



Recordkeeping Metadata

What is metadata?

Metadata can be defined simply as "data about structured information". Database managers, librarians, archivists, records managers, webmasters and others in the information management business have collected and used metadata for many years. However in an electronic recordkeeping environment, the need for consistency and a standard approach to metadata is much greater.

Australian Standard *AS ISO 15489 2002 – Records Management* defines recordkeeping metadata as:

Data describing context, content and structure of records and their management through time.

What does recordkeeping metadata include?

Recordkeeping metadata includes:

- registration and classification metadata - the metadata that gives a record its unique identity in a records system and classifies it in a classification scheme
- content, structure and context metadata - the metadata that gives a record content including title, abstract structure, type, format and context as well as identifying who created it, where, when and its relationship with other records
- recordkeeping process metadata - metadata that provides information or evidence about processes a record may have undergone such as viewing, transmitting, transferring custody, accessing, reviewing, sentencing etc.

Why apply recordkeeping metadata?

Recordkeeping metadata in a business or records system is required for the following reasons:

- unique identification of records
- authentication of records – to prove that the record is what it purports to be
- persistence of records content, structure and context
- accountability - management of records over time in an electronic environment
- administration of terms and conditions of access and disposal
- tracking and documenting of the use history of records
- enabling the discovery, retrieval and delivery of records to authorised users
- restriction of unauthorised use.

In many cases items of metadata are records in themselves as they describe a transaction that may have been transacted on a particular record. As such, they are themselves subject to the requirements of the *State Records Act 1997*. As an example, metadata that

provides evidence that a particular person accessed a record on a particular date is itself an official record.

Where will recordkeeping metadata be sourced?

Recordkeeping metadata can be sourced from a number of environments and systems in use in agencies. A great deal of recordkeeping metadata is already captured in existing agency systems including:

- business systems - many business systems already capture large amounts of data that will be able to meet the requirements of the recordkeeping metadata standard. Information within business systems often relates to records, as it is often business processes that create them. Business systems can also be used to identify and describe people, business units, workgroups, activities and functions
- disposal schedules - General Disposal Schedules and agency specific disposal schedules are a useful source for records disposal related metadata
- email systems - agency and Across-Government wide e-mail systems can provide significant recordkeeping metadata about the context of a document
- *Keyword AAA* and agency specific thesauri - for agencies that have adopted use of the *Keyword AAA* or their own specific thesaurus merged with *Keyword AAA*, this can be used to identify relevant transactions, business activities and business functions that need to be captured
- document and records management systems - document and / or records management systems can provide a useful source of recordkeeping metadata
- recordkeeping systems - corporate recordkeeping systems implemented in several agencies also are a great source of metadata for elements relating to business functions, mandates (Legislation, Regulations, Standards, Codes of Practice, Community Expectations), Agents (People, Workgroups, agencies), Locations and use of records
- archives management systems - archives management systems used by State Records are a source of metadata particularly about records and record series at an aggregated level, including agency data, previous agencies, mandate, and documentary form, preservation and disposal metadata elements
- Websites - agency and Across-Government websites (Internet and Intranets) in many cases already provide basic metadata elements. In many cases, web sites are a record and the metadata required for managing them as records need to be captured

Why the need for a standard?

State Records has identified the need for a recordkeeping metadata standard to underpin a number of other records management policies and standards that apply to South Australian State Government agencies and Local Government authorities. The need for a standard approach is particularly important when implementing new business and recordkeeping systems as all levels of government move increasingly towards conducting business electronically via the use of e-mail and the Internet.

The South Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Standard (SARKMS) was approved by the Minister and was published in June 2003.

How is recordkeeping metadata stored?

Two approaches are available for the storage of recordkeeping metadata:

- embedding metadata with the particular record - this approach is often seen in simple word-processing documents where metadata can be captured when a record is created and can be viewed via the File/Properties menu
- maintaining metadata in a separate “repository” or database and linking it to the appropriate record - this requires the development and maintenance of reliable, rugged two-way links between the record and its associated metadata.

A decision on the most appropriate storage method should be made after detailed consultation and will be dependent on organisational needs, technological requirements and State Records requirements for the storage of permanent records and their associated metadata.

Is the recordkeeping metadata standard compulsory?

State Records recognises that in many cases it will not be simple or cost effective to comply with the standard retrospectively. The most appropriate time to implement *The South Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Standard* is when new or enhanced document, records management or business systems are being implemented.

All South Australian state government agencies and local government authorities i.e. those covered by the *State Records Act 1997*, will need to become compliant to ensure their records management is adequate as outlined in the *Adequate Records Management Standard & Guidelines*.

Further Information

Further information and reading on recordkeeping metadata is available at the following websites:

- National Archives of Australia <http://www.naa.gov.au>
- State Records of New South Wales <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au>
- Public Records Office of Victoria <http://www.prov.vic.gov.au>
- Monash University, School of Information Management and Systems, Records Continuum Research Group <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/>

Availability

Copies of the *South Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Standard (SARKMS)* can be obtained from State Records on CD, or alternatively can be obtained online from the State Records website: <http://www.archives.sa.gov.au>