RECORDS MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES
JANUARY 1, 2021 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2021

Semi-Annual Report

National Archives and Records Administration
September 2021

Records Management Oversight Activities
Semi-Annual Report
January through June 2021

INTRODUCTION

This report shares recurring themes, key observations, and recommendations for action identified by the Records Management Oversight and Reporting program of the Office of the Chief Records Officer through various oversight activities completed January through June 2021

During this time frame the COVID-19 pandemic required us to be more flexible in adapting our processes from in-person site visits to virtual meetings and video conferences. While there may have been some information that we were unable to gather, we believe we were still able to effectively conduct oversight of Federal records management, identify trends and address challenges.

We conduct oversight through inspections including tracking plans of corrective actions (PoCAs), assessments on various records management topics, analysis of annual reports submitted by federal agencies, and tracking of unauthorized dispositions allegations.

During this six-month period we completed:

- Federal Agency Records Management Annual Reporting covering 2020 activities
- An assessment of Records Management Self- Evaluations by Federal Agencies
- An assessment of History Collections Maintained by Federal Agencies
- A multi-agency inspection of the Management of Permanent Records by the Department of Energy

For further information on each of the above reports, along with all other previously issued agency inspection and assessment reports, and the tracking of allegations of unauthorized disposition of Federal records, please see our website located at https://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt.

We also continued our tracking and monitoring of Plans of Corrective Action (PoCAs). As of June 30, 2021, NARA is actively working with agencies on 47 open PoCAs with 594 total recommendations. For the open PoCAs, 115 recommendations have been closed as a result of agency action.

TRENDS

The data from NARA's oversight activities indicate that records management programs across the Federal Government have much in common in terms of compliance with federal records management statutes and regulations.

While we find similar challenges and areas of non-compliance in most of our oversight activities, the ones specific to projects completed during the time frame of this report include:

- Records management programs do not consistently include self-evaluations to ensure agency policies, retention schedules, and other instructions are being followed.
- Agencies lack internal controls for records management.
- Records management policies, procedures and retention schedules are outdated and do not meet current business needs.
- Federal records are being maintained in separate history collections, archives and libraries within agencies without oversight from the Agency Records Officers or Records Management staff.

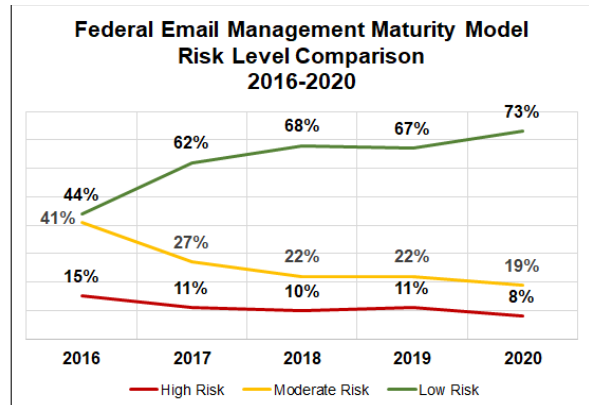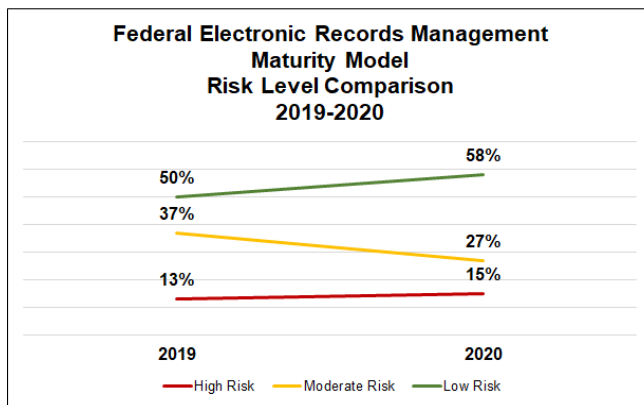## SUMMARY OF OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

In reviewing the data from our most recently completed projects, we found common challenges, best practices, and some noteworthy observations.

- **Federal Agency Records Management Annual Reporting:** During this time period the annual reporting data was collected from the Senior Agency Official for Records Management Reports, the Federal Electronic Records and Email Management Reports and the Records Management Self-Assessment. We received a 98% response rate for all three reports.

  Preliminary data analysis indicates a variety of trends concerning the transition to electronic recordkeeping including:

  - The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for electronic recordkeeping, and in some cases accelerated the transition.
  - Agencies that had been making progress towards electronic recordkeeping fared better than those that had not.
  - Most agencies are using electronic recordkeeping or management systems (e.g., Microsoft Office 365) of some kind.
  - Meeting the requirements for managing records in electronic information systems is a weak area, with less than half of agencies reporting having systems that meet the requirements for successfully managing electronic records.
  - Challenges to the transition to electronic recordkeeping have shifted from predominantly technology-driven to culture-based issues.

  The Federal Electronic Records and Email Management (FEREM) reports show some improvement in 2020 with email management remaining more mature.

Federal Electronic Records Management Maturity Model Risk Level Comparison 2019-2020

- High Risk: 13% (2019), 15% (2020)
- Moderate Risk: 37% (2019), 27% (2020)
- Low Risk: 50% (2019), 58% (2020)

Legend: High Risk — Moderate Risk — Low Risk

Federal Email Management Maturity Model Risk Level Comparison 2016-2020

- High Risk: 15% (2016), 11% (2017), 10% (2018), 11% (2019), 8% (2020)
- Moderate Risk: 41% (2016), 27% (2017), 22% (2018), 22% (2019), 19% (2020)
- Low Risk: 44% (2016), 62% (2017), 68% (2018), 67% (2019), 73% (2020)

Legend: High Risk — Moderate Risk — Low Risk

The full report, with details and analysis for the above, is expected to be available by the end of the fiscal year.

Records Management Self-Evaluations by Agencies: NARA conducted an assessment of seven agencies, including three Department component agencies and four independent agencies. Agencies were selected based on an analysis of annual Records Management Self-Assessment (RMSA) data regarding self-evaluations. Conducting self-evaluations is required by regulations under 36 CFR 1230.34(j), as well as, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-123. It is also a good internal control for ensuring compliance with agency records management policies or other internal instructions.

Some of the highlights of what this report found include:

- Regular and consistent self-evaluations are not being conducted
- Internal agency policies do not include the requirement to conduct RM evaluations.
- Strong SAORM support was lacking in some cases. This support is necessary to implement an effective self-evaluation program in order to have appropriate levels of resources.
- While NARA does provide some guidance including sample self-evaluations and maturity models, participating agencies noted that further NARA guidance or resource guides would be helpful.

History Collections Maintained by Federal Agencies: NARA conducted an assessment of eight agencies regarding the management of agency history collections. In particular, NARA was interested in the relationship between records management programs and the history collections.

In many cases, agencies have the sense that records being held in history collections are safe, secure, and well maintained, appearing to remove the need for RM programs to exercise oversight over organizations managing these collections. Conversely, this attitude hinders the collaboration of these organizations with RM. This perspective reaffirms observations made by NARA during the course of formal inspections that RM and programs maintaining agency history collections need to collaborate more closely to ensure compliance with NARA's regulations.

Some of the highlights of what this report found include:

- There is a lack of coordination between records management and history collections in terms of policy, roles and responsibilities, procedures, collections policies and inventories.
- History collections contain some federal records or copies of records without regard for their disposition under NARA-approved retention schedules.
- There is a need for a clear definition of what constitutes a history collection and more guidance for managing federal records within such collections.

Permanent Records of the Department of Energy Multi-Agency Inspection: NARA inspected the management of permanent records by six component agencies of the Department of Energy (DOE) as well as selected representatives from DOE headquarters offices and laboratories.

During this inspection, NARA found similar trends to what we have found in all inspections to date:

- Outdated records management policies, procedures and retention schedules;
- Challenges with electronic records management and the transition from paper records that could hinder implementation of OMB/NARA, Transition to Electronic Records (M-19-21);
- Lack of detailed inventories of permanent (and temporary) records and other governance mechanisms necessary for intellectual control;
- History programs that are maintaining overdue permanent records and lack controls in compliance with Departmental Orders; and
- Infrequent transfers of permanent records to the National Archives.

DOE also had two noteworthy practices:

- A robust records management oversight and evaluation program called Records Assistance Visits, Evaluations, and Networking (RAVEN). While it is in its early stages of implementation, it should provide the support needed by DOE elements and offices for compliance, process improvements and quality assurance and/or controls.
- DOE is very active in Electronic Document Management Systems and Records Management Application implementation and developing ways to integrate across the entire Department.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE ACTION

Overall, the challenges facing federal records management programs remain fairly consistent and can only be faced with concerted effort and leadership. The purpose of publishing specifics from our oversight activities semi-annually is to provide information about our activities and identify commonalities, particularly, for those agencies that have not yet been inspected or otherwise engaged with us. We encourage Senior Agency Officials for Records Management, other Senior Agency Officials, as well as Agency Records Officers and other Records Managers, to use this information to identify where they may have similar issues and proactively make adjustments.

NARA makes the following new recommendations for Senior Agency Officials for Records Management (SAORM) to consider based on the oversight activities covered by this report:

- Develop procedures that require RM programs to conduct self-evaluations on a regular basis to ensure RM processes are compliant with 36 CFR 1230.34(j) and agency requirements.
- Develop and implement a policy [or policies] that includes RM evaluation requirements in accordance with 36 CFR 1220.34(j)
- Establish a routine process by policy or procedure to review schedules for obsolete information and identify new or unscheduled records that need to be added to ensure schedules accurately reflect agency mission and procedures. (36 CFR 1220. 34(g) and 36 CFR 1225.22)
- Establish policies for the management of history collections and develop standard operating procedures documenting roles, responsibilities, and workflow processes between RM and offices or programs managing history collections to properly identify, maintain, and disposition records according to approved records schedules. (36 CFR 1220 and 1226)

Proper records management supports government accountability and allows agencies to create and retrieve information required in order to accomplish mission goals. NARA is committed to working with federal agencies to improve records management across the government to advance these important goals.

UPCOMING OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

The following oversight activities are expected to be completed in calendar year 2021.

Multi-Agency Inspections

- Board, Commissions, and Foundations Records Management Programs
- Records of Federal Executive Secretariats
- Permanent Records of Selected Regulatory Agencies
- Permanent Records within the Department of Treasury

Single Agency Inspections
- American Battle Monuments Commission
- Farm Credit Administration

Assessments
- Electronic Records Management of Incoming and Departing Employees
- Collaborative Platforms
- Chief Data Officers, Data Management Plans and Records Management Relationships