

RIM and FOIA Working Together: Key Tools

Records and Information Management (RIM) teams ensure that federal agency records are well-managed, protected, accessible to authorized users, and preserved for the right amount of time. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) teams ensure that their agencies are responsive to requests for public records and compliant with federal law.

Together, FOIA and RIM teams can work more efficiently and effectively to fulfill their goals and meet their responsibilities. Here are a few tools that can help both groups:

Annual FOIA Report

Agencies file an Annual FOIA Report each year with the Department of Justice detailing the agency's administration of FOIA. You'll find detailed statistics on the number of FOIA requests and appeals received, processed, and pending at your agency. Your agency's ability to search efficiently and find responsive records quickly has a significant impact on its FOIA performance. The report could help your RIM team understand the current FOIA landscape at your agency and identify ways to support both programs.

File Plans

File plans are short, targeted lists documenting the specific types of records held by an office or program. A typical file plan lists each type of information along with a brief description, location information, and records retention instructions. File plans can help FOIA and records management teams identify where and how the information for a specific office or program is stored.

Records Inventories and ESI Data Maps

A records inventory is a survey of all the different types of information in a program or office. Typical records inventories include a description of each type of information, notes about who uses the information, how it's used, and where and how it's stored, and estimates of the volume and formats of the records. In the RIM world, records inventories are used to create and update records schedules and file plans. In some organizations, an electronically stored information (ESI) data map collects similar information about the location of all electronically stored information. Those data maps can then be used to understand, manage and improve the storage of agency information, data, and records.

Records Management Network

Each agency has a Senior Agency Official for Records Management (SAORM), an Agency Records Officer (ARO), and a network of contacts across the agency who can help you determine what records are held in each program.

Records Schedules

A records schedule is an official, NARA-approved plan describing the types of information created by an agency and telling how long each type will be kept. Records schedules in the federal government must be formally approved by the National Archives and Records Administration.

Records Retrieval Issues

Records managers should talk with their agency FOIA teams about any areas where records appear to be difficult to locate and retrieve. Are there any signs of records at risk, records that need to be better managed, or records that are good candidates for digitization?

Topics and Trends

RIM and FOIA teams should talk about any trends or common topics they are seeing in FOIA requests and in new types and systems of records. These trends may give you insights into some of the most in-demand records at your agency. Are the records safely stored, quickly retrievable, and retained for the correct amount of time? Are there new initiatives, types of records, formats, or systems?

Learn More

You can learn more about records inventories, file plans, records schedules, and more through NARA's [online records management training catalog](#).

You can learn more about the federal government's approach to FOIA at www.foia.gov.