
Electronic Records Management: Strategies for Managing Chat/Instant Messaging Retention

Purpose: Provide guidance to state and local government agencies on a general strategy for applying retention to chat/instant messaging (IM) records.

A general strategy to follow is:

1. **Identify Business Uses** – Decide what business can be conducted using chat/IM.
2. **Determine Longest Retention** – Using the records retention schedules, determine the retention for each of the business uses identified in Step 1. If multiple retention periods cannot be applied to the chat/IM records, identify the longest retention period and apply that retention period to all chats/messages.
3. **Document in Policies/Procedures** – Create/update agency policies and procedures to document types of business that can be conducted using chat/IM, how long the records should be retained, and what to do when unapproved business via chat/IM takes place.
4. **Train Staff** – Make sure all staff using chat/IM are aware of and understand what business can and cannot be done via chat/IM.
5. **Retain the Records** – Keep the records (in electronic format) for the determined retention period(s).
6. **Do Compliance Checking** – Do routine and systematic checks to make sure chat/IM records are being retained appropriately.

**Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from
Washington State Archives:**

**www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov**