

# What every government agency can learn from the Defense Department's Records Strategy

Government agencies face a deadline to ensure that all permanent records are managed electronically by June 30, 2024. With 4,775 sites<sup>1</sup> and 2.8 million employees worldwide, the Department of Defense has perhaps the greatest challenge to comply with the National Archives' digital recordkeeping deadline. As an important step, DoD published its Records Strategy in spring 2023—a path to success from which every government organization can draw lessons

<sup>1</sup> Source: Base Structure Report FY18.pdf (osd.mil)



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## Executive summary

Faced with a looming deadline to digitize its records, the U.S. Department of Defense decided a new approach was warranted. It published a department-wide Records Strategy, laying out a simple, easy-to-digest plan to treat digital records as a strategic asset—vitaly important for mission-critical decision-making.

Government agencies facing similar issues around digital recordkeeping can take several best practices from the DoD Records Strategy, including:

- Connect digital recordkeeping to the mission.
- State your goals simply and succinctly.
- Incorporate the latest technological advancements.
- Embed security at each step of the records management lifecycle.
- One size does not fit all.
- Use digital recordkeeping to address weaknesses (re: IG or GAO findings).
- Involve all the interested parties.

This paper is intended to support public sector organizations at any stage of their digital recordkeeping journeys—whether they are looking to up-level their existing digital records program by incorporating AI, or are still struggling to get a handle on mountains of paper documents.





## The U.S. Department of Defense's race to compliance with M 23-07

As 2022 was drawing to a close, many U.S. federal agencies were growing nervous. The National Archives and Records Administration's deadline for transitioning all permanent federal records to an electronic format was fast approaching, and a significant number of agencies indicated they were unlikely to meet the mandate. Then, with two months to spare, NARA and the Office of Management and Budget issued an [18-month extension](#) to its original [M-19-21 memo](#), acknowledging pressures related to the pandemic.

The U.S. Department of Defense was one of the agencies with work to do. Although many Defense Department components responded affirmatively to the NARA readiness assessment (as captured in the [2022 Records Management Self-Assessment Scores](#)), other components lagged behind. Determined to make good use of the new deadline, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a Department-wide [Records Strategy](#) in May 2023.

The first-ever Records Strategy published by the Defense Department treated electronic records as a strategic asset, just like a well-trained marine or a state-of-the-art weapons system. "Records management enables access to and analysis of a wide range of information and improves the way the Department operates, builds platforms and weapons, and fights battles," said Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks in the forward to the Strategy. "Warfighters cannot fly a plane, detect an incoming missile, know if an adversary is on the other side of the hill, or secure a perimeter without real-time, operational information."

By publishing this Records Strategy, the Defense Department served notice that digital recordkeeping is an integral part of its mission.

And every other government organization can learn from it.

### Digital recordkeeping: Government best practices

The Defense Department's Records Strategy provides seven key lessons that can be applied by any government organization focused on digitizing its records:

- Connect digital recordkeeping to the mission.
- State your goals simply and succinctly.
- Incorporate the latest technological advancements.
- Embed security at each step of the records management lifecycle.
- One size does not fit all.
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#### 1) Connect digital recordkeeping to the mission




In her foreword to the Defense Department's Records Strategy, Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks says records management is a direct contributor to mission success.

"Records are a key instrument for decision-making, and the linchpin of accountability, transparency, learning, growing, and passing along institutional knowledge to those who will lead DoD in the future. Past operations can inform and enhance present-day operational planning and decision-making through a well-kept and accessible records management system. That's why good records management is important for mission success," Hicks said.

The traditional view of records management as a basement archive jammed with file folders makes it easy to back-burner the topic. But when agencies connect digital records to real-time decision-making and knowledge management, it becomes clear that government organizations simply cannot operate effectively without a successful digital recordkeeping program.

## 2) State your goals simply and succinctly

The DoD Records Strategy contains three goals. These are introduced in the executive summary, repeated in the introduction and thoroughly explained beginning on page four of the Strategy: Curate Records, Automate Records Processes for All Users, and Govern Records Across the Lifecycle. Each goal is one sentence long—and each one has a visual icon as a learning aid/memory tool.

DoD records goals	
	<b>Curate Records</b> – Consumers can exploit the value of the record for decision making.
	<b>Automate Records Processes for All Users</b> – Consumers have automated support for processes that create, receive, or manage records.
	<b>Govern Records Across the Lifecycle</b> – Consumers can be confident the record is maintained by the accountable organization throughout its lifespan.

Other government agencies would do well to emulate a similar level of simplicity and clarity around their goals for records digitization.

Jason R. Baron, former director of litigation at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and University of Maryland professor in the College of Information Studies, praised the DoD Records Strategy in an [interview with Federal News Network](#). “It does a terrific job. It should actually be a template for dozens of other agencies throughout the government to look to and ask questions about their own enterprise framework for records management.”

## 3) Incorporate the latest technological advancements

In the early days of e-government (circa early 2000s), NARA’s “digital records” policy directed users to print out emails and store them in a local file cabinet. Technology has advanced by leaps and bounds, and NARA’s expectations are that all records will be sent digitally, with appropriate metatags, by 2024.

The Defense Department Records Strategy goes well beyond the NARA memo. The Strategy plans to use metadata to enhance cloud migration, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and align with other DoD objectives. Metadata will also play a role in controlling information access within the department.

As generative AI continues to evolve, there may be a role in digital recordkeeping. Forrester has issued a report<sup>2</sup> recommending that organizations who would like to employ Generative AI in their knowledge management programs should prioritize the data. “When it comes to AI, the output will only be as good as what you input into the algorithm—garbage in, garbage out. For knowledge management, it’s especially crucial to ensure the information that’s collected, aggregated, and disseminated is accurate and high quality.” The Records Strategy indicates a plan by DoD to apply AI as part of its records curation process.

<sup>2</sup> “Generative AI: What it Means for Knowledge Management,” Forrester Trends Report, July 7, 2023.



Government agencies should consider orienting their digital recordkeeping strategy to include AI, analytics and cloud technologies in order to keep pace with the evolving technology landscape.

**4) Embed security at each step of the records management lifecycle**

Besides digitizing records, another looming IT deadline is DoD’s goal to achieve a complete zero-trust environment by 2025. Its Records Strategy lays out a vision of “modernized decision-making processes... enabled in a data-centric, zero-trust environment in which information that documents DoD’s functions and mission is well managed as records.”

By incorporating world-class cyber security controls with its digital recordkeeping strategy, DoD is showing its priorities: no one program out-ranks the other. There will be digital records and they will be in a zero-trust architecture. In fact, the Strategy envisions using metadata from digital records to support access controls, one of the five pillars of zero-trust.

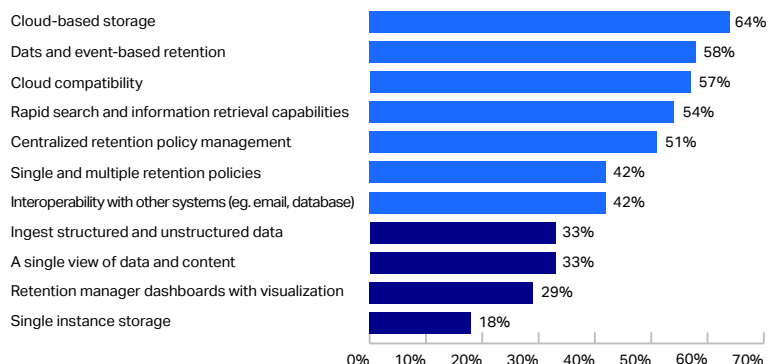
Other agencies should adopt a similar approach to incorporate cybersecurity controls with their digital records planning.

**5) One size does not fit all**

NARA has estimated that only **two to five percent** of government records should be considered permanent records and transferred to NARA for posterity. Which leads to some important questions: What is a permanent record? What is a temporary record? What information can fairly be considered non-relevant? (surely sensor data gathered in an IoT program need not be treated as a record, right?)

A further complication is the hundreds of active records schedules managed by DoD components with thousands of individual items on the records schedules (along with redundant data definitions and conflicting disposition instructions for similar content). Yet another issue is that archiving systems typically can’t integrate both structured and unstructured data, which leads to multiple systems running in parallel, and often in conflict. (IDC has published a survey<sup>3</sup> listing most common features of data archive systems.)

**Current data archiving capabilities**



The DoD Records Strategy outlines some guidelines for how information can become a temporary record, and then over time a sub-set of temporary records will become permanent records—all driven by the content contained in the record. The strategic answer to the issues listed above is to automate the records process to the greatest extent possible. With record creation, reception, management, and governance on auto-pilot, DoD has a better chance of finding the necessary information to make the best decision to advance the mission.

<sup>3</sup> Cloud Service Providers for Long-Term Data Storage: Results of IDC’s Cloud Data Archiving Survey 2022

Government agencies should adopt DoD’s strategy to automate recordkeeping, which will minimize mis-categorization of records. Beyond automation, agencies should seek out archiving systems that can manage both structured and unstructured data at scale.

**6) Use digital recordkeeping to close gaps**

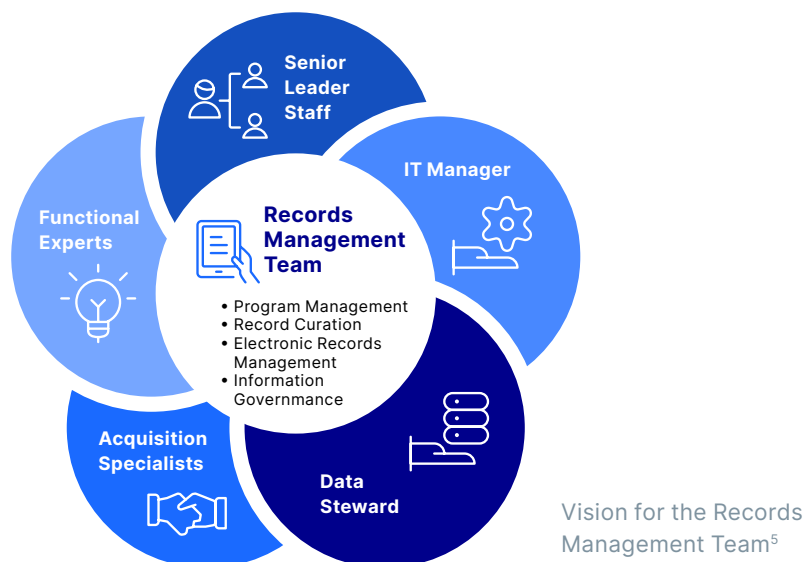
Every government agency has a “to-do” list, courtesy of its Inspector General, or the General Accountability Office. NARA also provides recommendations to agencies’ records management programs. In its Inspection Series Summary Report of DoD<sup>4</sup>, NARA identified the divide between records management and IT acquisition and operations as the area most in need of improvement. From the DoD Records Strategy: “the root of this disconnect is the general mismatch between the lifespans of records and the tightly coupled IT systems or services in which the records are created, managed, stored, and destroyed.”

The Records Strategy presented a plan to align IT acquisitions and operations with records management, including a roadmap for follow-up plans. To this end, the DoD chief information officer has published [Manual 8180.01 “Information Technology Planning for Electronic Records Management”](#) in August 2023.

Government agencies should take heed from the Defense Department and incorporate any outstanding gaps identified by an OIG or similar overseer while they work toward digital recordkeeping.

**7) Involve all the interested parties**

With real-time information fueling mission success, records management cannot be the responsibility of a single administrative bureau. The DoD Records Strategy lists the key involved parties and provides expectations around each of their records management duties, laying out a vision of a Records Management Team.



In addition to listing roles and responsibilities for each of the DoD team members regarding records management, it is important to share expectations with IT suppliers who are building (or will build) DoD applications that will, inevitably, house or contribute to official government records. To this end, the Defense Department CIO published [Manual 8180.01 “Information Technology Planning for Electronic Records Management”](#) in August 2023. This guidance provides a blueprint for

4 National Archives Office of the Chief Records Officer, "Department of Defense Records Management Inspections Fiscal Years 2017 - 2021 , Inspection Series Summary Report," March 16, 2021

5 Source: DoD Records Strategy, p. 18



software providers to satisfy data retention, metadata, capture, storage, find and update, disposition, maintain, access control, and reporting requirements.

Government agencies should examine each of their own internal team members who must work together to make digital recordkeeping a reality. Then they should go further to memorialize these responsibilities by incorporating them into the appropriate annual performance plans.

## How OpenText can help

OpenText has developed a series of automated, public sector-compliant solutions that can address agencies' records management digitization needs.

Cloud for Government is a bundled solution designed to deliver digital recordkeeping services to the public sector and includes OpenText™ Extended ECM for Government and OpenText™ AppWorks™, [delivered in the Amazon Web Services \(AWS\) Cloud](#).

[Extended ECM for Government](#) is an enterprise content management platform that manages the records lifecycle for public sector organizations. The solution was designed to free government agencies from legacy, paper-based processes while helping them maintain strict compliance with regulations. Extended ECM for Government easily integrates into existing enterprise applications such as SAP®, Salesforce® and Microsoft 365®, scaling to support large volumes of content so agencies can expand the solution as they grow.

[AppWorks](#) is a low-code development platform that helps government agencies build engaging, smart and easy-to-deploy process automation and dynamic records management applications. Agencies can achieve operational efficiencies and innovate on demand while maintaining compliance.

For intelligent document processing, [OpenText™ Intelligent Capture](#) enables process automation with text-searchable PDFs and metadata extracted by information capture with AI and machine learning.

[OpenText™ InfoArchive](#) allows government agencies to optimize costs with cloud-based legacy system de-commissioning, improve relevance and scalability by archiving inactive data, increase productivity by integrating content in context, and deliver process-centric archiving and compliance.

[OpenText™ Cybersecurity](#) helps public sector organizations of all sizes protect their most valuable and sensitive information. Our portfolio of end-to-end cybersecurity solutions offers 360-degree visibility across an organization, enhancing security and trust every step of the way.

To learn more, please see [OpenText's Industry Solutions for the Public Sector](#).

## About OpenText

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