Newport News area!



PAXTON Records Retention provides a cost-effective option for storing and managing information, records, and files. Paxton's state-of-the-art barcode management system enables Paxton to track the specific location and activity of **EVERY** item with access at a moment's notice!

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boring, and in many organizations there aren't enough of them to handle the increased compliance laws and regulations that have cropped up in recent months.

Not surprisingly, then, many companies are looking at records management software as a way to get a better grip on the increased volume of all kinds of records. Although that approach can help, a basic understanding of what records management is and its concomitant practices are required before even looking at any software product. If you don't have a records management policy in place along with the appropriate retention and destruction rules for the records, the software will be useless.

What is Records Management?

There are many different definitions of records management but one that I like the best is, "A professional discipline that is primarily concerned with the management of document-based information systems. The application of systematic and scientific controls to recorded information required in the operation of an organization's business. The systematic control of all organizational records during the various stages of their life cycle: from their creation or receipt, through their processing,

distribution, maintenance and use, to their ultimate disposition. The purpose of records management is to promote economies and efficiencies in recordkeeping, to assure that useless records are systematically destroyed while valuable information is protected and maintained in a manner that facilitates its access and use."

Some people have the mistaken impression that records management is about hoarding everything that comes across one's desk in the course of doing business. In some highly regulated industries it may seem that is the case. But in most cases it's not only making sure that what needs to be kept as a record is retained but also prescribing how long it should be kept, where it should be stored, who has access to it and when it should be destroyed (if ever).

There is even an ISO standard for developing a records management program ([ISO 15489](#)). However, even though records retention practices are considered systematic and scientific, deciding what is a record and how long it should be retained is a combination of both prescribed practice and a certain amount of subjectivity depending on

the actual documents in question. Just defining what a record is can get somewhat confusing to people.

What is a Record?

According to the [Federal Records Act](#) a record is, "recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristics, made or received by an organization that is evidence of its operations and has value requiring its retention for a specific period of time."

According to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) [records include](#), "... all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the U. S. Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of the data in them."

Got it?

This can be confusing for non-governmental organizations that don't believe that these definitions necessarily apply to them so a more generic definition would be that records are recorded information, regardless of physical form,

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."

Winston Churchill



that are generated or received and used while conducting business, and preserved because of their informational value or as evidence of an organization's functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, mission, programs, projects, and activities. This is why there is no real cookie-cutter approach to defining a records retention program for every document out there — every company has to look at its own business operations and examine what should be considered a record and then decide what retention rules to apply against them. Again, the government and other industry regulators may help in that decision by

defining exactly what they expect to see if they have to do an audit or investigation, but audits and investigations aren't the only reasons to have a records management program. There are other ways to determine if an information item should be considered a record or not:

- Does the information document your daily business process?
- Does the information provide input to a mission-critical business decision?
- Does the information provide evidence as to why a business decision was made?
- Is the information re-

quired for legal, fiscal, audit, or tax purposes? "Vital Records" contain unique or irreplaceable information and require special protection, such as articles of incorporation, annual reports and shareholder records. These should be defined as an integral part of a disaster recovery plan or operation.

RM Programs, RM Software

Essential elements of a records management program include a records retention policy and a set of procedures where records are classified, retention periods are defined and destruction procedures are prescribed. Classification of records and then maintain-

ing them with the appropriate metadata are necessary so that this information can be retrieved quickly when required. Record integrity depends on three attributes: content, context, and the structure of the original record. Authenticity is very important to determining if a piece of information is the "true" record of an event or business transaction, which is why the management of electronic records, most especially e-mails, web pages and instant messages, is so problematic. The ability to generate larger volumes of records in a shorter period of time has increased the productivity of many organizations but that productivity

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We're on the web!
WWW.VAGARA.ORG

gain can be lost if essential records can't be found during the course of doing business or, in even more critical procedures such as when an audit takes place or a legal discovery of evidence is required. Finding lost records costs money in terms of lost productivity and in more the substantial costs of fines, court costs and lawsuit settlement costs. Hence the need for records management software that aid in the record repository management activities of many organizations. These products help users:

- manage retention schedules,
- store records in their appropriate classifications along with the prescribed metadata,
- search for records when required,
- destroy records according to prescribed schedules,

- put holds on records so they don't get destroyed while the company goes through an audit or investigation, and
- track the access of the record over its active and in-active life cycle.

In many cases these systems track not only electronic documents but also other record objects such as paper, boxes and tapes...

Amid all the focus on key records management features such as record declaration and standards certification, one key factor sometimes gets lost in the shuffle. Records management is a core activity within many different business processes within the organization itself. It is in and of itself not meant to be the core application. Just like filing is an adjunct activity to one's work, records management must fit into

the core business process in order to be truly effective. Therefore, technological elegance shouldn't be the focus -- integration with core business processes is more important. Ability to support and integrate with key business applications and be imbedded as an activity within a workflow should become more important evaluation criteria in the long run...



E-mail me with news and/or information about yourself or colleagues and we'll put it in the next newsletter!
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Don't forget to mark your calendars for the 26th Annual VAGARA Conference!

November 4-5, 2010!

The Executive Board has an exciting program for you and we look forward to seeing you soon!

