GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Successful organizations need information systems for making, keeping and using authentic evidence (that is, records) of business activity to meet their business needs and legal obligations. In the electronic environment, the development and implementation of such systems should be both driven by the organization’s business needs and informed by the following principles.

1. Records-related principles – electronic business information has to be actively managed and reliably maintained as authentic evidence of business activity. As business processes become more completely automated, the electronic information generated by such activities may serve as the only evidence of specific transactions or decisions. Maintenance of this evidence in the form of fixed records is necessary for operational viability and accountability of the organization. This involves identifying a set of electronic information that will serve as the evidential record.

2. Business information has to be linked to its business context through the use of metadata. In order for information to have the capability of functioning as a record, it is necessary to augment that information with additional data (that is, metadata) that places it in the context of the business operations and computing environment in which it was created. In the case of line-of-business systems accomplishing uniform transactions, this context is derived from the system and its documentation. In other systems, however, such contextual information must be appended to the record as it is necessary to provide the record with sufficient longevity for interpretation and to maximize its value and utility as evidence of business activity.

3. Business information has to be kept and must remain accessible to authorized users for as long as required. Design and deployment of business information software must ensure that records can be searched for, retrieved and rendered in accessible formats and media for as long as is required for business and legal purposes. In this context, organizations should avoid the misuse of digital rights management technology and encryption.

4. Business information has to be able to be disposed of in a managed, systematic and auditable way. A hallmark of appropriate recordkeeping is the retention and appropriate disposition of records generated by business processes according to specified International Council on Archives Overview and statement of principles 9 rules. Systems need to be able to dispose of records in a systematic, auditable and accountable way in line with operational and legal requirements.

5. Systems should support good business information management as an organic part of the business process. Although it is not necessarily appreciated as such, good recordkeeping practices are an integral part of any business process. When automating any business process, one should always evaluate the advisability of simultaneous integration of recordkeeping software.
6. Systems for capturing and managing business information have to rely on standardized metadata as an active, dynamic and integral part of the recordkeeping process. Automated recordkeeping solutions offer powerful capabilities to access and attach standardized contextual information, via standardized vocabularies and taxonomies, to record content at different times during the life of the record.

7. Systems have to ensure interoperability across platforms and domains and over time. Electronic evidence, in the form of records, often has operational or juridical requirements for persistence over periods of time that may exceed the lifespan of the hardware or software that created it. As such, record information must be able to be presented in a manner that is understood and able to be modified, if necessary, for migration to other technology platforms.

8. Systems should rely as far as possible on open standards and technological neutrality. Many software products that create or manage records are developed using proprietary implementations. Hardware or software dependencies can have adverse effects on access and preservation of record material in the long term. Use of open standards ameliorates these technological dependencies.

9. Systems should have the capacity for bulk import and export using open formats. Electronic records resulting from a business process and managed by recordkeeping software may contain hardware or software dependencies. Recordkeeping software should ideally incorporate capabilities to remove these dependencies via support for bulk re-formatting as part of ingest or export capability or, at a minimum, via non-proprietary encoding of record metadata.

10. Systems must maintain business information in a secure environment. For security purposes, systems automating a business process often incorporate safeguards that limit which actions particular individuals can take with electronic information (for example, viewing, printing, editing, copying or transmitting). Systems must not allow unauthorized modifications to any records (including ‘Standardized’ may refer to an agreed organizational metadata schema or to the adoption/adaptation of a jurisdictional, national or international metadata standard. International Council on Archives Overview and statement of principles metadata), and where authorized modifications are performed, they must be fully documented.

11. As much metadata as possible should be system generated. Users are typically unwilling to interrupt their workflow more than three times in the accomplishment of tasks ancillary to executing the primary activity. It may be impractical and/or unnecessary to expect end-users to supply much of the metadata. Systems should be designed and implemented in a manner that allows automatic population of record metadata fields.

12. It should be as easy as possible for users to create/capture records of business activity. It is necessary to design systems/software that automate recordkeeping in a way, ideally, that makes such recordkeeping largely ‘invisible’ to the user.