

# Integrating Records Management into Information Resources Management in U.S. Government Agencies

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This article presents several key issues facing federal agencies with regards to electronic records management practices. The article identifies selected management, technology, implementation, and definitional barriers that agencies encounter when considering how to create and maintain an electronic records management process. A key question for federal agency technology managers is: If an enterprise creates and manages virtually all of its information in an automated information technology systems environment, does it make any sense to manage its records in a manual environment? Based on research conducted by the author, the article reviews various federal agency electronic records management processes and the implications for those practices.

The term “information resources management” (IRM), as it applies to U.S. government agencies, was originally coined in the 1970s by the President’s Commission on Federal Paperwork and later embodied in statute in the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980.<sup>1</sup> Since its inception, federal IRM has operated with the conceptual metaphor of “life cycle.” One finds the concept applied to information itself, as in the original definition of IRM in the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 and in the original version of OMB Circular No. A-130.<sup>2</sup> The stages of the life cycle are typically described as:

- Design;
- Creation or collection;
- Analysis;

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- Use;
- Dissemination; and
- Storage or disposition.

Life cycle is an organic metaphor, an analogy to the birth, life, and death of organisms. The origins of the metaphor are ancient and the notion of life cycle appears commonly throughout literature. The life cycle metaphor is applied also to information systems.<sup>3</sup> Even the process of acquiring information systems has received the life cycle treatment.<sup>4</sup>

Less focus is devoted to ways in which the life cycle metaphor obscures rather than elucidates reality. In large-scale government information enterprises—the decennial census of population and housing is an extreme case—the life cycle concept obscures the fact that each step in the cycle has its own internal life cycle, often lengthy and complex. The design stage of a decennial census itself, for example, entails data collection, analysis, use, dissemination, and storage or disposition stretching over several years. The same can be argued for the other stages of the decennial cycle, and indeed for most large, complex government information programs.

Perhaps no aspect of IRM has suffered more from the drawbacks of the information life cycle metaphor than records management. Figure 1 shows records management in relation to the rest of the information life cycle. As in the example above, records management has its own cycle: creation, receipt, maintenance, use, disposition, accessioning, preservation, and access. A principal drawback afflicting records management is that it is thought to occur *at the end* of the life cycle. In practice, this has tended to mean that records management is the last thing program managers think about because it is viewed as having no immediate relevance to program execution. Managers tend to view records management as only entailing preservation and fail to understand that records management is *both* day-to-day record keeping *and* longer term record retention and disposal. In consequence, records management has become information management’s afterthought, and, in the scale of competing priorities for scarce resources, records management all too often receives little attention or resources. Records management has, for too long, been the forgotten stepchild of IRM.

<b>The Information Life Cycle</b>	<b>Records Management</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Creation or Collection</li> <li>• Analysis</li> <li>• Use</li> <li>• Dissemination</li> <li>• Storage and Disposition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Records management IS storage and disposition</li> <li>• Record life cycle stages:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creation</li> <li>● Receipt</li> <li>● Maintenance</li> <li>● Agency Use</li> <li>● Disposition</li> <li>● Preservation</li> <li>● Access</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

*Figure 1*  
Information Management and Records Management

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