**DEFINITION’S**

What elements are included in an email message to make it a record? Electronic messaging (e-mail) is a method of delivering and receiving electronic mail. Just as you receive physical mail in your mailbox at home, electronic messages that you received in your university email box may be considered records. E-mail message include the following elements:

1. **Textual message** (this is the main message)
2. **Metadata** (To, From, Subject, Date, Time, System, etc.)
3. **Attachments**

These 3 elements together comprise a record.

What is a transitory? Transitory communication is directly connected to the transaction of public business that is conducted by university employees, but it has a short-term business value.

What is Routine? Routine communication comprises the normal communication that occurs when university employees, and sometimes their colleagues who are not university employees, work together to transact public business on behalf of the University of Wisconsin.

*The 8 Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles® aka “the Principles”*

1. Accountability
2. Transparency
3. Integrity
4. Protection
5. Compliance
6. Availability
7. Retention
8. Disposition

Under **“the Principles”**, records are found in electronic communications such as electronic mail (e-mail), chat transcripts, and text messages. Communications of this sort can be very casual in nature. Because of this casual nature, these records are potential targets for FOIA/Open Records Requests and Litigation. Electronic messages, just as paper records, should be managed through their entire records lifecycle in accordance to State and University policies.

**So how long should you keep Business Communication such as E-mail, Texts and Chat?**

1. **E-mail, Text & Chat communications which are designated as a RECORD** are based on the records content, which determines the records value. **Examples which fall under RECORDS include:**
   a. Records that document the formulation and execution of basic policies and decisions and the taking of necessary actions.
   b. Records that document important meetings like a departmental or staff meeting.
   c. Records that facilitate action by agency officials and their successors.
   d. Records that protect the financial, legal, and other rights of the University and of persons directly affected by the University’s actions.

Refer to the [University General Retention Schedules](#) on the UW-Madison Records Management Webpage.

2. **E-MAIL, Text & Chat that are TRANSITORY:** Transitory communication has no business value after the information contained in the message has been conveyed or superseded, or the event to which the message is related has occurred. Transitory communication does not establish policies, guidelines, or procedures; certify a transaction; become a receipt; nor perpetuate or formalize business activities of the University of Wisconsin System.
   - Retain for **7 days or destroy when obsolete because the communication has been superseded or the related event has transpired.**

3. **E-MAIL, Text & Chat that are ROUTINE:** Routine communication has no historical value; never includes records that set forth university policies, guidelines, procedures, or directives; and does not formalize the business processes of the University of Wisconsin.
   - Retain for **6 months after a business activity or project is completed.**
What are considered Non-records? – Delete

EXAMPLES of Non-Records

- Information not related to university business
  - let’s do lunch emails, soccer schedule
- Reference material
  - vendor catalogs, phone books, “how to” documents
- Duplicate copies
  - copies of records (paper or email) used for convenience or reference purposes only
- Draft or working paper
  - draft documents without substantive comments, rough notes, calculations
- General announcements and unsolicited email (internal or external)
  - reminders received by all staff, listserv messages, spam
- Computer generated response or confirmation
  - automated calendar requests and confirmations, password change notices

Other Tips for management of e-mail

- Tag e-mails containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) or confidential information in the subject line.
- Don’t Use Your Inbox as a Catchall
  - Try to “touch” each e-mail only once
  - Act on it, Refer it to someone else, Delete it, or File it. File important e-mails so that they are accessible to other people eg: on a server or shared drive.
- Be mindful that e-mail is a communications tool and not a collaborations tool.
  - Don’t let email prevent you from brainstorming and meeting with your colleagues face to face. Try not to send an e-mail if a conversation is a more appropriate way to respond to a colleague; most people only skim long e-mails and are likely to miss the important information you want to share.
- Do not use the “Reply All” as a default. Using the “Reply All” creates duplication and copies within the e-mail system which need to be managed. Use this only when needed to communicate to a group for a project etc.
- Avoid using the BCC function, using the “BCC” creates duplication and copies the same way as the “Reply All” within the e-mail system which creates more messages that need to be managed.
- Talk about One Subject per Email Message. Categorizing and managing e-mail is much more straightforward when we manage the subject lines consistently. Simplistic subject lines like Hi! are often treated as SPAM or a potential virus threat. Try to keep one subject per message. This makes it easier to sort, file and review. For example: “Acme Corp. Contract Negotiations” or “Human Resources Policy Draft” For another subject, start a new e-mail, if the subject/topic changes then change the subject line to reflect the message.

The 2012 UW-Madison Employee Guide to: Electronic Communication Guidance for University Records. This Guide provides information on management of Electronic Communications such as e-mail, text and chat as records.

Contact Peg Eusch, CRM University Records Officer for more information: recmgmt@library.wisc.edu

*About ARMA International and the Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles® ARMA International (www.arma.org) is a not-for-profit professional association and the authority on information governance. Formed in 1955, ARMA International is the oldest and largest association for the information management profession with a current international membership of more than 10,000. It provides education, publications, and information on the efficient maintenance, retrieval, and preservation of vital information created in public and private organizations in all sectors of the economy. It also publishes Information Management magazine, and the Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles®. More information about the Principles can be found at www.arma.org/principles.