

4.2 Electronic Mail Policy

Policy Statement

E-mail is an accepted, efficient communications tool for supporting departmental business.

As provided in the *Government Records Act*, e-mail messages are included in the definition of “records.” Therefore, under that act, e-mail messages, sent and received, are the property of government and are required under the act to be managed in accordance with the records management requirements of the act, including the Standards for Administrative and Operational Records (STAR/STOR). E-mail messages may also be subject to government records management policies, standards, and guidelines, which may be identified through Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.

The Government Records Committee, set up under the act, oversees the management of e-mail records in the same way that it oversees other record formats.

In addition, the management of e-mail records is subject to the requirements of this policy.

Policy Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to

- promote an understanding of how e-mail messages are, as required under law, managed as part of departmental information resources
- provide for the appropriate use of e-mail, separate and apart from the legal requirements noted in this policy
- provide for the controls necessary for records retention, accessibility, and protection of e-mail, separate and apart from the legal requirements noted in this policy
- make users aware of their roles and responsibilities in managing e-mail and provide them with guidelines for purposes of this policy.

Policy Directives

1. E-mail is a government communications tool, and users are accountable for using it appropriately and responsibly, including the following:
 - Personal use of e-mail is restricted to a user's own time and personal e-mail should not be stored in the government e-mail system.
 - E-mail is not to be used for distributing personal opinions, for personal gain, or for inappropriate messages.
2. Where STAR or STAR/ STOR have been adopted, e-mail messages that are managed under the STAR or STAR/ STOR, may, as provided in the STAR or STAR/STOR, be either transitory or required for ongoing purposes as explained below:
 - E-mail messages of temporary usefulness and not required to meet statutory requirements or to support administrative or operational functions are transitory records and need not be transferred to the department's record-keeping system but instead may be deleted from the e-mail system.
 - E-mail messages required for statutory, legal, fiscal, audit, administrative, or operational purposes are required for ongoing purposes, are official government records and must be transferred out of the e-mail system to the department's record-keeping system. Examples of ongoing purposes cited for purposes of this policy include documenting business transactions, giving evidence of activities and functions of an office, and supplying the information needed to perform duties and make decisions. The e-mail system is not a storage system for records nor is it a records management system.
3. Where only STAR is adopted, users must, concerning the management of operational records, consult with the Records Manager Designates in their departments respecting the management of transitory e-mail records in their departments.
4. Where neither STAR nor STOR have been adopted, users must, concerning the management of administrative and operational records, consult with their Records Manager Designates respecting the management of transitory e-mail records in their departments.
5. E-mail messages distributed through an e-mail system must be managed as follows:
 - E-mail messages must be managed in accordance with STAR/STOR, including the requirements that e-mail messages that are retained must, in the same way that paper records are managed, be classified and scheduled as required by and according to the STAR/STOR Schedules.

- E-mail records that are retained must be stored and made accessible, along with other media formats within the office.
 - Each e-mail user has an obligation to identify, preserve, and protect e-mail records that should be retained, including electronic calendars and other special features of the e-mail system, and e-mail users must be aware that local area network backup systems for e-mail are designed for system-wide recovery, not for individual user recovery.
 - Utilizing, as a best option, an electronic records management system or, in the absence of such a system, producing the electronic records in hard copy to be managed under the manual records management system.
6. E-mail should not be used as a carrier for confidential information, because messages may be seen by people other than those the sender intended.
 7. In order to ensure authenticity of e-mail records, passwords must not be shared, and proxies must be granted with care.
 8. E-mail systems have limitations, and users should not depend upon them for delivery or receipt of urgent messages or as the sole means of communicating an important message. E-mail is to be used in combination with other business tools such as the telephone, voice mail, and face-to-face conversations.
 9. E-mail records that are to be retained must contain sufficient contextual information to be meaningful.
 10. E-mail records should meet acceptable standards of composition. Users should take the same care with composition as they would with a paper record, proofing or spell checking each record before sending it.
 11. E-mail attachments should be limited to a size considered appropriate by the departmental system administrator.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to the e-mail created or received by any government department, agency, board, or commission. In this policy, “department” and “departmental” are to be read to include agencies, boards, and commissions.

Policy Guidelines

It is the policy of government to supply all users with access to the Guidelines on the Use and Management of E-mail and related training tools, prepared pursuant to this policy, to enable users to manage their e-mail through the application of specified procedures and best practices. The guidelines may be modified or enhanced to meet departmental requirements, provided that the department is in compliance with this policy.

Responsibilities

ALL USERS

All users are responsible for day-to-day management of their e-mail messages, according to the requirements referred to and stated in this policy, including departmental policies and guidelines. They will identify which e-mail messages are to be transferred to a record-keeping system and which e-mail messages are considered transitory records and may be destroyed.

EXECUTIVE AND MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL

Executive and management personnel are accountable for ensuring that e-mail records are managed according to the requirements referred to and stated in this policy, including departmental policy and guidelines.

SUPERVISORS AND SECTION MANAGERS

Supervisors and section managers will oversee record-keeping practices in their areas to ensure that access is available to e-mail records created or received by their work groups. They will also ensure that users receive training to enable them to use e-mail effectively.

SYSTEM ADMINISTRATORS

System administrators play an important role in configuring the system; monitoring the system; putting security, disaster recovery, and backup procedures in place; and troubleshooting problems.

RECORDS MANAGERS

Records managers work closely with the system administrator to ensure that the system is able to meet records management access, record integrity, records scheduling, and disposition requirements. Records managers are responsible for managing the record-keeping system that is the repository for e-mail messages identified as records.

Records managers should, where possible, monitor the participation of users in depositing e-mail messages in the record-keeping system, and the quality and completeness of e-mail messages deposited. This may be possible only when an electronic record management system is operational.

Related Legislation

The following acts relate directly to the management of e-mail messages:

Public Archives Act

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

Government Records Act

Business Electronic Filing Act

and all acts and regulations that contain specific requirements for the production of, access to, and retention and disposition of records.

Additional Resources

A Guideline for the Use and Management of Electronic Mail (E-Mail)

Definitions

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Information that identifies the date of a record; date of receipt of a record; sender or author name, position, and address; content; and related records.

ELECTRONIC MAIL (E-MAIL)

Messages sent and received electronically between computers.

RECORDS

As defined in the *Government Records Act*, information or data that is recorded or stored by graphic, photographic, electronic, mechanical, or other means and includes public archives vested in Her Majesty in right of the Province.

RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEM

A system used to organize records according to a classification system where records, or documentation linking records of different media types together, are preserved, protected, made accessible, and managed according to an authorized records schedule.

STAR/STOR

STAR (Standard for Administrative Records) and STOR (Standard for Operational Records) are government-wide standards for the classification, filing, automated retrieval, essential record designation, and disposition scheduling of administrative and operational records. STAR/STOR is based on a block numeric records classification system, reflecting function, for the classification of all types of administrative and operational records. STAR/STOR forms the foundation of the government records management system. These media-independent standards cover administrative records (common to all offices and government) and operational records (of which some are unique to each office).

TRANSITORY RECORDS

for electronic systems, as described in STAR/STOR, means records, information, and data of temporary usefulness that are not an integral part of an administrative or operational record or data file, that are required only for a limited period of time, or for the completion of a routine action or the preparation of an ongoing record or file. These records are not required to meet statutory obligations or to support administrative or operational functions.

Enquiries

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