



OFFICIAL

Records Management Advice

Website Content and Record Keeping

Introduction

An organisation's website provides users with information about its services, promotes current news and updates on matters related to that organisation. It may also enable business transactions to take place.

An organisation's website and content published to it form part of its business activities and therefore records, including information and data presented on websites, are subject to legislative requirements including the *State Records Act 2000* (the Act) and State Records Commission principles and standards.

Who is responsible for capturing website records?

All staff that participate in creating, amending and publishing content, or managing and maintaining websites have responsibilities in relation to capturing and managing website records. The scope of this work will depend on the organisation's website management policies and procedures and other requirements of the organisation's record keeping plan.

If management of the website is outsourced, it is the organisation's responsibility to ensure contract arrangements are in place outlining the contractor's obligations to manage website records in accordance with the record keeping plan.

Which records do we capture?

Section 3(2) of the Act defines record keeping as creating, maintaining, indexing, organising, storing, preserving, securing, retaining and managing records, including means by which any information on a record can be recovered. Further the Act requires organisations to ensure that the government records kept by the organisation properly and adequately record the performance of the organisation's functions.

More specifically for websites, attention should be given to:

- Original information that is not captured anywhere except the website
- Contextual information such as the date and time the web content was published, amended or removed, e.g. logs of changes
- Structural information such as site maps and the structure of the website
- Transactions with external parties

Copies of documents and other information that are reproduced on or linked to by the website do not need to be duplicated in website records. However, care should be taken to ensure these are captured in other records of the organisation if they are documents of the organisation.

Legal Deposit

Publications on a website (e.g. journals, reports, newsletters) are subject to legal deposit requirements under the *Legal Deposit Act 2012*. State Government organisations are also required to adhere to the requirements of Premier's Circular 2021/14 which defines websites as publications.

The State library of Western Australia (SLWA) website provides further information regarding legal deposit and the capture of websites.

How are records in websites managed?

Content Management Systems

Content Management Systems (CMS) simplify the website management process by automating many of the processes involved in website publishing.

If a CMS is used to manage a website, check that it has appropriate record keeping functionality:

- if records are removed from the website, will the CMS retain a copy?
- will it track document changes and versions?
- will it note the dates information was added and/or removed from the website?
- does it capture all the information required for record keeping, or will additional record keeping strategies need to be employed?

Manual updates

If an organisation's website is manually updated, records should document:

- all unique information published on the website
- dates content was published on the website and the dates they were removed
- any major changes to the website

To do this, capture the content, context, and, in some cases, the structure of the website.

Snapshots and change logs

This involves taking and keeping a snapshot of the website at various intervals. Change logs record the changes between snapshots. Together they inform what was published on the website on what date, and when that information was removed.

Decisions on how often the website snapshots need to be taken, what information should be recorded will be determined by the organisation. The process for taking snapshots of websites will differ depending on the software application used to create the website.

Organisations need to capture enough information to give a clear picture of what was published, and/or what occurred, and when.

What happens if the website changes, or is decommissioned?

If an organisation's website is being decommissioned or undergoing major change, for example through machinery of government changes, consider if a copy of the complete website needs to be captured.

State government organisations are responsible for ensuring that an archive is taken of the old website at the time it is decommissioned. Organisations can contact the SLWA for further information as the SLWA has a responsibility to ensure that significant Western Australian websites are captured into Pandora (Preserving and Accessing Networked Documentary Resources of Australia), Australia's web archive. This is about providing long-term, persistent access to historical material not for record keeping purposes.

Local governments are also encouraged to consider the historical value of their websites and whether they should be incorporated into the Pandora web archive collection.

Organisations can capture websites using web harvesting products available online. For completeness, organisations will need to ensure all material is captured so the site is visible offline and local HTML files work properly.

How long are website records kept?

Records, information and data on websites are subject to the same disposal rules as other records and are sentenced based on the function/activity they relate to in accordance with an approved retention and disposal authority.

Individual pages of websites (this includes intranets) containing information not captured elsewhere are retained in accordance with the subject matter of the page. Where records are not captured elsewhere, organisations will need to ensure that records stored within current or legacy websites are preserved and remain readable for as long as they are required. Refer also to SRO guidance for the management of digital records.

The General Retention and Disposal Authorities for State and Local Government Information (GRDAs) provide for the legal retention and disposal of various types of website records and content including publications, user data and logs of changes.

State government organisations may need to refer to their specific, approved retention and disposal authorities for retention and disposal of their website records relating to functional business activities.

Further information or advice:

Email: sro@sro.wa.gov.au

Related documents

General Retention and Disposal Authority for Local Government Information

General Retention and Disposal Authority for State Government Information

Management of Digital Records

Records in Outsourced Arrangements

Records Retention, Disposal and Destruction

Active date

February 2025

Review date

February 2027

Sources

The SRO acknowledges the following sources used in the development of this records management advice:

Department of the Premier and Cabinet, (04 Nov 2021) *Premier's Circular 2021/14 - Requirements for Western Australian Government Publications and Library Collections*, (accessed 16 January 2025).

National Archives of Australia, (n.d.) *Archiving Australian Government websites*, (accessed 16 January 2025).

Public Record Office Victoria (updated 31 October 2024) *Websites: Advice for managing website records*, (accessed 16 January 2025).

State Library of Western Australia, (n.d.) *For publishers & authors, Legal Deposit – Archived Websites*, (accessed 16 January 2025).

State Library of Western Australia, (n.d.) *For publishers & authors, Legal Deposit – Information for WA Government agencies*, (accessed 16 January 2025).

State Records NSW, (Nov 2020) *Decommissioning websites*, (accessed 16 January 2025).

Copyright Statement

© State of Western Australia 2025



Except for any logos, emblems, and trademarks, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, to the extent that it is protected by copyright. Authorship of this work must be attributed to the State Records Office of Western Australia. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Disclaimer

The State of Western Australia gives no warranty that the information in this version is correct or complete, error free or contains no omissions. The State of Western Australia shall not be liable for any loss howsoever caused whether due to negligence or otherwise arising from the use of this advice.