**Background:**

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Every organization should oblige to create records of the respective transactions, and it is the responsibility of the organization to retain those records for certain period of time for effective decision making by the top management and strive to survive in a cut throat competition such as to be effective team players and gain the competitive advantage over competitive excellence. There are certain legislations, which would regulate the retention of the said records. To promote transparency and accountability, each staff is responsible for managing their business records, created by the respective staff.

Pursuant to prescribed legislation and regulations, there should be a strong vigilant system in place to monitor the proper destruction of the records, which would also help in mitigating associated risks with improper disposition of the records.

**Introduction:**

Public accountability is a key challenge to public institutions such as local (first tier and second tier), provincial and federal governments. It is their mandate to protect information that was created or received in conjunction with business and alignment with the municipal functions, which is under custody or control of the organization. As a part of business process, institutional staff might receive information or records in originals, copies and drafts. Business record is a record that contains business decisions and it should be retained and purged in accordance with approved retention schedule aka retention bylaw. Institution can manage information manually and this method would satisfy the institutional need as long as records are limited or not many. Can an institution still manage if the organization grows? As every institution has a quality of growing aka dynamics in day to day activities. For instance, institution may likely to introduce a new service or plan to remove a service, which is neither benefit to the community nor useful, as well neither cost effective nor cost benefit. During this process, institution create number of records that contains business decisions, would substantiate the reason for add or remove services. As a future prospective, Township would like go forward to have and implement either a standalone, net wok based or web based information management system, which would help and act as a catalyst in promoting accountability, transparency and openness.

**Designing Phase:**

To design and develop this application also known as product, which serves the purpose of records management, for which, considered **ISO** (**I**nternational **O**rganization for **S**tandardization) standards are as **15489, 23081** (Meta data standard), **DoD** (**D**epartment **O**f **D**efence-United states for “Design Criteria Standards for Electronic Records Management Software Applications”), **CAN/CGSB** (**Can**adian **G**eneral **S**tandard **B**oard) **72.1** and internal policies, procedures, directives and guidelines as a frame work to meet the requirements of the cited standards for the maintenance of records.

While designing, the following principles taken into account and develop the system, Principle of Accountability, **Integrity** (program shall be constructed so the records and information generated or managed by or for the organization have a reasonable and suitable guarantee of authenticity and reliability), **Protection**(program shall be constructed to ensure a reasonable level of protection to records and information that are private, confidential, privileged, secret or essential to business continuity) , **Compliance** (program shall be constructed to comply with



applicable laws and other binding authorities, as well as the organization’s policies), **Availability** (shall maintain records in a manner that ensures timely, efficient, and accurate retrieval of the needed information), **Retention** (shall maintain its records and information for an appropriate time, taking into account legal, regulatory, fiscal, operational and historical requirements), **Disposition** (shall provide secure and appropriate disposition for records that are no longer required to be maintained by applicable laws and the organization’s policies) and **Transparency** (the process and activities of an organizations record keeping program shall be documented in an understandable manner and be available to all personnel and appropriate interested parties), are called **G**enerally **A**ccepted **R**ecords **P**rinciples.

**How it works:**

There are some prerequisites to be completed prior to key in file information into either new or existing files. To name a few, employee details, user roles, departments, record series attributes, document types, subjects, functions, activities, and exemptions. Upon successful completion of the said actions, end user would start work with the application.

File creation, there are few mandatory fields to get fill in, such as subject and the corresponding record series aka class, file title and year open, however rest of the fields would also require but not at the time of file creation. At a later time, end user would go into modify under existing in file.

End user may like to attach documents at the time of file creation or end user create all for open files then at a later time, would also able to attach documents, for which he would not go to upload documents rather to modify option. To be specific and key in this operation is file must

be declared as closed at any stage of working, then the only option left for the end user would be

“modify”, where end user could declare the file as closed.

Each and every record series assigned with few commendable attributes such as active (in office), semi-active (offsite), final disposition (the fate of group of records after expiration of predefined retention periods such as Active and Semi active), further identified as permanent, archival, archival cum disposable, and disposable. In order to roll in privacy protection, the record series identified in the lines of sensitivity around the information as high, medium and low as well determine the type of information presented in those documents such as personal,

Personal cum general and general information. In order to deploy the access and privacy controls

aka as built in access and privacy controls, for which, above identified attributes are very much required to meet those needs.

Above, attributes would be seen on the right side of the page as soon as the end user chooses the record series from the drop down at the time of file creation.

**Content Management:**

It is comprised of two functionalities such as records management component (retention periods are applicable at the file folder level as per the approved records retention bylaws) and it is capable of capturing documents (of any format such as word, pdf, excel, ppt and .msg) into appropriate identified working file folders. It allows two ways of capturing content either directly drag or drop into file folders listed out in working folders under tree structure or drag and drop into content page where small popup menu appear where end user provide all necessary metadata.

**Single Document or Multiple Documents:**

End user can drag and drop a document into a working file from desk top or even to a new file, system would prompt for metadata to the respective document type.

**Tag as a Record:**

At the time of drag and drop, end user could declare the document as record or not. If end user declared that document as record then end user cannot delete, but whereas documents that are not declared as record (s) can be deleted, this option allows end user to delete all copies, working papers, versions, and drafts. However, any action pertains to the file folder would be captured in audit trail for compliance and legal purposes as well.

**Departmental roles and responsibilities:**

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Each and every department should capture their own file(s), which are under their custody or control, independently and, at the same time, system should allow end user to enter minimum details (customization) where all file attributes, record series attributes should pop-up as soon as the end user chose sub-activity, activity and function (group of sub-activities leads to activities and the group of activities leads to function) and, every sub-activity has associated with file and record series attributes.

**Inter Departmental Lending Files:**

System facilitates inter lending files between departments, subject to proper authorization for personal and confidential files, and where as general files would be lent out without authorization. However, every action would be keep tracked in a way of audit trail.

**Audit Trail:**

By default each and every Electronic Records Management System (ERMS) should capable of track all actions, with respect to records operations (transfers, retrievals, dispositions, inter lending). This system is fully capable of conducting audits and keeps track all above actions.

**Meta Data:**

Though all eligible files and its records disposed in compliance with retention bylaws, but still system would keep all relevant Meta data for any future purposes, in keeping legal challenges with respect to disposition of a file. This would demonstrate the accountability and transparency of municipal organization.

**Transfers, Retrievals and Disposition:**

There are a couple of activities associated with file(s) upon successful creation aka closed file(s), to name a few, transfer, retrieval, access request, re-open, legal-hold and disposition.

**Records transfer** would takes place after file(s) is not in use but to be eligible for preservation or store in an inexpensive storage place, in other terms, off-site storage. All semi-active files (to meet the eligibility for transfer would be the file should satisfy two conditions such as a file must be closed and active period should expire as specified in the retention by law document aka record retention schedule (record series attributes)). File(s) must be stored or preserved until file (s) reach the expiration of active and semi-active periods (Ref: retention schedule) and the final disposition would takes place as a last stage of the information management life cycle and the destruction or purging process should be aligned and in accordance with retention schedule. To

proceed further with records transfer, staff should follow the predefined procedures or the direction that should be aligned and complied with approved policies and procedures



**Records retrieval** would take place, as and when need, by the author or other staff member within a department. The originators can only have access to their originated records but not others (taken into privacy considerations into account). This activity would only possible as long as records availability or , till the expiration of semi-activity period time (Ref: retention schedule), upon completion of the semi-activity retention period, then it should be considered for sentenced, subject to the designated actions such as disposable, permanent, archival vs. disposable. To proceed further with the records retrieval, staff should follow the predefined procedures or direction that should be aligned and complied with approved policies and procedures.

**Records disposition** would be the final stage in the life cycle of records information management. It is beyond “reconstruction” stage. Hence, attention is very much commendable and need to check and verify the process carefully and also should prompt for a message before deletion of files as we realized “this” as a critical component in the whole information life cycle management. Department head as well Records Management head would be held liable or responsible for deletion of files if the action process contrary to the Records retention bylaw as well the criteria cited on Certificate of destruction. “They” must ensure no records should be disposed contrary to retention bylaw. To proceed further with final disposition, staff should follow the predefined procedures or directions that should be aligned and complied with the approved retention policies and procedures.

Occasionally, would be a great possibility of occurrence of unexpected actions that need to perform against on any existing closed file(s) aka before disposable, to name a few, Access request, Re-open and Legal-hold. To proceed further with re-open and legal-hold, the subject file(s) should be retrieved from the off-site storage to on-site such as in-office, for which staff should follow the predefined policies and the procedure for the same to be in comply with approved records management policies and, then

**Re-Open/Re-Active**, is a method and considered as a new activity that happens against an existing closed file(s). There are times, need to add a new piece of a document or information included in the existing closed file (s). In the event of re-open, three actions should be performed against the subject file(s).

**Business Process:**

Three actions to be performed against re-open/re-active file (s) such as;

Re-open/Re-active file(s) should go back to active period until file (s) declare as close by the author or creator then only, the subject file(s) are eligible to send back to offsite storage as it falls into the semi-active period.



Re-open/Re-active file(s) aka record should be deleted from the box content list and, the old box number as well new box number information should available in the file re-open history

Retention period to be recalculated from the Re-open/Re-active -close-date in compliance with retention schedule

**Legal-hold** is a method and considered as a new activity would takes place against an existing closed file(s). There are times, a must need and require the closed file(s) for a possible legal litigation. In the event of legal hold, three actions should be performed against the subject file(s).

**Business Process:**

Three actions to be performed against qualified file(s) of legal-hold such as;

Legal- hold file(s) should go back to active period until legal hold release and, declare close by the author or creator, only then, the subject file(s) are eligible to send back to offsite storage as it falls into the semi-active period System also prompt for definite period of time extension after legal hold release (by authorized person, here the department head), accordingly the file would be managed.

Legal-hold file(s) aka record should be deleted from the box content list and, the old box number as well new box number information should available in the file re-open history and retention period to be recalculated from the Legal-hold-close-date in compliance with retention schedule.

**Access to Information (Right to Information):**

Access-Request is a request, requesting for right of access for recorded information, which is under the custody or control of the public sector organization with limited exemptions and disclose either in full or in part to the requester and, also it is a legal right of any citizen, anywhere in the world. Public sector organizations are not obligated to create records that are not existed in pursuant of municipal freedom of information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA). Organization could provide a right of access to the responsive records of a request as long as the recorded information available in other terms, the responsive records are not under gone for purging or disposable or sentenced in accordance with approved records retention by- law aka records retention schedule.

With this module,

As mentioned above, if any record aka file requested by any public by the method of access­

request, requested record aka file to be recognized and would rise a flag equal to as many times

as it is being requested or accessed. The intent for capturing the number of times would allow the organization to rework on the retention time and it pave ways to revise retention period

associated with the set of records aka record series.