



## Recorded Information Management

# Create It...and Keep It!

## *Your Recordkeeping Responsibilities*

### *“Why didn’t I write that down?”*

How often have you asked yourself that question? Consider these scenarios:

- ❑ You attended an important meeting, but didn’t take notes. Now you can’t remember all the things you were supposed to do.
- ❑ The new program seems to be a success, but little data on service levels and results is being collected. It’s difficult to show that the money is being well spent.
- ❑ Your branch is restructuring (again) and no one remembers why it was reorganized a few years back. There are few memos and notes on this in the file.

Previous RIM Fact Sheets have emphasized your responsibilities for the proper organization, storage and disposal of government records. *But what about ensuring that the right records are created in the first place?*

As a government employee, you have a responsibility to create and maintain full and accurate documentation of your activities in order to support government business needs and accountability, and provide a lasting record of achievements.

Some activities naturally generate records; other records must be created on purpose. For example, registering a birth automatically results in a record. Decisions taken at meetings, however, must be written down intentionally for future reference.

### *So, how do I decide what activities I should document?*

If the program you’re dealing with has established procedures for creating specific records, follow them. In other situations, as a rule of thumb, ask yourself this question: *“What information do I need to capture to show what has been done, how the program has been planned and managed, and what results have been achieved?”*

### ***Full, accurate and reliable records:***

- are necessary for conducting the daily business of government
- provide evidence to support government—and employee—accountability
- assist in effective decision-making
- support the legal rights of the province and the public, including the public’s right of access to information
- provide a lasting legacy of the achievements of the government and Ontario’s public servants

***What to document...a few examples:***

- evidence of daily activities that support the business of government
- significant decisions and recommendations, along with complete background information
- all significant interactions with clients, consultants, vendors, partners and agents
- significant verbal communications such as important meetings, telephone calls and face to face discussions
- legal agreements of any kind, with complete supporting documentation
- all policy and planning activities
- complete information documenting the work done on behalf of the government by consultants and others
- administrative actions and decisions wherever payments are made or received, services delivered, or an obligation incurred
- all details of IT systems (hardware and software) necessary to their continued operation, including their ongoing availability and integrity of the data they contain
- workplans and performance results

In general, records should be factual, to the point, and not contain personal opinions or comments about others.

Once records have been created, make sure they are securely stored in an appropriate location where they can be easily retrieved by you and others who may need them (and who are authorized to access them). That place may be in the appropriate computer directories, paper files, or in an electronic document management system, depending on the procedures in your office.

***How do I know if the records I've created are adequate?***

A fuller RIM guideline will discuss this in more detail. But simply put, records need to be complete, accurate, relevant, authentic, and authoritative if they are to be useful. These characteristics seem common-sense, but they are not always so.

For example, how often have you created an incomplete record of who said what, failed to date a document or identify its author? How often have you neglected to create and keep that all-important memo documenting your input into a policy or planning process (because you figured you would remember what you said)? Are you sure which document is the final version and which is the draft? Do you always return the original e-mail with your response, or at least make reference to it in your message?

***How long do I have to keep the records once I've created and filed them?***

Retention and disposal of official records are governed by records schedules approved by the Archivist of Ontario. "Transitory" records (eg. e-mails about minor administrative issues) can be deleted or destroyed once they have served their purpose. See the Archives RIM website for more advice on "The Fine Art of Destruction" (Fact Sheet #8), and other guidelines for retaining and disposing of records.

***Remember, the records you create in your job belong to the province, not to you.***

For more information about this **Fact Sheet**, contact the **Archives of Ontario Policy Unit** at (416)327-1568 or (416)327-1570 or [rim@archives.gov.on.ca](mailto:rim@archives.gov.on.ca)