Name of Submitter: National Archives of Australia - 18 December 2017

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA – SUBMISSION

Digital delivery of government services inquiry

Context

The National Archives of Australia (Archives) is pleased to provide this submission on the inquiry into the digital delivery of government services.

In October 2015, the Archives issued its Digital Continuity 2020 Policy, leading the whole-of-government approach to digital information governance. It complements the Australian Government's digital transformation agenda by supporting efficiency, innovation, interoperability, information re-use and accountability through the integration of robust digital information management in all government business processes. The Digital Continuity 2020 Policy was preceded in 2011 by the Digital Transition Policy which was developed by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Archives was the lead implementation agency for this whole-of-government policy, which required agencies to create and manage government information digitally for efficiency purposes.

The Archives actively supports the digital delivery of government services to achieve better outcomes for Australians. The successful digital delivery of trusted government services requires an increased focus on the value, governance and management of business information, including data. Effective information governance ensures the ongoing access to fit-for-purpose and reliable information which supports effective government services, protects the rights and entitlements of Australians, and reduces the liability risks for government.

This submission considers:

- the need for a strategic focus on information and data governance within the Australian Government, with business information valued as an asset and a key enabler in the digital delivery of trusted government services; and
- the value of embedded information management functionality in digital platforms and services.

Recommendations

That the Inquiry consider the following recommendation for the digital delivery of government services:

Include information governance requirements in relevant whole-of-government and whole of agency digital government service delivery projects.

To support this recommendation and enable the effective digital delivery of government services, the Archives also recommends that the Inquiry:

1. Note the crucial role that quality information and data play in the digital delivery of trusted government services and better outcomes for citizens; and
2. Reinforce the requirement under the Archives Digital Continuity 2020 policy that information management functionality be included in the design (or procurement) of digital platforms and services, and digital information.

Key points in support of the recommendations

Improving information governance to enable the digital delivery of government services

The Archives supports improved information governance in agencies to enable the Australian Government's digital transformation initiatives. Effective information governance allows agencies to manage information as an asset by efficiently collecting, managing and accessing it as part of service delivery, supporting better business outcomes and maintaining government accountability.

When information is managed as a strategic asset of government it enables digital transformation initiatives and ensures that other governance requirements are met, including those that underpin digital service delivery such as security, privacy, quality, accessibility, re-use and mitigation of potential liabilities.

By contrast, information that is not managed as a strategic asset is more likely to be fragmented and out-of-date rather than reliable or trustworthy. Information that is not well managed is also more likely to become unreadable, unusable, and have limited potential future use and value.

The value of effective digital information management for efficiency and productivity gains in government has been highlighted in a number of recent Australian Government reports. These reports indicate a need for clear and consistent whole-of-government information management policies and practices to enable streamlined, efficient delivery of government services and programs. This is demonstrated particularly by the recommendations in the *Independent Review of Whole-of-Government Internal Regulation (Belcher Red Tape Review)*, and *Learning from Failure [Shergold] Report.*

Information and data as a government asset

Government information and data is a key government asset and a valuable national resource. It underpins the digital economy and is an enabler of digital government. Government invests significantly in data collection and creation, and it is as important as the services, technology and systems that enable the digital delivery of government services. Integral to the development of services and their platforms, are the functions that allow the collection and management of business information and data as assets. These must be considered from the outset, rather than retrofitting systems to include information management functionality.

The current state of government digital information in support of transformation

In its role as lead agency for the transition to digital information practices in the Australian Government, the Archives regularly reports on agencies' progress. Over the last seven years key measures have focused on the extent to which agencies are working digitally and the effectiveness of their information governance frameworks and practices. During this period, the number of agencies managing most of their information digitally has increased substantially from 30% in 2010 to 87% in 2017.

Agencies managing most of their information digitally
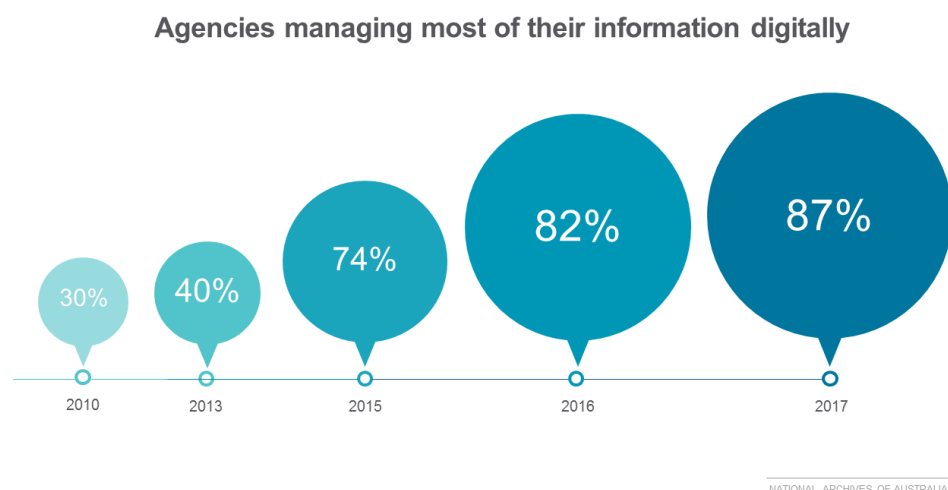
This change has been supported by the Archives' policy requirement that digital information and records created after 2015 will only be accepted by the Archives in digital formats. Over this period the cost of storing physical records has also decreased by $94 million per annum across government, with agencies reporting the annual cost of storing physical records in 2015 as $126 million, compared with $220 million in 2010.

While there has been overall improvement, the Archives has identified areas in which further progress is needed to enable digital transformation and to support the digital delivery of government services:

- the implementation of agency information governance frameworks that ensure business information is managed for as long as needed[1]. Our findings indicate agencies often focus on the technological solution over the value of the information; and
- sufficient information management functionality in business platforms and systems to ensure that business information can be found, secured, used, managed and migrated to conduct business and meet the longer term needs of government and citizens.[2] Our findings indicate that agencies often focus on immediate business needs only, and that longer term

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[1] In 2017, 36% (60) of agencies were progressing the implementation of an information governance framework, with 10% (17) of agencies yet to commence. Target due date 31 December 2016.

[2] In 2017, 57% (95) of agencies had started to assess their business systems for information functionality, with 37% (62) of agencies yet to commence. In 2017 68% (115) of agencies had started to assess their business systems for essential metadata, with 19% (31) of agencies yet to commence. Target due date 31 December 2017. In 2017, only 7% (11) of agencies have implemented appropriate information management functionality. Target due date 31 December 2018.

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agency needs and the needs of future users are not considered, requiring expensive retrospective work.

Existing strategies and tools

The Archives' Digital Continuity 2020 Policy creates a firm foundation for digital service delivery by integrating robust digital information management into all government business processes to support efficiency, innovation, interoperability, information re-use and accountability. The Policy sets specific targets for agencies to achieve by the end of 2020 under three key principles to optimise Government digital information:

1. **Agencies will develop and implement a comprehensive information governance framework to manage their information assets.** This includes a strategic, multi-disciplinary approach to managing information at an organisational level to ensure regulatory, business and accountability requirements are met, including professionalism requirements for information management staff.
2. **Business processes will be digital from end to end**. Business decisions will be made and recorded digitally, using digital authorisations and workflows. Fully digital processes enable responsive digital service delivery and more complete and accountable information.
3. **Government information will be interoperable**. Information sharing and re-use promotes efficiency, enables open data initiatives and supports integration of government services and processes. Under the Policy, interoperability is based on standards for functionality in platforms and systems, file formats and use of metadata.

The Archives is responsible for leading the implementation of the Policy. Implementation within agencies is expected to be achieved as part of normal agency business reviews and ongoing technology maintenance and investment cycles. In support, the Archives provides a variety of practical tools and advice to agencies, including tools to transform analogue processes to digital, improve information management functionality in business systems and to support digital information management skills development.

Strategies for improving information governance to support the digital delivery of government services

Consistent with its ongoing implementation of the Digital Continuity 2020 Policy, the Archives recommends three key strategies for improving information governance to support the digital delivery of government services:

1. **Inclusion of information governance requirements in whole-of-government and whole-of-agency projects**
   Large scale projects pose the greatest information management risks given the costs, complexities and volume of government information created, collected and used.
   To mitigate these risks and maximise the benefits quality information can deliver for business, effective information governance is a fundamental requirement of the current Digital Continuity 2020 Policy. As such, the Archives recommends that information governance and appropriate information management planning be a mandatory inclusion in new business cases. This should

include costings for the management of information created, collected or generated by the project or platform across its lifetime, inclusive of future migration requirements.

2. **Role of information and data in supporting service delivery and better outcomes for citizens**
Quality digital information enables more efficient digital service delivery, increases opportunities for information sharing and can improve business decisions. It also creates new opportunities for process and service reuse, redesign and innovation. Agencies that understand and fully realise the benefits of their assets – information, technology, people and processes – deliver better and more efficient services to Australians.

As such the Archives recommends business information, including data is recognised as being central to the provision of digital government services and better outcomes for citizens. Additionally, information created as a result of delivering such services is a valuable resource in its own right, supporting citizens' rights and entitlements and informing ongoing transformation and improvement in service delivery. Accordingly, provisions should be made within individual agencies and across government for ensuring ongoing access, protection and management of such business information.

3. **Requirement to include information management by design through:**
   o **procurement or design of compliant digital platforms and services**
   Under the Digital Continuity 2020 Policy, the Archives advocates and supports procurement of fit-for-purpose systems and online applications that can appropriately create, secure, manage and provide access to government business information from the outset, for as long as needed. This approach recognises that greater opportunity exists at the point of procurement or development to consider and build in appropriate levels of information management functionality as part of a system's overall design and functionality, while noting the expense of retrospectively building in such functionality once the system is operational.
   o **design of compliant digital information**
   Under the Digital Continuity 2020 Policy, the Archives advocates and supports design of systems so that information is appropriately described and can be secured, managed, found and shared for as long as needed. This approach recognises that greater opportunity exists at the point of procurement or development to consider and build-in appropriate levels of description as part of a system's overall design and functionality, while noting the expense of retrospectively building in such description once the system is operational.

Background

The Archives was established under the *Archives Act 1983* (the Act) and is an Executive Agency of the Australian Government. Its role is to:

- preserve Australia's most valuable government records and information and support its use. This includes all Australian Government business information and data created, used or received as part of government business such as email, social media content, datasets, geospatial information and audio-visual information; and
- promote effective information management by Australian Government agencies.

Information management policy and advice

Under its Act, the Archives sets standards and provides advice to Australian Government agencies to support effective information management. The Act governs the retention, destruction and transfer of all Australian Government information and data, and the requirement to transfer the most significant and valuable information to the Archives for ongoing preservation and access.

Standards and other guidelines produced by the Archives provide a key resource for agencies in sharing information effectively. Through membership of Standards Australia, the Archives is an active participant in the development, endorsement and use of national and international standards related to information management.

The Open Government Partnership Action Plan (2016) recognises the Archives leadership role in transforming from paper to digital information practices in Australian Government agencies, digitising paper records of high research value and increasing the number of records available for public access.

The Archives is currently collaborating with other Australian Government agencies in the delivery of the Government's digital transformation agenda including development of a whole of government digital records platform (led by Finance), engaging with the Australian Public Service Commission to improve digital literacy and capability and liaising with the Digital Transformation Agency in relation to inclusion of information management functionality in ICT procurement contracts.

Contact

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