**INFORMATION GOVERNANCE**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

**What is Information Governance?**

Information governance, or IG, is the set of multi-disciplinary structures, policies, procedures, processes and controls implemented to manage information at an enterprise level, supporting an organization's immediate and future regulatory, legal, risk, environmental and operational requirements.

IG encompasses more than traditional records management. Under the information governance umbrella, multiple disciplines within the organization that historically have functioned separately are brought together in a holistic fashion to work collaboratively to manage one of an agency’s biggest assets – records and information. These disciplines are:

* **Business units/lines of business** *(processes to perform agency mission and administration)*
* **Records management** *(management, retention and disposition of informational assets)*
* **IT / IS** *(hardware, software, devices, integration, systems maintenance)*
* **Security** *(protection of information and systems)*
* **Legal** *(including public disclosure and other legal obligations)*

**What’s in it for the agency?**

Agencies are all struggling with the same issues – their records and information are not being managed and any efforts to do so fall short. Huge amounts of time are wasted as staff spends hours searching for or spending time recreating documents just to do their job and perform the agency’s mission. Public disclosure and discovery efforts have become more complicated and complex and take up more and more time and effort to satisfy records requests, taking away from the agency mission itself.

Everyone knows there are problems, just not what do to about them. Some agencies end up in an endless debate about what should happen, and then nothing does happen as they just get stuck. Limping along can be an option, but does that really work? Ignoring the issues won’t make them go away, nor does that solve anything.

So far the choices or decisions made are largely driven by looking at things only from a technology perspective (what’s new and shiny) and not from a collaborative agency wide perspective in making choices really for the greater good and for what it can and can’t really do. Many decisions are made in a vacuum and not with input from a broader view of the proposed tools.

The benefits of information governance are numerous:

* Provides a positive strategic framework for the agency as a whole;
* Breaks through the barriers and obstacles that are holding agencies back from moving forward and DO something;
* Invites collaboration and teamwork to make wiser and more sustainable decisions;
* Information governance paves the way towards implementing electronic content management systems and other processes necessary today to manage records, information and data;
* Information governance supports compliance and an open and transparent government;
* The ability to locate and use records and information and keep only what you need to keep, and have all the other stuff go away - it’s just plain old good for business.

**What’s in it for me?**

Users benefit when their agency has a plan and strategy to move forward instead of being paralyzed by indecision. IG fosters collaboration and input, and enables the agency to provide more appropriate tools and systems that benefit both the users and the agency. Better tools and systems enables users to increase their effectiveness, providing a higher level of services and resources to the public and users. *With the right tools in play, levels of frustration and stress will decrease – leading to a happier and more productive workplace.*

**How does my agency get started?**

Start with a conversation and a hard look at the current and prevailing attitude of the agency, and take a hard look at the current levels of pain with managing records and information, and levels of pain when it comes to the agency public disclosure and discovery issues.

* Are the business users are really supported and consulted on the tools they need to do their job effectively?
* How many different systems, different databases, and silos exist in your agency?
* How close to compliance are you? How much time and money is spent on disclosure efforts?
* Are you able to manage your disclosure/discovery processes? How effective are they and what are the stress levels of the disclosure units?

Asking some basic questions and doing a high level assessment of pain points for the agency will help you determine the extent of the problem, and once you get to the point of accepting and acknowledging there are problems, you can then take the steps moving forward to solutions.

**Can my agency embrace information governance even if we can’t afford or don’t want to purchase a new ECM system?**

IG is the ***framework* *and a plan*** around which an agency can build an information governance program for the agency. Policies, procedures, and a strategic plan can all be developed and implemented for the agency regardless of their level of readiness for purchasing and implementing a system. This will benefit the agency even if an Electronic Content Management system is not a viable option at this time.

For government, free is not always good. Sometimes you do get what you pay for, and “free” storage or “free” cloud use doesn’t always include the security and protection levels for public records. “Free” tends to include a catch – like saying “up to 10 gigabytes for free” and then after accumulating that much in a very short period of time next thing you know you are paying more for “free” than expected. Epic volumes of records and data add up very quickly, and that’s not cheap.

You can at least embrace the concepts and take some basic steps towards an **enterprise approach** in the management of records and information.

**Now what?**

In order to change, there must be an acknowledgement of the problem and that the current state of things isn’t working very well. Just limping along won’t solve anything or change anything, a commitment to change and make improvement is the first step, and you can begin with some basic steps:

The main thing is to **GET STARTED!**

1. Make the commitment for change
2. Formalize an information governance/records management program
3. Make training and education mandatory
4. Create consistent policies and procedures
5. Do some business analysis and target problem areas
6. Start some housekeeping chores/clean up
7. Manage expectations – this is not an overnight fix
8. Pick just **ONE** business unit as a pilot build on that success.

Consistent policies are always a good thing, they outline expectations and are an excellent foundation to build on complimenting new strategies and processes that may develop under the IG framework.

You may find just making some changes to certain existing processes and procedures when viewed and analyzed from a holistic standpoint will prove beneficial even if you don’t buy any additional technology or tools at this time.

It’s not easy to eat an elephant, but it can be done. It doesn’t matter which end you start with, or even if you pick the middle. The main thing is to just take those first bites and follow up with continuous bites and over time the elephant is gone. By having a robust records management program and consistent application of systematic best practices and the right tools, the elephant doesn’t show up again!