



Bulletin 2015-04

September 15, 2015

TO: Heads of Federal Agencies

SUBJECT: Metadata Guidance for the Transfer of Permanent Electronic Records

EXPIRATION DATE: Expires when revoked or superseded

1. What is the purpose of this Bulletin?

This Bulletin defines the minimum set of metadata elements that must accompany transfers of permanent electronic records to the National Archives. Per 36 CFR 1235.48, Federal agencies are required to transfer documentation adequate for NARA to identify, service, and interpret permanent electronic records for as long as they are needed. This guidance applies to all permanent electronic records and is a companion to NARA Bulletin 2014-04: Revised Format Guidance for the Transfer of Permanent Electronic Records.

This Bulletin supports the action specified in the Managing Government Records Directive that NARA issue revised guidance, including metadata requirements, for transferring permanent electronic records. NARA will issue additional metadata guidance that supports comprehensive recordkeeping practices by Federal agencies.

Federal agencies are responsible for managing their records in accordance with NARA statutes, including the Federal Records Act (44 U.S.C. Chapters 21, 29, 31, 33) and NARA regulations (36 CFR Chapter XII Subchapter B).

2. What is metadata?

Simply put, metadata are elements of information that answer the questions ‘who, what, where, when, and why’ regarding electronic records. Metadata elements provide administrative, descriptive, and technical information that describe the structure and content of electronic records. Metadata elements also provide contextual information that explains how electronic records were created, used, managed, and maintained prior to their transfer to NARA, and how they are related to other records. This information enables NARA to appropriately manage, preserve, and provide access to electronic records for as long as they are needed.

3. What are NARA’s minimum metadata requirements?

This Bulletin includes metadata elements and terms that were standardized under the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (DCMI). The elements are a subset of the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set v1.1 [↗](#), which provides generic, repeatable, human-readable elements that can be applied to any electronic record. Appendix A of this Bulletin describes the elements listed below and further refines *Identifier*, *Rights*, *Coverage*, and *Relations* through the inclusion of additional DCMI Metadata Terms [↗](#). The use of controlled vocabularies and standardized authorities, where applicable, is recommended. Controlled vocabularies provide carefully defined and standardized sets of terms, words, phrases, and notation systems for data entry designed to aid navigation and search.

Transfer-Level Metadata Elements

Each transfer of electronic records should include the following element that applies to the transfer as a whole:

1. The Transfer Request number. (Please see NARA's Electronic Records Archive (ERA) page for information about submission of a request to transfer permanent records.)

File/Item-Level Metadata Elements

Agencies should provide the following elements for each file or item included in a transfer (Appendix A, Metadata Element Definitions describes the specific elements and provides examples of their appropriate use):

1. *Identifier [File Name]*. The complete name of the computer file including its extension (if present). (Please see Appendix B: Recommended File and Folder Naming Conventions.);
2. *Identifier [Record ID]*. The unique identifier assigned by an agency or a records management system;
3. *Title*. The name given to the record;
4. *Description*. A narrative description of the content of the record, including abstracts for document-like objects or content descriptions for audio or video records;
5. *Creator*. The agent primarily responsible for the creation of the record;
6. *Creation Date*. The date that the file met the definition of a Federal record; and
7. *Rights*. Information about any rights or restrictions held in and over the record including access rights such as national security classification, or personally identifiable information, Privacy Act, or Freedom of Information Act, or usage rights relating to copyright or trademark.

Agencies should provide the following metadata elements, if they apply to the record being transferred:

1. *Coverage*. The geographic and temporal extent or scope of the content of the record; and
2. *Relation*. The relation element should be used if a record is composed of multiple files that form a logical record, or is a necessary component of another logical record.

4. What if agencies have additional metadata?

If an agency provides additional metadata elements, NARA will accept that metadata as part of the transfer process in addition to NARA's minimum metadata requirements. Agencies should notify NARA of any metadata standards that are in use with permanent electronic records and provide relevant schemas, data dictionaries, controlled vocabularies, ontologies, and system indexes at the time of transfer.

5. What other documentation must accompany transfers of permanent electronic records?

Agencies must continue to comply with existing requirements for documentation as described in General Records Schedule 3.1: General Technology Management Records , 36 CFR 1235.48, 36 CFR 1236.14, and 36 CFR 1237.28. These regulations define additional metadata and documentation requirements for specific record types such as digital photographs, data files, and email records.

6. How should required metadata be transferred to NARA?

It is possible to embed metadata in individual files, hold metadata in a records management application, or both. This guidance specifies that agencies provide the identified core elements as an index in a pipe-delimited, machine-readable CSV file and notify NARA of the presence of any additional metadata.

7. What other resources are available?

- NARA Bulletin 2014-04 Revised Format Guidance for the Transfer of Permanent Electronic Records specifies which file formats are acceptable when transferring permanent electronic records to NARA.
- NARA Bulletin 2013-02 Guidance on a New Approach to Managing Email Records provides agencies with a new records management approach, known as "Capstone," for managing Federal record emails electronically. This Bulletin discusses the considerations that agencies should review if they choose to implement the Capstone approach to manage their email records.
- NARA Bulletin 2012-02 Guidance on Managing Content on Shared Drives outlines the records management implications and challenges, agency responsibilities, and benefits of organizing and managing content stored on shared drives.
- NARA Bulletin 2010-05 Guidance on Managing Records in Cloud Computing Environments outlines the risks and challenges of records management in the cloud, highlighting the need for agencies to designate and control the record copies of all Federal records created in the course of business.
- Project Open Government Common Core Metadata Schema provides guidance from the General Services Administration developed to support the use of the common core metadata to list agency datasets and application programming interfaces (APIs).

8. Whom should I contact for additional information?

For questions related to the transfer of electronic records and their accompanying metadata, the agency should consult with the National Archives and Records Administration, Electronic Records Division, Processing Branch (RDEP), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740, telephone number (301) 837-3420, or by email Etransfers@nara.gov.

For information specific to transferring digital photographs and their accompanying metadata, the agency should consult with the National Archives and Records Administration, Special Media Records Division, Still Pictures Branch (RDSS), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740, or by email stillpix.accessions@nara.gov.

For information specific to transferring digital audio or video files and their accompanying metadata, the agency should consult with the National Archives and Records Administration, Special Media Records Division, Motion Picture Branch (RDSM), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740, or by telephone (301) 837-2903.

If additional information is needed, or if you have questions about any part of this Bulletin, please contact your agency's Records Officer, NARA Appraisal Archivist, or records management contact. Please refer to the List of NARA Contacts for Your Agency at <http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/appraisal/>.

DAVID S. FERRIERO

Archivist of the United States

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

1-86-NARA-NARA or 1-866-272-6272

Top