

Description and transcript for Summer School for Records Coordinators, Part 3: Conducting the Inventory.

On screen: Summer School for Records Coordinators. Records Inventory: Conducting the Inventory. Robin Riat, CRM. National Records Management Training Program. National Archives and Records Administration. August 7, 2013.

Narrator: Thanks for joining us. This is the third in a four-part series based on a Web briefing originally delivered in August 2013 as part of our Summer School for Records Coordinators.

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

Narrator: We started by looking at what a records inventory is and why you would conduct one. Then, we talked about planning for an inventory. In this episode, we'll look at different ways to approach the inventory, and we'll look at some examples of the kinds of information you might collect.

On screen: Conducting the inventory

Narrator: You can approach a records series inventory in a number of different ways.

On screen: Inventory Methods. Existing resources, process maps / context diagrams, questionnaires / surveys, interviews, site visits.

Narrator: The method you choose will depend a lot on the goals, scope, time frame, and resources available for your project. Let's take a quick look at some of the more common approaches.

On screen: Use existing resources. Use information in existing agency inventories and documents. Previous records inventories and file plans, vital/essential records lists. Systems of Records Notices (SORN).

Narrator: Before you begin a new inventory, be sure to identify any work that has already been done. Did your records program do an inventory a couple of years ago? You may find that you just need to update that information. You can also look for information that was gathered for other purposes, like System of Records Notices for systems that collect personal data.

On screen: Two lists of records systems appear on screen to illustrate the idea of many Systems of Records Notices. Then, an excerpt from a real System of Records Notice appears.

Narrator: Those existing system inventories and notices can help you identify key databases and other information sources that are supporting your agency's work. They will often tell you the main purpose of the system, the types of information it contains, the program points of contact, and how the information is used.

On screen: Use existing resources. Enterprise architecture documents, I. T. system planning and budget documents. Shared drive analysis.

Narrator: Your information technology department is a great resource for this kind of information. Any enterprise architecture work they've done, and the IT planning and budget information they collect, like the Exhibit 300 or other planning documents, can really help you identify and examine systems from a records management perspective. Your server team may have tools that can help you analyze company shared drives and understand what types of electronic files are stored where, and by whom. Don't be afraid to reach out to your IT department. Records management and IT are natural partners when it comes to information management, and our programs can work together as a good team.

On screen: Process Maps and Context Diagrams. Used while collaborating with subject matter experts. Trace the types of records created and received. See the connections between records, people, process.

Narrator: Process maps and context diagrams are another helpful way to identify records and understand how the information supports your business. These make great collaboration tools when you're talking with subject matter experts. If your agency has done work in Lean Six Sigma or other types of process improvement, you may already have access to diagrams like these.

On screen: A plain screen appears with a sample process map. A series of blocks appear, one after another, linked by an arrow that runs throughout the entire map. The sample map is for a playground safety testing process. In the first block, playgrounds are selected at random for testing. In the next block, a safety tester is assigned to the case. After that, the process involves notifying the playground point of contact and establishing the testing schedule. Then, the tester travels to the playground and performs the tests. Then, the tester enters the results into the Safety database. Finally, the tester generates the final report and sends it to the playground.

Narrator: Here's an example. In process mapping, you look at each step in a business process and examine how the work flows throughout that process. We would use this map, or create one like it, as we talk with the safety testing department to find out what they do when they inspect a playground. As we identify the steps, we also identify the information resources – records, systems, and other information – that the expert uses in each step along the way.

On screen: Additional blocks appear under each of the process steps. The playground selection process is now accompanied by the Annual Playground Testing List. The next step has the Playground Safety Testing Staff roster. The notification step is supported by correspondence, schedule, and Playground Testing Tracking System. When the tester travels to the playground and performs the test, that step is supported by a travel authorization and testing log. The Safety Database step is supported by that database and by the Playground Testing Tracking System. The final step is documented by a final report and a compiled yearly report.

Narrator: This approach is really helpful when you're doing a vital records inventory as part of your business continuity and disaster recovery planning. You can see what work needs to be done, and what information is needed at each point along the way. When you've analyzed the process, you have a list of potential records and systems, and you have a better understanding of how they fit together to support the work.

On screen: A plain screen appears with a circle in the middle marked Playground Safety Testing Process. Around the circle in the four corners of the screen are blocks marked Playground points of contact, Playground Safety Association, Playground equipment manufacturers, and Safety Testers.

Narrator: I saw a related approach at a presentation at the 2007 ARMA International Conference. The speaker used context diagrams to identify the key stakeholders in a process and identify what information flowed into and out of that process.

Narrator: In the context diagram approach, you're not concerned with the steps of the process. You're focusing on who is involved, and what information they get from, or give to, the process. You start by putting the process in the middle, then adding the major players around that circle. Then, you identify the types of information and show those flowing into or out of the work being done. This can be a quick, graphical way to identify and represent that information while you're working with experts who understand the process.

On screen: Additional blocks representing records and systems appear. For example, a test data block appears between the Safety Testers block and the Playground Safety Testing Process. An arrow appears, showing that the test data flows from the Safety Tester to the testing process.

On screen: Questionnaires. Survey questionnaire distributed to designated contacts. Makes use of department staff knowledge, time. Good for initial data gathering.

Narrator: There are several traditional ways to approach a records inventory. You can distribute questionnaires or surveys to each department and ask a point of contact to collect the information and send it back to you. It allows you to use the expertise and effort of people in the departments that hold the records. This can be a quick, initial approach that helps you gather information in a shorter period of time.

On screen: May be less detailed, less accurate. Be very clear about definitions, expectations, deadlines.

Narrator: There are some negatives here, though. As anyone who's ever done a survey knows, people don't always respond, and sometimes the information you get is not as complete or accurate as you'd like. If you're going to use this approach, be very clear about what you mean, what information you want, and by when.

On screen: Interviews. More in-depth information.

Narrator: The interview method allows you to gather more in-depth information in a one-on-one or small group setting. It allows you to talk with people about their work, and it gives you a chance to ask for clarification or ask follow-up questions.

On screen: Work from a list of questions. Ask for a description of the process being documented.

Narrator: I always recommend that you work from a standard list of questions that you have created ahead of time, and I recommend that you focus the interview on the work process that is supported by the records. That allows you to see the records in context with the work being done. The process and context mapping techniques work well when combined with an interview.

On screen: Take good notes. Stay focused. Combine with questionnaires and site visits when appropriate.

Narrator: You will need to be careful to stay on track and take good, clear notes so you can compile and analyze the information later. These techniques can also be used together, so you might start with a questionnaire and then follow up with interviews for those new or unusual record types.

On screen: Physical site visit / survey. Trained staff review records on-site. Typically generates more accurate, complete information. Can provide opportunities to answer questions, help with files.

Narrator: A physical site visit or site survey means that you or someone from your team actually goes out and looks at the records themselves. Again, this approach can be combined with questionnaires and interviews or other techniques. It often results in more accurate, more complete information, because your team can examine the records and see exactly what's going on. A visit can also be a good opportunity to connect, and you may find that you're able to answer questions or help resolve other records issues while you're there.

On screen: Time-consuming for records staff.

Narrator: This does tend to be the most time-consuming and labor-intensive approach for your team, but depending on the nature of the records and the goals of your inventory, it may yield the best results.

On screen: Combination approach. Three blocks appear on screen, one after the other, with arrows connecting the blocks. The first block is marked, "Initial questionnaire." The next block is marked "Follow-up interviews." The final block is marked "site visits."

Narrator: I prefer a combination approach that is tailored to the goals, scope, and needs of the inventory. I might start with a very basic questionnaire, then do some follow-up interviews where we need more information, and then visit just a few departments when we find we need even more detail.

On screen: Three more blocks appear. The first block is labeled "Diagrams / process maps with interviews." The middle block is marked "Follow-up spreadsheet shared." The last block is marked "Interviews and site visits as needed."

Narrator: Or, you could start with an interview that creates or reviews process maps, then follow up

with the group by sending them a spreadsheet or other document showing all the record types the group identified so they can review and confirm what you found. From there, you'd do more in-depth interviews or visits as needed.

On screen: Two more blocks appear. One is marked "confirm / update existing inventory." The other is marked "follow-up interviews."

Narrator: If you already have a fairly recent inventory, you might just be asking people to confirm or update the existing information, then do follow-up interviews or visits in the few cases where those are needed.

On screen: Collecting Inventory Information.

Narrator: As you choose how to inventory, you'll also need to decide what to collect. The type of information you gather in your records inventory really depends on your goals, scope, and situation.

On screen: What information should we collect? Make your list – we'll compare notes at the end.

Narrator: I'll give you some of the more common examples in this segment. As we go along, start thinking about the types of data you will need to collect for your inventory, and we'll compare notes at the end.

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: Here's the scenario from the previous segment. In this example, our main goal for this baseline inventory is to gather the information we need to re-establish our records management program. So, 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 could really help us plan for our program. Ultimately, we'd like to prepare file plans for our three locations so people in each office know what information is stored, and where.

On screen: What should we collect? Data collected depends on your purpose and scope. Contact information. Series title and description. Location, dates and volume. Retention. Formats. Storage, retrieval and use.

Narrator: There are some general categories of information that we typically collect as part of a records series inventory. We'll look at examples in each of these broad categories.

On screen: Contact information. Part of a traditional records series inventory form appears. At the top of the form is a block marked "Department / program / office." That block is filled in with the name, "Playground Safety Testing Program." The next block is labeled "Department / program / office point of contact," and is filled in with the name Bea Bailey and the telephone extension 9 8 7 6 5. The next block is marked "Person conducting the inventory," and that is filled in with the name Dee Davis and the extension 1 2 3 4 5.

Narrator: If you are conducting your inventory with help from anyone – a small team or a large one – you'll want to identify the person who did each part of the inventory. You'll also want to identify which department, program or office owns the records and capture the name of that point of contact for those records. As you collect more and more inventory data, you may find that you need to go back for clarification or for more information, so this contact information can be important.

On screen: A new portion of the inventory form appears. The next block is marked "Series title / alternate titles and acronyms." The block is completed with the words, "Playground Equipment Testing Case Files. Also known as M files. M stands for merry-go-round." The next block is labeled "series description" and is filled in with "Case files documenting the inspection and testing of installed playground equipment in public parks. Files include photos, inspection checklists, test data reports, correspondence, and the final report."

Narrator: Information about the records is, of course, the heart and soul of your inventory. You want to capture what each series – each type of records – is called. I like to note any additional names that are used, too, especially when I'm creating file plans. Is there an official name for the system, but people refer to it by an acronym or a system number? How would people ask for the records?

Narrator: You also want to capture a brief description of the series or system. What are these? What purpose do these records serve? What's included in the collection of records? In this example, we're looking at case files that support the playground safety testing process. Knowing that the files include photos, reports, and other materials will help us understand, capture, manage and preserve the records.

On screen: A new portion of the inventory form appears. The next block is labeled "Location of files." It is filled in with the words, "Playground Safety Testing Program Office, building 1 2 7, room A. Files area, completed files, and individual staff desks, open files. Working drafts and digital photos are stored on staff shared drive S, M-files."

Narrator: In most records inventories, we capture some basic information about how and where the files are maintained. If they're paper records, we note where they are stored. If they're electronic, we note where they are on the network, who the system points of contact are, and things like that.

On screen: The next block is labeled "Date span" and is completed with the words Fiscal Year 2005 to present.

Narrator: We also note the date span of the records. This can help you be sure you've located all the records. If you find 2000 through 2005 and 2010 to the present, you can see pretty quickly that you still haven't found all the records.

On screen: The next block is marked "volume" and is completed with the words "16 cubic feet, approximately 1 gigabyte on shared drive."

Narrator: In a lot of cases, we'll note the volume of the records. That is usually recorded in cubic feet – one standard records box holds one cubic foot. If you have electronic files, you'll note the amount of space those files take on your network. This information is helpful if you're planning for records storage space, planning to send files to a records center or an archives, planning to purchase data storage, or just trying to get a picture of the vast quantity of information your organization has.

On screen: Retention. A new portion of the inventory form appears. This block is marked, "Is there a records schedule for this series? It is filled in with the words, "Yes. Schedule Item P G 130. Cut off when final report is issued, destroy 10 years after cutoff."

Narrator: In our example, we're also tracking what, if any, records schedule covers the records. Since we want to prepare file plans and update schedules in this example, this is information that will help us move forward. If we find records that don't yet have a schedule, we can ask for recommendations for retention times.

On screen: Formats and Media. Another portion of the form appears. This section is marked Record formats, and it has several check-boxes. Boxes for paper, electronic (Microsoft Word), and Audiovisual (photos) are checked.

Narrator: In this inventory, we're also going to collect information about the formats and media we use to store the records. This can help you identify areas where you may need to plan for preservation, storage, or other issues.

On screen: Arrangement and retrieval. Another block with a set of check boxes appears. The list is labeled, "How are the records filed?" The options include alphabetically, numerically, geographically, and chronologically. The box for alpha-numerically is checked, and a blank is filled in to indicate that these are filed alpha-numerically by case number.

Narrator: In our example, we want to prepare file plans to help each department identify and retain their records. Part of our file plan will include information on how the records are to be organized, so we're going to collect that information here. If you have the same type of records maintained in several different offices, asking this question can help you identify where you need to standardize naming and filing conventions.

On screen: What information should we collect? What else is on your list? As the narrator speaks, new ideas appear. Indexes, other copies, related records, when are files closed, vital records, programs supported, legal requirements, is the schedule adequate.

Narrator: There are other bits of information you might also collect, depending on the goals of your inventory. You could track whether there are any related indexes or finding aids for the records. In this example, how do they find case numbers for each one? Are there other copies stored elsewhere? That's helpful to know if you're planning for disaster recovery or if you're planning to consolidate storage. Are there any other related records? If you're building a records schedule, you really want to know that so you can manage all the records in a coordinated way. If you're building or updating a records schedule or file plans, you'll also want to know when the files close. When is the work complete? When do we stop adding new materials to the file? You will choose the information you need to meet the goals of your inventory. Some inventories will require less information, and some will need more.

On screen: Electronic systems. As the narrator speaks, bullet points appear. Name and description of system. Links to other systems. Records duplicated elsewhere. Programs supported by the system. Points of contact. How and where information is stored.

Narrator: The information we gather for electronic systems is pretty similar. We ask questions like, what is the system called? Is it related to any other records or systems? What programs are supported by the system? That's critical information, because you want to be sure that all the stakeholders' interests are included when you're building your schedule. Just like with traditional series, we also capture information about the business and technical points of contact for the system, and information about how and where it is stored.

On screen: Electronic systems. As the narrator speaks, more bullet points appear. How is the information retrieved or accessed. Sources of data input. Outputs from the system. Formats of content. Metadata. What makes up a comprehensive record? What is the life cycle of a record in the system?

Narrator: We look at what information is stored in the system and how it is accessed. We look at what goes into the system, and at what kinds of reports, data streams, or other products come out of the system, and where they go when they're generated. We look at the electronic formats of the content and at the metadata. Metadata is that additional information about the records – things like dates, file titles, project numbers – the things that we use to locate, manage, understand, and preserve the records. We look at what it takes to make up a complete record in the system. We look at how the information flows through the system – what is its life span, and what happens to it?

On screen: Tips.

Narrator: I've given you a lot of examples, and you will want to tailor that list to fit your project.

On screen: Practice before you jump in.

Narrator: Whether your inventory is large or small, I recommend that you choose those data fields and prepare whatever tool you will use to collect the data – a form, a spreadsheet, a database, or a system – and test it out on a few series before you truly jump in to the inventory project. Give the inventory tool to a couple of people who will be working on your team, and ask them to highlight any areas of confusion. Actually try out the form on a handful of record types and then look at the results. Are you gathering the information you need in a way that will work for you?

On screen: Validate initial results early in the process and as you go along.

Narrator: As you get started, you'll also want to spot-check the inventory results to be sure things are working the way you intended.

On screen: Collecting the data. Collecting questionnaires or forms. Data entry. Transcribing notes. Spreadsheets. Database.

Narrator: The size and scope of your inventory will also determine what approach you take to collect the data. If it's a small project for one area with just a few types of records, you might do the inventory yourself with a notepad and pencil. If it's a larger effort, you will want to look for the best way to capture information as it comes in. Are you going to ask for handwritten or electronic forms that you consolidate into one spreadsheet or database? If you're doing interviews, how will you transcribe those notes into a form that allows you to compile the information? If it's a very large effort across many offices and locations, you may want to consider having some kind of data entry tool that allows your team to capture what they find in one central location. Data collection does not have to be fancy – it just needs to be effective. Choose the approach that will help you meet the goals of your project in the simplest way.

On screen: Tips. Make maps as needed.

Narrator: If you are inventorying paper and other physical record formats, you may want to map their locations as you capture their descriptions.

On screen: Map File Locations. A simple map appears on screen. The locations of two doors, a window, two shelves, and three cabinets are noted. As the narrator speaks, notations are made next to the cabinets to show the presence of safety testing files, travel files, and budgets. Two problem areas, a leaky window and a broken lock, are noted on the map.

Narrator: One of my colleagues recommends taking a sheet of paper and sketching out the locations of

cabinets, shelves, and other records storage areas when you're doing a site visit or physical inventory. You can then note the location of each series you find. This will help refresh your memory, and it can help as you're preparing vital records plans or planning to consolidate files. You can also note any problems you find during the inventory so those can be corrected.

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

Narrator: After you and your team have carried out the inventory, it's time to put your data to work. In the next segment, we'll look at what to do after you've collected your data.

On screen: Photo credits. Want to learn more about concept mapping? See *Fast Tracking the Records Inventory*, Donna Rose, ARMA International Conference, 2007.

On screen: The Records Management Training Program logo appears out of a black background.

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