

RECORDKEEPING AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT ROAD MAP

RTI Commission of Sri Lanka

Alignment with the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) of the Commission

The Right to Information Commission is responsible for providing guidance on the maintenance and management of all information records as part of its core mandate. As specified in the RTI Act Section 14: h), the Commission is directed to: “*issue guidelines for the proper record management for public authorities.*”

Further Strategic Objective #6 of the SIP anticipates RTI Commission stewardship of records management into digital maintenance and organization of information records:

The RTI Commission is able to direct the public authorities to improve their records management by providing precise guidelines on information management and by directing public authorities to launch programmes for incremental digitisation of information.

In addition to key steps to developing records management and introducing digitisation, this road map also provides seminal resources for further reference.

The Road Map

I. WHY

The primary purpose of records management is to allow people to find and use information. Under Sri Lanka’s Right to Information Act, all citizens regardless of where they work or reside have the right to review and possess information of a public nature.

All public authorities must create and maintain records to ensure that the authority’s functions and activities are adequately and properly documented, as well as to protect the rights of the government and all citizens directly affected by governmental actions.

II. WHAT

II.1: The key questions for the RTI Commission to determine -- and for all Ministers and Public Authorities (under Part III of the RTI Act: Duties of Ministers and Public Authorities) -- on what information they should document and preserve are:

- ***Did you create or receive the information to conduct public authority business?***
- ***Does the information document the mission, functions, policies, decision-making process, operations, programs, projects or activities of the public authority?***
- ***Does the information document business transactions, decisions that were made, advice given or received in the conduct of official business?***
- ***Does the information relate to public authority business that does not exist anywhere else?***

If the answer to any of these questions is: Yes, then the information is required to be maintained and preserved as records that can be easily accessed by the public.

Further these may not be restricted to documents in the physical possession of an agency that are subject to the RTI Act but may also include documents in its legal control. Where a Public Authority has a right to access documents—even if they are not currently stored at the Authority's premises—and a requester applies to access them, the Authority may have to retrieve them. This might mean getting documents from contractors, private solicitors, or retrieving them from offsite storage.

II.2: The form that information can take is diverse. All relevant information in the form of paper records, electronic files, still images, audio or video records needs to be kept and organised for public disclosure.

Substantively required records include:

- Personnel records (job title, salary grade, time and attendance)
- Contracts
- Policy guidance and directives
- Case files
- CD's
- Cartographic records
- Blue prints
- X-rays
- Audio tapes
- Photographs
- E-mail
- Video, sound, image files
- Linked databases
- Web based documents
- Handwritten notes, video or audio recordings and braille, a work diary, CCTV footage, discs, tapes, post-it notes on files.

While many current records exist on paper, the country is moving to international standards for maintaining information in electronic form.

II.3: Any information that is recorded in a form that only a computer can process and that satisfies the definition of a record as outlined above is considered an electronic record.

Some examples of electronic records include:

- Digitised versions of hard copy records
- Tabulated data
- Metadata
- Documentation in any audiovisual or computerized form

II.4: It is crucial for records to be trustworthy. Records show whether an agency has met legal, organisational, social and/or moral obligations. Records serve as proof of activity by public authorities in serving public interests. As such, the trustworthiness of information records must also be documented. The most reliable way to achieve this is by documenting the recordkeeping process itself.

The systems for preserving records and the controls for monitoring and assuring the currency and accuracy of information should be part of the record. This includes certification that adequate security provisions are being exercised to preserve the integrity and completeness of the information.

According to the universally recognized International Standards Organization (ISO) trustworthy or authoritative records must have the following characteristics (ISO 15489-1):

- Authenticity
- Reliability
- Integrity
- Usability

Recommendation: Randomly and routinely verify the trustworthiness of information records:

- Are the systems processes used to preserve records reliable?
- Is there a schedule for retention of information?
- Are staff trained fully and frequently on record maintenance and management?
- Are there regular audits and certified audit trails for the information?

III. HOW

Records should be created and captured as part of normal daily business. This is the duty of every person acting as a public authority regardless if they have the duties of an Information Officer.

All personnel should be instructed and reviewed for adherence to national standards of maintaining authoritative records of public service activities.

III.1: Records systems are designed to insure the reliability and integrity of the information they contain. Systematising the collection and management of records insures their comprehensiveness and compliance with Right to Information Act requirements.

Recommendation: A record system for public authorities should be constructed according to ISO 15489-1 recommendations for designing and implementing record systems:

- Documentation of records transactions
- Physical storage medium and protection
- Distribution management
- Conversion and mitigation
- Access, retrieval, and use
- Retention and disposition

III.2: Electronic recordkeeping systems are increasingly the global standard for information retention and management. Capturing electronic messages and files as “records” also ‘freezes’ them from further change. “Freezing” electronic records maintains the security and integrity of each record allowing them to be preserved over time.

Electronic records include E-mail, scanned images, Electronic Information Systems (EIS), databases, websites, records created/born electronically (Word, PDF, etc.), voice mail saved and played back over E-mail, voice and video-version sharing and distribution (attachments).

Given the norm of paper recordkeeping currently in Sri Lanka, the RTI Commission intends to set a schedule and guidelines for the migration of information to electronic form. Data Migration is a set of organised tasks designed to achieve periodic transfer of paper material to digital and digital materials from one hardware/software configuration to another.

The preservation of record integrity requires that the electronic record needs to be authentic, reliable and complete. This means that the content, structure and context of records need to be documented.

It is also important to organise electronic records logically. This includes saving the hidden background data linked to each E-mail message, word processing file, spreadsheet, etc. so they can be accessed quickly.

Recommendation: Introduce data migration as the focus of the preservation of and continuing accessibility to information records. Transfer data from obsolete media/operating system as necessary and move data every 1-5 years to keep pace with contemporary technology.