

Rhode Island State Archives & Public Records Administration

Managing Electronic Records

Bulletin No. 1

Managing Electronic Mail - The Basics

2010

1. What is Electronic Mail?

Messages and enclosed (attached) documents composed and transmitted or received via a computer system or computer network.

2. Rhode Island State Law, Electronic Mail, and the Meaning of "Public Record"

2a. "Public record" "public records" shall mean all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, magnetic or other tapes, electronic data processing records, computer stored data (**including electronic mail messages...**) or other material regardless of physical form or characteristics made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency. RIGL § 38-2-2 (4)

2b. By law, state agencies are responsible for developing email records management policies. RIGL § 42-8.1-17

3. Creating an Electronic Mail Record

3a. Electronic mail, like traditional mail and envelopes, should include header information: sender name, email address, recipient name(s), including cc's and bcc's, date of creation, time of transmission, and subject (file name) of the message.

3b. Best practice suggests that signature information within the body of the email include: sender's name, title/official position, and name of the agency.

3c. Attachments to electronic mail messages form part of the record. Issues of incompatibility may arise, however, when document recipients are unable to open and read the attachment. To avoid this difficulty, ensure that both parties possess the same or compatible word processing, database management, or spreadsheet software. Otherwise, recipients may have difficulty importing documents and be unable to open and read attachments. Agencies should seek guidance from their IT personnel.

4. Record Status

Is the message an official agency record? See 2a.

No. Delete at your discretion.

Yes. Go to 5.

Don't know. Contact the State Archives Division.

5. Capturing Internal Email

Agency policy should dictate who – **sender, recipient, or both** – bears primary responsibility for capturing an official copy of email messages that are both sent and received within the agency.

6. Capturing External Email

If you are mail recipient. Go to 6a.

If you created and sent mail. Go to 6b.

6a. Are you the sole or primary recipient of the message?

No. If another individual (**or individuals**) within your agency is the primary recipient of an external message (name(s) in the "To" field) and you are copied (cc'd), or you are one of several individuals who have been copied, the message's importance to you should determine how long you keep it.

Yes. You are a primary recipient (your name appears in the "To" field). Keeping the email as an agency record is your responsibility. Go to 6b.

6b. Single message/message sequence.

Is the message a single, isolated communication? Or is the message the last of several messages in a sequence of exchanges (several messages and replies) about an agency business matter?

Single, isolated communication. Go to 7.

Last in a sequence of message exchanges. Go to 6c.

6c. Record capture – a sequence of messages.

Does the last in the exchange of two or more messages capture all the previous messages and their header information?

No. Capture all individual messages necessary to document the authorship, chronology, and content of the exchange. Then go to 7.

Yes. Capture the last message only, if it includes all previous messages and their header information. Then, delete all previous transmissions in the exchange. Go to 7.

7. Email Storage – Three Questions, Three Choices

Email/attachment storage method choices must be guided by a calculation of the cost of premature destruction or loss, and also calibrated by the length of required retention.

7a. What is your agency's email capture policy/procedure?

7b. Is the retention period more than 10 years? Go to 7d. or 7e.

7c. Print to paper, and go to 8. **Use of this option requires the inclusion of all email header information** (sender name, email address, recipient name(s), including cc's and bcc's, date of creation, time of transmission, subject (file name) of the message).

7d. Copy to word processing document including header information, then print. Go to 8.

7e. Upload to a secure and maintained agency electronic records management system.

8. Classifying and Filing

The creation of email file folders that coincide with record series titles in the agency's records retention schedule and the General Records Schedule helps to promote effective document retrieval and authorized, timely disposal of the records.

9. Destroying Official Email Records

9a. See 4 above.

9b. Destruction requires an approved records retention schedule. Consult your agency's schedule and the General Records Schedule

(http://www.sec.state.ri.us/Archives/general_schedules/) and/or contact the State Archives Division.

9c. Destruction of agency records requires an approved **Certificate of Records Destruction** before disposal may take place. (RIGL § 38-1-10, § 38-3-6 (j) and § 42-8.1-10) Consult records destruction

(<http://www.sec.state.ri.us/Archives/destruction/>) and/or contact the State Archives Division.

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