Office of the
State Archivist

Metadata

IMPLEMENTATION TOOL

Introduction

This advice outlines basic metadata concepts.

It supports our *Information and Records Management Standard* and *Metadata Standard.* We recommend you read both before reading this tool.

Key points

Metadata schemas – such as our *Metadata Standard* – set out rules about how to use metadata.

The best time to implement our *Metadata Standard* is when you introduce new or enhanced systems.

Records management systems are designed to meet recordkeeping and metadata requirements. You may need to do more to meet our metadata requirements in business systems.

Where possible, capture recordkeeping metadata automatically and persistently link it to the record.

Metadata can be created, captured and managed:

- automatically through a system
- manually by a person
- by both automatic and manual means.

Metadata itself is a record. This means you need to:

- manage and keep it for as long as specified in Disposal Schedules
- transfer permanent records and their metadata to the Tasmanian Archives.

Tasmanian Government

Metadata schemas

A metadata schema is a set of rules about how to use metadata. It will generally specify:

- which elements to use (‘date of creation,’ ‘name’)
- what elements mean ('date’ may mean the date of creation, or modification, or all dates of action on a record)
- relationships between elements
- use of elements (whether they are mandatory, conditional or optional).

Our *Metadata Standard* is a metadata schema.

A metadata schema is also called a ‘metadata standard,’ or ‘metadata element set.’

Examples of metadata elements

Examples of metadata elements include:

- title
- author
- unique identifiers (such as document numbers)
- date created or received
- protective markings that identify sensitive records
- system process information that provides an audit trail of who has used the records.

Our Metadata standard

Our *Metadata Standard* is a metadata schema. It is a set of minimum mandatory elements and includes:

- metadata elements for all records
- additional metadata for permanent records.

You may also use other metadata schemas or elements to suit your business. For example, you might use a spatial or statistical metadata schema, as well as our *Metadata Standard*. Capture as much metadata as you find useful, for both the system and its users.

When to implement our *Metadata standard*

It may not be possible or practical to meet our *Metadata Standard* retrospectively. The best time to implement it is when you introduce new or enhanced systems.

Plan for implementation

A simple implementation approach might include the following steps:

- plan
- review metadata requirements across your organisation and in individual systems
- map metadata
- configure metadata in systems
- develop policies, procedures and training
- monitor and review.

Electronic document and records management systems (EDRMS)

Records management systems are designed to meet recordkeeping and metadata requirements. They have security, access, version control and audit functionality. However, metadata capture depends on system configuration, so check your system settings.

Business systems

You may need to do more to meet our metadata requirements in business systems. Few business systems have the recordkeeping functionality to capture all required metadata automatically. For example, systems:

- without audit logs may not capture all process metadata
- may detach unique number identifiers from records if records are moved within systems.

If using business systems, you may need to:

- review recordkeeping features of the system
- configure systems to capture metadata automatically
- develop policies, procedures and training to help staff manually capture metadata.

How metadata is attached to a record

Metadata is typically attached to records when:

- they are captured in a records management system (point of capture metadata)
- processes are performed on them (process metadata).

Metadata accumulates over time as records are used and managed.

Types of metadata

Point of capture

Point of capture metadata is derived or assigned when a record is created or captured. It includes information about the:

- content, appearance, structure and technical aspects of the record
- context in which records are created.

Process

Process (or workflow) metadata describe processes performed on records. These include:

- registration into a system
- applying or changing security and access rules
- disposal (transfers of custody, migration and destruction).

Examples of process metadata include:

- dates of significant actions
- workflow authorisations
- audit trails of alteration and access.

Descriptive

Descriptive metadata helps us identify and find records. It provides the business context of the record and includes the:

- title
- owner or creator
- business transactions it relates to.

Descriptive metadata also describes the record type, such as email, image, spreadsheet.

Descriptive metadata does not only describe records. It also describes people, workgroups, organisational structure, business functions and activities.

Other types of metadata

Administrative metadata helps us manage records. It includes creator, ownership and access rights.

Preservation metadata helps ensure long-term access to digital records. It includes file format, the software and hardware needed to open a file and migration data.

Structural metadata describes structure and relationships between parts of a compound object. For example, how pages form chapters or how tables relate to each other in a relational database.

Technical metadata describes technical details of a file or dataset. It includes file size, format, resolution and software.

Capture metadata automatically

Metadata can be created, captured and managed:

- automatically through a system
- manually by a person
- by both automatic and manual means.

Where possible, capture recordkeeping metadata automatically and persistently link it to the record. Automatic capture and management depends on your system and how it is configured. Records management systems are designed to meet recordkeeping and metadata requirements. Only some business systems have this functionality.

When manually capturing metadata, use pre-defined lists (not free text) as much as you can.

Often, the metadata required for individual records already exists:

- in document properties or email subject lines (author, title)
- as an automatic function in a records management system (date registered, unique number)
- in metadata attached to a folder where a record is saved (business classification, disposal)
- in a control tool implemented in a system (access or security classification).

Encoding schemes

An encoding scheme is a controlled list of standardised terms, and rules for how to enter the terms. Encoding schemes help with metadata standardisation, consistency and accuracy. They may include words, phrases, numbers and symbols. For example:

- dates follow the international standard (ISO 8601) of Year-Month-Day in the ‘YYYY-MM-DD’ format, not ‘DD/MM/YYYY’
- personal names follow the format of surname followed by a comma, then first name: ‘Smith, Mary’.

Applying metadata

Metadata can be applied to:

- individual records
- groups or aggregates of records, like folders in a system
- whole systems and information assets.

It is common to apply and manage metadata at the folder or system level, instead of to individual records. Doing this means records saved to a folder will ‘inherit’ the metadata of that folder. This metadata might include access permissions, business classification and disposal.

Metadata is a control record

Recordkeeping metadata often acts as a ‘control’ record. This is because it allows for:

- identification
- registration
- indexing
- tracking of records.

Metadata schemas are control records. System audit logs, file and folder indexes, metadata schema mapping, security and access rules are other examples of control records.

Control records are permanent records.

Metadata mapping

Metadata mapping ensures elements are consistently defined, understood and applied. Metadata mapping is the process of aligning elements from one schema to another. For example, ‘description’ in one metadata schema may be the same as ‘title’ in another schema.

Metadata mapping is also known as 'metadata crosswalks'.

You might complete metadata mapping if you use more than one schema in your organisation. For example, you might map between our *Metadata Standard* and a spatial metadata schema.

You may also need to map metadata between business systems if you introduce or upgrade systems.

Migration and transfer of metadata

You may need to migrate or transfer records and their metadata to:

- new systems
- other organisations as part of government administrative change.

Ensure recordkeeping metadata remains persistently linked to records when migrating or transferring records. Doing this means the records will be accessible, authentic and usable. This can be challenging and needs careful planning.

When migrating records and their metadata, you will need to:

- identify metadata and metadata relationships
- map the metadata from the current to the new system
- capture metadata about the migration itself
- test the migration is successful before disposing of the source data.

When transferring records and metadata to other organisations, capture metadata including:

- the date a record was closed
- names of the creating, transferring and receiving organisations
- whether the function has ceased or been transferred
- the date of the transfer.

Disposal metadata

When you destroy records in a system, some summary recordkeeping metadata remains. This is a ‘metadata stub.’ The stub provides evidence the record existed and has been destroyed.

Individual record metadata stubs may show:

- title/name
- author (individual or organisation)
- date of creation, date sent or last action.

Folder level metadata subs may show:

- file title
- dates of creation and closure; if not closed, date last item added
- disposal actions including the Disposal Schedule number and class, disposal action and trigger
- date of destruction or other disposal, such as transfer of custody or to Tasmanian Archives.

Metadata is a record

Metadata itself is a record. This means you need to:

- manage and keep it for as long as specified in Disposal Schedules
- transfer permanent records and their metadata to the Tasmanian Archives.

Your metadata schema, metadata mapping and related control records are permanent records. Transferring them to us will help future researchers understand and use your records.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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MORE INFORMATION

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Metadata is part of the *Tasmanian Government Information Management Framework.* It supports the *Information and Records Management Standard* and the *Metadata Standard.* This is a living document and we will make minor changes as needed. If you notice anything that needs updating, please let us know.

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