

Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit

INTRODUCTION



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The original version of this guideline has been prepared by the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA) for use by countries around the Pacific. This means that the guideline may refer to things that you are not familiar with or do not use in your country. For example, not all governments have an auditor-general who reviews the financial and other records of government departments. You may find that you need to change some of the advice in this guideline to suit your own government's arrangements. To obtain an editable copy of this guideline, contact the national archives, public record office or other records authority in your country, or contact PARBICA at <<http://www.parbica.org>>.

THE NEED FOR A RECORDKEEPING FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE TOOLKIT

The Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA) recognised at its conference in Nadi, Fiji in 2005, that good recordkeeping underpins public sector efficiency and accountability. By improving recordkeeping practices, governments will become more efficient in their everyday activities and be able to be more accountable for their actions.

In response, PARBICA is developing this Toolkit as a series of resources that promote a common approach to best practice recordkeeping across the Pacific and in alignment with international best practices. Although cultures and administrative laws and traditions throughout the Pacific region vary from place to place, there is also a great deal of similarity in the ways in which governments function today. By identifying those similarities through research and consultation, and combining that knowledge with expertise in modern approaches to recordkeeping, the tools will be designed in such a way that they will be able to be adapted or customised to suit the particular requirements of any country.

The Toolkit will assist Pacific governments to meet their legal obligations and help protect the rights and entitlements of the citizens of these countries and territories.

WHAT THE TOOLKIT WILL PROVIDE

The Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit (the Toolkit) has been produced by PARBICA for Pacific archivists to better equip government agencies across the Pacific to improve the state of recordkeeping within their administrations.

Given the Toolkit is modular in nature, this introduction cannot provide a complete summation of what the Toolkit will finally include. Funding has already been secured from the Australian Government's AusAID program for Stage One of the project. This stage will develop:


- a brochure (and possibly a poster) aimed at permanent secretaries, chief executive officers and other departmental heads that explains their responsibilities in relation to recordkeeping, and highlights the benefits of ensuring that those responsibilities are met
- a checklist to help an organisation ascertain whether it has in place the things it needs to manage records well
- guidelines for Pacific Island archivists and records managers on how to identify, document, communicate and fulfil public sector recordkeeping requirements
- PowerPoint slides that will help our members introduce and explain these products in their own countries.

The PARBICA Bureau, assisted by the National Archives of Australia (NAA), has accepted responsibility for maintaining, distributing and updating the modules of the Toolkit for as long as they are needed and remain useful.

It is envisaged that over time the Toolkit will grow to include further guidelines for Pacific archivists and records managers on how to:

- further identify, document, communicate and fulfil public sector recordkeeping requirements in each jurisdiction
- provide information on records classification, disposal, storage and disaster prevention and recovery
- provide training to staff, including training packages related to Toolkit modules
- develop assessment checklists and frameworks (including information on managing emails, access guidelines, auditor checklists etc).

The Toolkit has been produced through a collaborative process with input from a variety of archivists from across the Pacific. The PARBICA Bureau would like to acknowledge the assistance of these archivists, who are listed on page 12. However, PARBICA does not want the collaboration to end here. Stage One of the Toolkit was overseen by our Reference Group and the PARBICA Bureau, and there continue to be opportunities for other PARBICA members and archivists to become involved.



PARBICA is committed to continuing to add to the Toolkit so that we can develop world-class tools for good recordkeeping that are relevant to our Pacific environment. The PARBICA Bureau welcomes comments and suggestions from any interested party. If you would like to provide feedback or suggest areas or topics that PARBICA should cover in future parts of the Toolkit, please contact the PARBICA Secretary-General. Contact details can be found on the PARBICA website at:
<<http://www.parbica.org/bureau1.htm>>.

TOWARDS GOOD GOVERNANCE AND GOOD RECORDKEEPING

Organisations and government agencies can considerably reduce the effort required to work towards good governance and good recordkeeping if a leader such as a chief executive officer, director-general or agency head provides motivation and support.

Leaders are responsible for protecting their organisation's, government's and the public's interests. One way of doing this is to make sure that the organisation is practicing the principles of good governance.

Governance is the way in which an organisation arranges its processes and structures so that it can make decisions, carry out its work and monitor its progress. Good governance means making sure the office or agency is organised and does its work in a way that it efficient and accountable, and complies with relevant laws and regulations.

The brochure which accompanies the Toolkit is aimed at the leaders of government agencies to help them understand the importance of good recordkeeping and good governance. The brochure points out to leaders that protecting the government's and the community's interests in an efficient way is an important aspect of their role within government and their organisations. Contact PARBICA if you require copies of the brochure.

Efficiency

Keeping good records helps an organisation or government agency to organise information about its actions and decisions. This can make it easier to find the information when it is needed, which will help the organisation or government agency to work more efficiently.

Protecting the government's interests

Keeping good records helps to protect the government by proving what actions it has taken. If records are not maintained to back up what has happened, other people—including a court or an auditor—may not believe the government's position if someone else claims that something different happened.

Protecting the community's interests

Keeping good records helps to protect the whole community by protecting the information that the government has about other people. Governments should always act for the benefit of their citizens, but if they do not keep and use information carefully, they can actually cause harm to the people they are supposed to help.

WHAT IS A RECORD?

The International Standard on Records Management defines a record as:

Information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.

Organisations should create records whenever they carry out their business.

Let us use an example to illustrate this. To apply for a fishing licence, fishermen may need to complete an application form, which results in a record being created. To complete the licence application process, they may have to pay a fee.

The fishermen would then expect a government official to supply them with a document, such as a receipt or the licence, showing that they had paid the money. This becomes the proof that the transaction took place, and enables them to go fishing. The government official would also need to document the processes that took place—and this would become the official government record of the transaction.

After a record has been created, it is then stored or maintained so that it can be easily found when it is needed again. For example, if fishermen need to produce their fishing licences for some reason, but their licences have been lost, they would expect to be able to get a copy of each licence from the government. The government should then be able to quickly find the original application form and a record that the licence had already been paid for, so that a copy of the licence could be supplied.

WHAT IS RECORDKEEPING?

Recordkeeping is the processes and systems an organisation uses to make sure that records can be found quickly and easily and that they are preserved for as long as they are needed.

Creating records

Organisations need to have processes in place to make sure that records are created. A procedure might be in place for when a person wants to apply for a fishing licence. The fisherman may need to complete an application form and take it to the government for processing. When the fisherman completes the form, a record is created. Organisations can have tools like forms, or rules that make sure staff put documents in files, to make sure that records about their activities are created.

Controlling records

Organisations need to have systems for controlling their records so that they can be managed efficiently and found again when they are needed. When the fisherman hands the completed application form to the government department, there might be a procedure to help the government clerk know what to do with the completed application form. For example, the record might need to be placed into a particular file. The naming of that file might be controlled by a system which is a list of words that are appropriate to use. The list of words might include other types of licences that are issued by the government, such as driving, hunting and shopkeeper licences. So an appropriate name to call the file where the fishing licence is kept might be Licences—Fishing. If the government also processes driving licences, that file might be called Licences—Driving. If there was ever a need to find the original fishing application form, then the file titling system makes it obvious which file the application should be in: it will be in the file called Licenses—Fishing, and not the file called Licenses—Driving.

Using records

Organisations need to have rules about how their records are used so that it can find the records when they are needed, and also to make sure that only people who are allowed to see government information have access to the files. A department might have a rule which all staff must follow that says all files must be kept in a file registry, and not in a staff member's office. When staff need to see a file, there might be a procedure about how the registry clerk keeps track of who has the file. For example, the registry clerk might need to record the date, file name and number and who the file has been given to into a list, book, register or computer program.

Disposing of records

Organisations need to follow rules about how long they keep their records, so that files are kept for as long as they are needed by the department, the government or the public. There may be a legal requirement to keep certain records for a period of time. There are also records that are very important or have significant historical value. When records are no longer needed for legal reasons or business needs, then a decision might need to be made what to do with them. If they are important records, they may need to be transferred to an archive for further safe-keeping and preservation. If they are not important, then the decision will need to be made whether or not to destroy them. Having a system in place to know how long records need to be kept for legal or business requirements is very important for good governance and accountability.

WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE?

When records are no longer required to be kept by an organisation or government department for everyday operations, one option is to destroy them. However, those records that have historical research value should be transferred to an archive.

The word 'archive' means a record that has been selected for preservation because of its value as long-term evidence of an organisation's actions and decisions. 'Archive' can also mean the place where records that have long-term value are kept.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AN ARCHIVIST?

The archivist is a professional who assesses, collects, organises, preserves, maintains control over, and provides access to information or records that have been determined to have long-term value.

Archivists have an important role to work with organisations to ensure that valuable records are preserved for future use. They should be involved in deciding what value records have and how long they need to be kept. Archivists can also advise government departments and other organisations on the best way to manage records so that they are:

- created when they are needed
- stored correctly so that they are protected from damage and misuse
- easily found when they are needed
- preserved for as long as they are needed.

WHY SHOULD ARCHIVISTS CARE ABOUT THE STATE OF RECORDKEEPING?

Some people may feel that it is not the archivist's job to worry about the state of recordkeeping within their government administrations, because this is the role of records managers and registry staff. There are a number of reasons why archivists should look closely at what is happening in their government administrations.

In some countries, the government's Archives Act may require the archivist to be involved in recordkeeping, by advising governments on how to manage records or selecting records for long-term preservation. This gives archivists an important role in ensuring that governments retain the records that they need to do their work efficiently and to account for their decisions and actions.

Because archivists have experience in making decisions about which records must be kept for historical research, they also understand the business that the records document and the processes used to create them. Archivists are able to use these skills to help governments create better records in the first place—because they understand what systems create good records.

Archivists also have an interest in making sure that records are well kept because good records make good archives. If a government department lets its records be damaged because they are stored badly, those records will still be damaged when they are transferred to the archives. If a department does not have a good system for titling its files, it will be hard for the department to find the files that it wants. It will also be hard for the archives to find the right files, because the file titles will not provide good information about what is inside them. By being involved in government recordkeeping, archivists can help to make sure that records are well kept, both now and in the future.

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