

Local Government Records (LGR) Program

Electronic Records Statement

September 2000

Purpose

In response to the increasing call for guidance in the challenges and opportunities electronic records present, the OHS LGR Program has drafted an electronic records statement in order to (a) provide electronic records guidance for local governments; and (b) support the creation and maintenance of electronic records to their ensure integrity, usability and survivability.

Background

Recorded information is vital to the operation of Ohio government. Under state law, each local government entity must establish and maintain a program for the management of the recorded information that they produce. The state law also strongly favors a commitment to providing access to public records. The policies and practices developed by most local governments have, for the most part, been sufficient when applied to traditional paper records. However, now that local government entities have become increasingly dependent on computer technology to accomplish their basic functions, there is an urgent need for new policies and guidelines that deal with records in electronic formats.

During the past decade, records management practices in local governments have been revolutionized. New information technologies from mainframes, to PC's, to local area networks and the Internet have transformed the way governments create, use, disseminate, and store information. These new technologies offer a vastly enhanced means of collecting information for and about citizens, communicating within government and with the public, and documenting the business of government. Like other modern organizations, Ohio's local governments face challenges in managing and preserving their records because records are increasingly generated and stored in computer-based information systems.

This electronic records statement is intended to establish principles for local governments to follow as they develop their own practices and systems for making and keeping records in the electronic environment.

Definitions

According to the Ohio Revised Code a *record* is defined as:

"...any document, device, or item, regardless of physical form or characteristic, created or received by or coming under the jurisdiction of any public office of the state or its political subdivisions, which serves to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities or the office." (ORC 149.011)

Electronic records are records that contain machine readable information. The information may be text, numbers, graphs, line drawings, pictures, images, or sound. Examples of electronic records include word processing files, spreadsheet files, presentation graphics, electronic images, databases, audio or video recordings, and e-mail. Electronic records may occupy media such as magnetic disks or tapes; audio or video cassettes; and compact or optical disks.

Principles

- 1. Electronic information is a record if it satisfies the criteria defined by Ohio law.**
 - Electronic records are compilations of data that are created or received by a local government entity or employee during the course of official duties and that document the organization, functions, policies, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office, as defined by ORC 149.011.
 - In an electronic environment, records may exist in structures other than that of familiar documents traditionally found in paper formats.
 - Electronic records may be public records as defined by ORC 149.43 and thus subject to the public access provisions of ORC 149.43
 - Electronic records are subject to audit and legal proceedings such as discovery and subpoenas.

- 2. Electronic records should be managed effectively as part of a comprehensive records management program.**

- 3. Local governments should create, maintain and manage their electronic records in compliance with standards, best practices and guidelines.**
 - Local governments should make the fullest possible commitment to the use of open, public, non-proprietary standards that facilitate communication between multiple systems and software.
 - American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or other industry-wide standards, LGR issued guidelines and best practices should be used where applicable.

- 4. Work processes and tools should support the creation and maintenance of electronic records.**

- Provisions for adequate maintenance, disposal and preservation of electronic records should be built into work processes and tools so that electronic records management is a routine and time efficient activity.
- Appropriate descriptive metadata about electronic records must be captured at the time of record creation. Unlike paper records, that data cannot be determined at a later date.
- Appropriate records management principles should be an essential component in the design of new systems or the upgrading of existing systems.

5. Electronic records should be created in reliable and secure systems.

- Local government entities should identify systems that create and maintain electronic records. The development, modification, operation, and use of these systems should be documented and measures should be taken to ensure reliability and security of records over time.
- *Reliability* refers to a record's authority and trustworthiness at the time of creation. To ensure reliability, agencies must establish procedures for creating official records electronically.
- Agencies must take measures to prevent unauthorized access to electronic records.
- Data must be captured which document the context, content and structure of electronic records. *Context* establishes who created the record and the transaction of which it was a part. *Content* is the actual data. *Structure* is the format of the record. Structure must be captured so that the record can be migrated into the latest generation of hardware and software as necessary.

6. In most cases, electronic records should be maintained in electronic form, because preserving the context, content and structure of and facilitating access to those records are best accomplished in the electronic environment.

- Electronic records can be classified as system-dependent or -independent.
- *System-dependent* records are records that require an electronic environment to provide meaning, context or accessibility. System-dependent records should be migrated as necessary, at least every five years.
- *System-independent* records are records that can exist independently of an electronic environment. System-independent records may be reformatted, with necessary metadata, into an eye-readable media.

7. **Maintaining and providing access to electronic records over time is a shared responsibility.**
- Local government records managers, records commissions, information technology managers and the OHS LGR Program must work together to manage, preserve and provide access to electronic records.
 - Transferring all historically significant electronic records from the originating local government entity to the OHS or a regional network center may be neither cost effective nor practically feasible. When OHS or a regional network center does not take physical custody of electronic records with enduring historical value, LGR Program staff will provide appropriate guidance to ensure long term accessibility and physical preservation.

Electronic Records Resources

The following resources can provide more guidance on specific electronic records issues.

[Digital Imaging Guidelines](http://www.ohiohistory.org/resource/lgr/ImagingGuidelines.html)

<http://www.ohiohistory.org/resource/lgr/ImagingGuidelines.html>

[Draft Guidelines for Managing Electronic Mail](http://www.ohiojunction.net/erc/email/emailguidelines.html)

<http://www.ohiojunction.net/erc/email/emailguidelines.html>

[General Schedules for Administrative Electronic Records](http://www.ohiojunction.net/erc/schedule/ercgensched.html)

<http://www.ohiojunction.net/erc/schedule/ercgensched.html>

[Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook](http://www.ohiojunction.net/erc/tis.html) (in progress)

<http://www.ohiojunction.net/erc/tis.html>

[Ohio Electronic Records Committee](http://www.ohiojunction.net/erc)

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