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Developing Records Management in Support of Access to Information

Access to Information as a Right

“Access to public records gives citizens the opportunity to participate in public life ... and hold their governments accountable ... [it] is a fundamental human right and can be used to help people exercise other critical human rights, such as clean water, healthcare, and education.”

The Carter Center, Americas Program

http://cartercenter.org/peace/americas/nav_question4.html

Freedom of Information is catching!

“In the past two decades, freedom of information legislation has moved from being a legislative ‘luxury’ enjoyed by a few advanced democracies to becoming an accepted part of the democratic landscape.”

Assessing the performance of freedom of information. Robert Hazell, Ben Worthy. (Constitution Unit at University College London, UK. 2010)

“A rising tide ... raises all boats.”

“Respect for the law means acting with a sense that the law has value over and above the immediacy of the application of the law ... It means that we ... help the law to evolve and in turn allow the law to help us evolve as well. Without law there can be no civilization. Indeed, it is the law that creates civilization.”

Ivan Hoffman, 2004

A legitimate, meaningful and effective “seat at the table”.

“The right to information is understood ... not simply as an attempt to get legitimate access to information, important though this is, but as a part of a people’s struggle to develop people-centred participatory governance.”

David Goldberg, Co-convener,
Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland.
December 2002

Access encourages Trust

“A free flow of information can be an important tool for building trust between a government and its citizens.”

The Carter Centre, Americas Program

http://cartercenter.org/peace/americas/nav_question4.html

Access to what?

“Any freedom of information legislation is only as good as the quality of the records to which it provides a right of access.

Such rights are of limited use if reliable records are not created in the first place, if they cannot be found when needed, or if arrangements for their archiving or destruction are inadequate.”

Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002:
Code of Practice on Records Management

What do we mean by Governance?

The use of government resources in the execution of the government's duties on behalf of the citizen must encourage,

- Transparency
- Responsibility
- Accountability
- Participation
- Responsiveness to the needs of the people

What is Good Records Management?

Records management is the systematic control of all records from their creation or receipt, through their process, distribution, organisation, storage and retrieval, to their ultimate disposition.

The Benefits of Good Records Management (1)

Systematic management of records allows organisations,

- to know what records they have, and locate them easily
- to increase efficiency and effectiveness
- to make savings in administration costs, both regarding staff time and storage
- to support decision making

The Benefits of Good Records Management (2)

- to be accountable
- to achieve business objectives and targets
- to provide continuity in the event of a disaster
- to meet legislative and regulatory requirements, particularly as laid down by any access to information legislation and other information laws
- to protect the interests of employees, clients and stakeholders

The Principles of Good Records Management

- Authenticity
- Accuracy
- Accessibility
- Completeness
- Comprehensiveness
- Compliancy
- Effectiveness
- Security

The Main Components of Good Records Management (1)

- Records management must be regarded as a corporate function
- Inclusion of records and information management in the corporate risk management framework
- Instructions to staff and managers on keeping and managing records

The Main Components of Good Records Management (2)

- Identifying and managing the information and business systems that hold records
- Records management policy
- Resources to support the records management policy
- Records management during major organisational and other changes

The Main Components of Good Records Management (3)

- Records Management Strategy document
- Business Classification Scheme (file plan)
- Retention and disposal schedules
- Information security policy

The Main Components of Good Records Management (4)

- Archiving policy and transfer arrangements
- Business continuity plan, including vital records policy
- Competency framework for records management staff
- Assessment and review procedures

We must be free not because we claim freedom, but because we practice it.

“The assessment of current performance in recordkeeping ... is in order to improve that performance. It involves identifying areas for improvement and putting in place relevant action plans.

It is not a one-off action but rather a repeated process so as to ensure that recordkeeping meets the changing needs of the authority.”

Scottish Council on Archives

<http://www.scoarch.org.uk/home>

Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011

“The Act cannot put right what went wrong in the past, but it can help us avoid the same problems in the future.

We owe it to future generations to make the necessary improvements to the way public authorities deal with records, to safeguard their rights and their identities as individuals and to secure our collective memory.”

Fiona Hyslop, MSP.
Scottish Government Secretary for Culture and External Affairs

"Start where you are. Use what you have

..." *Arthur Ashe*

"The secret lies in the present -
if you pay attention to the present,
you will be able to improve it.

And, if you improve the present,
whatever happens afterwards will
be better too."

Paul Coelho
The Alchemist (1988)