Description and transcript for Summer School for Records Coordinators, Records Inventory, Part 2: Planning the Inventory.

On screen: Title slide, Summer School for Records Coordinators. Records Inventory, Planning the Inventory. Robin Riot, C R M, National Records Management Training Program, National Archives and Records Administration, August 7, 2013.

Narrator: This is the second of four parts of the Summer School for Records Coordinators Records Inventory online seminar originally delivered in August 2013.

On screen: Agenda. What’s an inventory? Why inventory? Planning the inventory. Conducting the inventory. Next steps and follow-up. Planning the inventory is circled.

Narrator: In the previous segment, we looked at what a records inventory is, and why you would conduct one. This time, we’ll look at ways to plan your inventory.

On screen: Planning an inventory. Determine your purpose and scope. Do your research. Choose your team. Plan communication and training.

Narrator: When you are preparing to do a records inventory, there are several things you’ll want to do before you jump in and start looking for records. Let’s take a look.

On screen: Determine the purpose and scope.

Narrator: Before you begin, you need to determine the purpose and scope of your inventory. In other words, what do you want to accomplish?

On screen: Purpose and Scope. Move / consolidate offices. Create file plans. Create / update records schedules. Digitize and share paper records. Implement electronic records management system. Identify specific types of records. Streamline records storage. Stand up / re-start a records program.

Narrator: There are a lot of reasons to do a records inventory. You may be preparing for a move, or getting ready to organize your office and implement classic records management tools like file plans and records schedules. Or, you may be starting a project to digitize records or implement a records management system. Knowing your goals will help you identify the places you need to look and help you decide what information to collect as you inventory.

On screen: Purpose and Scope.

Narrator: Depending on your goals, you may choose to do a comprehensive inventory or a targeted one.

On screen: Comprehensive / Baseline. Enterprise-wide or program-wide. All formats. All locations.

Narrator: A comprehensive, or baseline inventory is one that typically covers an entire organization, department or program. In this kind of inventory, you're trying to identify all the different types of information you have in all different formats and all locations. With a comprehensive inventory, you're getting the most complete overall picture so you can plan for projects like records system implementations, new or revitalized records management programs, and comprehensive records schedules.

On screen: Targeted. One function or business process. One type of records, one format.

Narrator: A targeted inventory focuses on one specific business process, one area, one type of records, or one format. In that type of inventory, you might be looking only at records for a particular business function or location, or just for your permanent records, your photographs, electronic documents, or another specific type.

On screen: Let's imagine. One department in a large Federal agency. Three main offices. Records coordinator left 7 years ago. Central files area, shared drives. Some records schedules. Some work has changed.

Narrator: As an example, let's imagine for a moment that we work for a department in a large U.S. Federal agency. Our agency has three main office locations, and while we have a records program, it really hasn't been active since our records coordinator retired 7 years ago. We have a central files area in each location and more than one shared drive. We do have some records schedules, but we know that some of the work we do has changed since the last time the schedule was updated.

On screen: Purpose and Scope. Re-establish our departmental records management program. See what records we have, and where and how they're stored. See if schedule updates are needed. Identify opportunities. Prepare file plans for three offices.

Narrator: In a scenario like that, our main goal for the inventory might be to gather the information we need to re-establish our records management program. With that in mind, we want to use the data we gather to see what records we currently have, where they're stored, and in what formats. We also want to see if we have any new types of records, or any records whose current schedules need to be updated. Along the way, an inventory might help us identify any recordkeeping issues or opportunities for improvement, and that information could really help us plan for our program. We would also like to prepare file plans for our three locations so people in each office know what information is stored, and where. In this situation, a baseline inventory is our best approach. It will take some work to identify our records, but once we know what we have, we can make real progress.

On screen: Do your research. Choose your team.

Narrator: After you've defined the goals and scope of your inventory, it's time to do some background research and put together a team.

On screen: Background research. Mission statements, annual reports, organization charts.

Narrator: The amount of research you need to do will depend on how well you already know your organization. If you're new to the agency, you'll want to take some time to understand its mission and major lines of business. Knowing the agency's major goals and knowing how it's structured will help you figure out what kinds of records you're likely to find, and where those records might be kept.

On screen: Policies, legislation, rules. Procedures and processes. Key experts and departments.

Narrator: Looking at some of the agency policies, rules, and procedures, or talking to a few subject matter experts can help you get the background information you need and can actually save you time down the road by helping you understand the information you find and put it in context.

On screen: Who can help? Where should we look? What do we expect to find?

Narrator: The basic questions to ask in this step are: Who can help us? Where should we look for records and information systems? And What do we expect to find? Can we identify some key types of records that we think are likely to support a given area?

On screen: Choosing the team. Who will help you? Gathering the data. Interpreting the data. Getting access to the records. Ensuring participation and compliance.

Narrator: As you're selecting your team, you want to identify people in each department, area, or business function who can help you collect inventory information. You also want to identify people who can help you interpret the information and understand how it is being used to support the business. That's especially critical if you are planning to create or update a records schedule. You'll want to identify who can help you get access to the records themselves. Last, but certainly not least, you want to identify managers, team leaders, and others who can help motivate people to cooperate with you and help make the inventory itself work smoothly and effectively.

On screen: Stakeholders and support. Records Officer / Records Manager. Records Coordinators / Custodians. Information Technology team. Support staff. Subject matter experts. Technical experts. Management champion. Legal. Security. Building / facility manager. F O I A Officer. Agency Historian.

Narrator: You may need to call on many different people to help plan and conduct the inventory. Most records inventories will involve the records management team, IT department, support staff, and technical or subject matter experts. Depending on your project, you may also need to involve someone from your legal department, information and physical security, your facility manager, your Freedom of Information Act officer, or your agency historian.

On screen: Who should be on your team?

Narrator: Take a moment and think about who needs to be on your team for your inventory. The right team can help you plan and carry out a much more effective inventory in a lot less time.

On screen: Communication and training.

Narrator: Once you've recruited your team, you need to decide how you will communicate, and how you'll prepare the team.

On screen: Communication.

Narrator: I've heard people say that records management is sometimes like having a puppy. When there's work to be done managing those records, no one wants to claim ownership. But at the same time, everyone wants to have a say in how their information is managed.

On screen: Give a brief explanation of purpose and role of inventory. Emphasize the opportunity to have input. Review steps and schedule.

Narrator: An inventory is actually a great opportunity for everyone to have a say in how their information is managed. You'll want to communicate clearly, and you want to be sure that everyone understands the purpose and goals behind the inventory. Let them know why you're doing this, and on what kind of schedule. What specific input do you need from them, and when? What will be the outcome? If they help identify records now, how will that help everyone down the road?

On screen: Require programs to designate one or more points of contact. Ask managers to ensure access to information and people.

Narrator: If your inventory project is a larger one, you may want to request or require each area or program to designate a central point of contact, so people in each group will have someone who can answer their questions and help coordinate responses. Communication with management is also key.

On screen: Training. Purpose and scope. Terms used. Inventory tools. Inventory schedule and expectations. Where to go for help.

Narrator: As you plan your inventory, plan to provide some basic training for the people who will be involved. Again, you'll communicate the purpose and goals of the inventory so everyone is on the same page. You'll want to define the terms you're using so everyone understands what you mean when you say things like volume or series or records schedule. You'll also want to communicate your project expectations and schedule – how much information will the team gather, and by what date? The people who are helping you also need to know where and how to get help if they have questions or run into problems.

On screen: Planning an inventory. Determine your purpose and scope. Do your research. Choose your team. Plan communication and training.

Narrator: To summarize, the planning phase of a records series inventory involves defining the purpose and scope of the project, doing some background research, recruiting a team, and planning the communication and training you'll need to make sure your project is successful.

On screen: Agenda. What's an inventory? Why inventory? Planning the inventory. Conducting the inventory. Next steps and follow-up.

Narrator: We started this series by describing what a records inventory is, and why you would conduct one. In this segment, we looked at planning an inventory. In the next segment, we'll look at ways to conduct the inventory and gather the information you need.

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