RM/IG Program Plan

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60 days – becoming familiar and establishing a foundation

*Team Creation*

The first sixty days of creating a Records Management/ Information Governance Program for River Park University are crucial. These first two months will be about creating a strong foundation in the form of assembling stakeholders and team members, creation of policies, and identifying inventory.

I would first meet with Dr. Turner, the university president, and any other executive stakeholders to determine any “strategic objectives” that the university would like the RM/IG department to focus on. From my initial conversations with the president, the Director of Risk Management, and the Chief Information Officer it seems like some of these objectives might include record security/risk management, legal compliance, and historical preservation. These objectives should also align with River Park University’s overall mission and goals, since the RM/IG program exists to support RPU.

It is also imperative for the RM/IG program to secure an executive sponsor to “provide leadership, accountability, and advocacy for records management initiatives” (Saffady, 2021, p. 20). The executive sponsor is not involved in the daily operation of the RIM department but plays a key role in offering authorization, approving a budget, and communicating with other stakeholders. The executive sponsor is a key figure in upholding the principle of Accountability from ARMA International’s Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles. These principles will be important to keep in mind as the program develops and policies are created. Text

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(Read-Smith & Ginn, 2016, p. 23)

To create both the RM/IG policy and records retention schedule, I will need to assemble a team with representation from IT, Archives, and our legal team. I want to make sure all our bases are covered as far as compliance, protection, and retention. They will be essential in helping to create the RM/IG policy. While building an RM/IG team it is important to consider who has the most pressing information issues, but some potential team members might include (Smallwood, 2020, p. 73):

* Executive sponsor
* IG program manager
* Chief IG officer
* Rep from legal counsel
* Rep from IT
* Senior records officer (SRO)
* Information security professional
* Privacy professional
* CDO and CFO input

The RM/IG policy will be used by everyone who deals with records and will provide rules and guidelines for all steps within a record’s lifecycle: creation, distribution, use, maintenance, and disposition. This policy must also include guidelines and/or schedule for record retention and disposition. Since the policy is a living document and must be re-visited often to remain relevant, I would like these representatives to form an advisory committee: “The advisory committee defines program objectives, reviews records management policies and initiatives, and is involved with record retention issues, such as the review, approval, and implementation of retention schedules (Saffady, 2021, p. 21). This advisory committee will be used in the future as the RM/IG program matures.

*Policy Creation and Data Collection*

An important part of the RM/IG policy is the records retention schedule. However, the record retention schedule relies on a fact-finding data collection mission, which is our next step. While River Park University can be considered a small university, it is in no ways a small organization. It houses multiple schools, locations, departments and has a long history. This data collection process will be a large production that “gathers and evaluates information about the nature, quantity, storage conditions, business use, and perceived value of an organization’s records” (Saffady, p. 37) and cannot be accomplished in only a few months due to the size of the organization. To make this process more manageable, we will perform the data collection in stages and limit the scope to make sure that the records we are spending time on are valuable and essential to RPU’s mission and operation.

As records manager, I will develop a data collection plan and timetable divided by program units. These program units are based on the existing hierarchy of departments and their functions. To begin, the scope of this plan will be limited to those departments with the most vital and important records. From my initial analysis, I identify the departments of Human Resources, Financial Aid, and Accounts Payable as most in need. I suspect that these departments are part of those that are using the massive amount of file storage that the CIO has complained about. Hopefully, this data collection effort will help identify what is and is not a record and any nonessential items can be deleted. ISO 15489 defines a record as information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business and only 10-15% of documents that an organization produces can be considered records (Read-Smith & Ginn, 2016, p. 5). Other storage solutions will be addressed later, but this can act as a temporary space-saving solution.

Table

Description automatically generatedTo accomplish this, I will need to hire a few additional employees to help collect the data. Depending on our budget, this could be accomplished with 3-4 part-time student workers who would distribute the data collection questionnaires to help get an initial review of the formats and quantity of records present. Questionnaires are shorter and can be sent out in batches but can also produce less than quality results. Therefore, I would also use the student workers to help conduct follow-up interviews in a hybrid collection method. The interviews could help clarify any confusion but would have to be more limited due to staff and time constraints. Both the questionnaire and interview script would be developed by me and will document:

(Read-Smith & Ginn, 2016, p. 8)

* the type of records (external, internal, transactional, referential, etc.)
* the value of the records (see above chart)
  + administrative, legal, historical, etc.
* how/where records are stored, regardless of form (storage format, digital or physical)
* the amount/volume
* how they are organized/classified
* any current retention or disposition schedule attached to them

120 Days- Beginning to implement changes

*Storage Solutions*

At this time, it will be important to begin exploring storage solutions for both physical and digital records. It’s apparent that the current methods of storage are neither efficient nor secure. For physical records not currently in use, the majority are being stored in the basements of RPU and in banker boxes on the floor. The first issue here is that any type of flooding could take out these items. The second issue is that the poor filing and haphazard storage makes these items inaccessible. RPU must purchase proper storage cabinets to remedy both issues. Vertical filing cabinets might be the best solution as they offer functionality and will work for the majority of RPU’s records. Additionally, having a uniform storage solution will make establishing a classification system easier to enforce, which will aid in accessibility.

A related issue is that records are being stored in multiple places. For RPU, I think the best solution is a centralized filing system. Dr. Turner alerted me that numerous copies of official records have been found and this obviously is not ideal for consistency and security reasons. Since there types of records, such as student admission paperwork, are being used by multiple groups: “document repositories are usually preferable to decentralized filing arrangements in which records relating to a particular business process, operation, or activity are scattered in multiple locations” (Saffady, 2021, p. 120). A centralized repository saves space, eliminates confusion, and makes it easier to maintain an authorized record of the organization’s dealings but also allow only authorized employees to access it.

Since RPU has multiple campuses, I would like all possible new records to be created or uploaded to a Records Management System. This will be part of a larger purchase and move towards an Enterprise Content Management system (ECM) that will oversee the lifecycle of digital records. Part of my job will be to shop and research different ECM options to see which is the best fit for RPU’s goals and budget. According to Read-Smith and Ginn, there are many advantages to digital document technologies such as:

* Quick retrieval and simplified distribution
* Able to be accessed by multiple people in multiple locations
* Less likely to be lost/misfiled
* More effective version control and security
* Eliminates need for expensive, physical storage solutions

Moving away from physical documents will also necessitate seeking cloud-based storage solutions. I will also consult with IT to see what cloud storage options they might recommend so that they can become less worried about storage space and possibly revisit their strict email disposition policy. IT will also be able to consult about the media compatibility of any new SaaS purchase with current systems. The archival department should also be consulted about media stability considerations.

After the services are chosen, hardware such as scanners or digital imaging technology must be purchased and implemented. This will also be part of my job to research options and consult with members of the advisory committee to ensure that these choices will work well for everyone. Part of this implementation will involve communication and training for any staff that handles records. A potential learning curve for staff will be learning to input metadata to make the results retrievable. This will also require the cooperation of management and administration to ensure that these new systems and steps will be followed.

*Security and Risk*

If RPU has many inactive records, we might need to consider a commercial record center where the responsibility of accessibility, storage, security, environmental controls, etc. are passed off to the record center for a fee. I would also recommend a record center for vital documents because of the security they offer. In the past I have done some research into three records storage solution companies in the Chicagoland area: Vital Records Control, Vanguard Archives, and GRM Document Management. These companies have facilities specifically designed for record storage, tracking, and retrieval. I would strongly recommend storing vital records at one of these facilities because storing records off-site makes retrieval easier in the event of a natural disaster.

Speaking of disasters, RPU desperately needs a disaster recovery plan in the event of an emergency. The first part is a basic risk assessment. Part of the initial risk assessment is identifying essential records that are vital to the continued operation of the organization and the kinds of risks possible such as data breaches, ransomware, noncompliance, etc. These should be described and detailed as to why it would matter if these records were lost as well as the department/people responsible for their protection and the methods of protection to be implemented. These types of protection should consider both physical and digital security countermeasures and risk mitigation as well as back-up methods and/or off-site storage. In the event of a disaster, RPU should have vital/essential documents secured in order to maintain essential business operations and continue operations as much as possible. This type of continuity plan requires a lot of planning and cooperation from all stakeholders but is a necessity and a vital part of records and information management.

1 year – maintenance and improvement

*Regular Audits and Strategic Planning*

One year in, the RM/IG program should be well established. Most of the records RPU produces should be digital and this new way of handling records should be consistent. Employee training and understanding of RM/IG policies should be consistent and re-visited as necessary. However, this does not mean that the RM/IG manager role is finished. An effective RM/IG program must be constantly assessing its effectiveness and adapt to changing contexts: "However it takes shape, an IG program must be ongoing, dynamic, and aggressive in its execution in order to remain effective (Smallwood, p. 426).

In order to maintain a healthy RM/IG program, regular audits must be scheduled to assure compliance and effectiveness. These audits are part of strategic planning and should include the RM/IG advisory team to make goals/business objectives to be accomplished that align with RPU’s own goals. These goals and steps should then be developed into tangible steps with assigned roles and responsibilities. I would consult RM/IG program maturity models to identify areas that can be improved or expanded upon. It is my responsibility as the RM/IG Director “for implementing the policies and ensuring that all employees are complying with them.” (Read & Ginn, p. 365). Communication will be key here and how I deliver this audit and future inspections might prompt some growing pains and resistance, especially from some of the more established staff. However, conducting record audits is essential for the organization’s health and I will need to be both gentle and tough while identifying potential issues and changes to be implemented.

References

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