
Electronic Records Management: Strategies for Managing Voicemail Retention

Purpose: Provide guidance to state and local government agencies on options for managing the retention of voicemails.

Here are some suggested strategies for managing those voicemail records that need to be retained:

1. **Capture Audio Recording in Another Format** – Automatically capture and retain the voicemail records in another format that is easier to manage, such as email with the audio file (and, if available, an automatically generated text transcription) attached, etc. When the capture is complete, delete the voicemail from the voicemail system.

PROs: Full audio record is retained; able to be applied consistently; utilizes existing strategies and tools for managing records (such as emails); reduces voicemail system storage volume.

CONs: Voicemail system may not offer this feature; searching voicemails in audio format is difficult*.

*Searching may be helped if a brief note of the contents and participants or a computer-generated transcription is added to the record.

2. **Memorialize the content manually** – Create a note-to-file, summarize in a call log, or send an email confirming the voicemail message, etc., then delete the voicemail from the voicemail system.

PROs: Requires no additional technology; easier to search for the record using the memorialized summary than searching the audio file.

CONs: Full audio record is lost and only a summary is retained; requires some degree of effort from user; hard to ensure this is practiced consistently.

3. **Retain voicemail within the voicemail system.**

PROs: Little to no effort needed; voicemail remains in original electronic format.

CONs: Voicemail system size limitations may make this impractical; searching within voicemail system is difficult; applying retention within voicemail system is difficult.

4. **Disable the service** until such time as the agency can implement an effective retention strategy.

PROs: Avoids creating records that cannot be managed by the agency.

CONs: May not be practical from a customer service or business needs perspective.

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