

Description and transcript for the recorded Web seminar, Summer School for Records Coordinators. Records Inventory, Part One: What's an Inventory?

On screen: The title slide reads "Summer School for Records Coordinators. Records Inventory. What's an inventory? Robin Riot, C R M. National Records Management Training Program. National Archives and Records Administration. August 7, 2013."

Narrator: This is the first of four parts of an online seminar originally delivered in our Summer School for Records Coordinators series in August 2013.

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

Narrator: We'll start by describing what a records inventory is, and why you would conduct one. In the next segment, we'll look at ways to plan your inventory.

On screen: What's a records inventory? Why should you do one?

Narrator: A records inventory is an important tool in the world of records management. An inventory can help you identify all the different types of information being maintained in your organization and understand where and how that information is being maintained.

On screen: Types of Records Inventories: Accountability, Retrieval, Series.

Narrator: We work with several different types of inventories in records management. We'll take a quick look at the first two, but this seminar focuses on the third: a records series inventory.

On screen: Types of Records Inventories. Accountability: Item / Document / File, Folder, Box. An illustration appears showing a list of document numbers being checked off one by one.

Narrator: At some point, you may find that you need to do an accountability inventory. This is an item-by-item inventory that looks at each individual document, electronic file, photograph, file folder, or box to verify that all of the items in your collection are present. You might scan barcodes, read RFID tags, or visually verify that everything is where it should be. You are most likely to encounter this type of inventory in an environment where you have extremely important documents or files, like patient files in a hospital, classified documents in a government agency, or certain types of confidential information in a business.

On screen: Types of Records Inventories. Inventory for Retrieval: Item, Folder, Box. A document marked "Crop Insurance Handbooks" appears on screen. It is a box list, showing a series of documents in Box One. The list shows the title of each file and the date it was finalized.

Narrator: The second type of records inventory you may encounter is a document, file, or box-level inventory used to help you identify and retrieve records quickly. You might prepare a folder-by-folder or document-by-document listing like this one if you are preparing items to send to an off-site records storage center, or you might create a file index like this if you are preparing files for transfer to an

archives.

Narrator: Although it takes time to prepare an index, the time you invest now will save you a lot more time down the road when you need to find an individual file or just see what information you have on a topic.

On screen: Types of Records Inventories: Accountability, Retrieval, Series. A blue circle draws itself around the word "Series."

Narrator: The third type of records inventory is a series- and system-based inventory. We'll focus on that type for the remainder of our seminar. A series inventory focuses on identifying the types of records and information systems that support an organization.

On screen: Series and Information Systems. Series: A group of similar records that are related because they are created, received, or used as part of the same activity.

Narrator: In the records world, a series is a type or a family of records that we keep together because they document the same business process, they relate to the same topic or activity, or because they have something in common that causes us to want to maintain them together, in the same way.

On screen: Information system: An organized set of procedures and techniques designed to store, retrieve, manipulate, analyze and display information.

Narrator: An information system is a paper or electronic tool or set of practices that we use to create, capture, store and work with information. We typically think of these in terms of the information processing systems, databases, enterprise systems, and other tools we use to help us do our work.

On screen: Series and Information Systems. What are some of the records series and systems in your office?

Narrator: Take just a moment to visualize the different types of information and information systems that support the work in your organization.

On screen: The board begins to fill with words describing various types of records series. The series listed are Time and Attendance, Contracts, Corrective Action Tracking System, Applicant Case Files, and Patient Care Management System.

Narrator: Each agency's situation is different, but depending on the work you do, you might have time and attendance records, contracts, audit tracking systems, case files, case management systems, or any number of other types. A series inventory focuses on your organization's information at this level – not on individual files or documents, but on the types of information you have.

On screen: Why inventory?

Narrator: There are many good reasons to conduct a records series inventory.

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On screen: Establish better retrieval and control.

Narrator: If you're trying to get a handle on the information your company stores, you need to know what you have, how much you have, who is responsible for the records, and where and how that information is stored. You can't really put good information management structures in place until you know what you have.

On screen: Start or re-start a program.

Narrator: If you are starting a records and information management program from scratch, you need to start with a clear picture of what you have and how it is being maintained and managed. That's critical background information that will help you plan for and build a records program. If your organization needs to revitalize its program, an inventory can tell you where you stand and can help you identify priorities for action.

On screen: Create records management tools. A file plan, represented by a table with rows and columns, appears. The far left column lists the file number for the records center. (For example, 105.) The second column lists the series title and description. (For example, Travel Files. Travel orders and related records.) The third column lists filing, retention and disposition instructions. (For example, File by fiscal year, then by last name. Cut off at end of fiscal year. Destroy or delete six years after cut off.) The last column lists the location of the records. (For example, Main File Station – Environmental Research.) The last column can list a physical location or a virtual location, such as a shared drive, for the records.

Narrator: Once you know what you have, you can begin to set up recordkeeping systems and build records management tools like records schedules and file plans. The example on screen now is a simple file plan for an office. It's a listing of the series – the types of information – that are used by the office, along with information about where the records are kept and how long the records are to be kept. It's a road map to your records that makes it easier for everyone to find and manage the information they need.

On screen: Plan projects, new systems. The screen rapidly fills up with piles of papers.

Narrator: A records inventory can also help you plan new projects and systems more effectively. If your office decides to digitize its paper files, you'll want to know how much information you have, how it's arranged, and who needs access to that information before you begin scanning. If you are moving to a new office space, cleaning up your shared drives, or installing new information management software, a records inventory will help you identify what you really have and make better, more cost-effective choices for your project.

On screen: Records Inventory. A fact-finding mission. A starting point. End result: Information about

the types, quantities, characteristics, storage conditions, and perceived value of your organization's records.

Narrator: To sum up, a records inventory is like a treasure hunt. It's a fact-finding mission that will gather the information you need to get a clear picture of what information your organization is keeping and how, where, and why it is being kept. It gives you a good place to start as you begin to plan for and implement different aspects of your records management program. When your records series inventory is complete, you'll have a better idea of the types and amounts of information you're storing, and you'll know more about how those records support your organization.

On screen: The agenda from the beginning of the video appears again, with the first item, "What's an inventory? Why inventory?" checked off. Agenda. What's an inventory? Why inventory? Planning the inventory. Conducting the inventory. Next steps and follow-up.

Narrator: In the next part, we'll look at tips for planning your inventory.

On screen: Photo Credits.

On screen: The National Records Management Training Program logo comes into focus on a black background.

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