# Choosing an Email Appraisal Approach

The volume of email is overwhelming now and will grow significantly in the next 5 years. Government email messages contain permanent records but not every email sent from a government employee is a permanent record. Archives need an email appraisal approach to help them identify emails that are permanent records. No one has the time or staff to sort through all the email generated by state or territorial government agencies.

Determining an email appraisal approach will create a solution for the majority of archival email records. The approaches described here are standard ones — they won't work for every situation — but choosing an approach (or a hybrid of the two for a unique solution) will minimize the staff intervention needed to identify email for long-term preservation and streamline its appraisal.
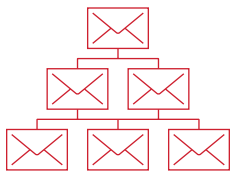
Position Appraisal Approach

The position-based appraisal approach, also known as the Capstone approach, was developed by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in 2013. It simplifies how archives identify which emails should be preserved by making appraisal decisions based on the position of the email account owner. The foundational concept of a position-based appraisal approach is that the email accounts most likely to send and receive messages of high value are those of key officials. Those officials are identified through collaboration with the organization and the archives.

Position Appraisal Steps

- Identify a list of Capstone positions (e.g. elected officials, constitutional officers, etc.).
- Create a functional schedule(s) for transfer of selected officials' email accounts. This will ensure that regular transfers of email records occur at the appropriate times.
- Continually communicate with agencies and educate new staff about their email transfer obligations so that as people in key positions depart, email transfer occurs.
- Management of email for all other positions conform to state or territorial records schedule requirements.

Officials in Capstone positions need to understand their roles as record-keepers and manage their email accordingly. The success of the position appraisal approach hinges on compliance. If agencies fail to notify the archives of a staff change, or if officials delete emails with long-term value, it could result in records loss.

The position appraisal or Capstone approach, is gaining momentum in state and territorial archives; almost 25% of archives have these policies or approaches implemented in their state/territory.

Position Appraisal Pros

⊕ **Small scale of appraisal:** archives work with agencies to evaluate key positions.

⊕ **Periodic, not constant, appraisal:** positions only need to be appraised once and only re-evaluated when the position changes significantly.

Position Appraisal Cons

⊖ **Scale:** although this technique limits the number of accounts archived, the accounts themselves are preserved in their entirety. As email messages continue to grow, this scale will pose challenges for processing and access.

⊖ **Lack of redundancy in the process:** failure to follow transfer requirements of Capstone officials may result in records loss as other mechanisms for capturing permanent records in email may not be in place.
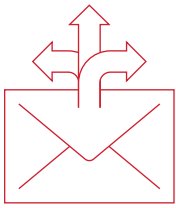
Content Appraisal Approach

A content appraisal approach engages the record creator in applying the records schedule and appraisal rules to their email account. The record creator performs active inbox management by regularly moving their messages from their Inbox (and Sent Items folder) to categorized folders based on the categories of the state/territorial records retention schedules.

Since the emails in each folder should have the same records retention requirements, employees can more easily move their inactive records to their next phase, whether it's destruction or transfer to the archives or records center. If an email account is managed regularly, deciding what to transfer or destroy and when becomes a brief task.

Content Appraisal Approach Steps

- Create agency buy-in. Agencies need to support employees performing record keeping work.
- Archives and agencies collaborate to develop controlled folders. Consistent, controlled folders within an agency or subdivision are key to success.
- Identify retention schedules for each folder, e.g. any items in the "Publicity Materials" folder likely will have the same retention, making destruction or transfers to the archives or records center more efficient.
- Regularly transfer messages in controlled folders according to the appropriate schedule.

The content appraisal approach will lead to duplication of email records at the appraisal stage. There are many more accounts submitting email records to the archives and, therefore, less chance of loss of a historically-relevant email. However, compliance is challenging and there is risk of not getting much if the record creators don't do their part.

Content Appraisal Pros

⊕ **Accession permanent email records:** rather than having to take all email messages, archives are able to accession only permanent email records that align with the state/territorial archives retention policy.

⊕ **Automation:** Proper use of folder sorting can enable automatic capture or deletion on a routine and regular basis.

Content Appraisal Cons

⊖ **Buy-in:** It is challenging to convince state employees to regularly sort their email into the correct folders. While some of the sorting can be automated, this too requires employees to set up the automation.

⊖ **User Error:** Employees may sort their messages into the wrong folders.

⊖ **Irregular Metadata:** If employees use their own folders rather than controlled folders, it could create irregular, chaotic metadata which will negatively impact description and access.

Additional Resources

- CoSA PREPARE: Preparing Archives for Records in Email
- E-Mail Management Guidelines (VA)
- Electronic Mail Retention Guide (MI)
- Guidelines for Managing Public Records Sent and Received Via Electronic Mail (AZ)
- NARA's Capstone Training and Resources

More resources available in COSA's Resource Center

PREPARE (Preparing Archives for Records in Email) is a program of capacity-building services for email management and preservation CoSA is providing to state and territorial archives through the University of Illinois' Email Archives: Building Capacity and Community program, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This publication is part of the PREPARE program.

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) is a nonprofit membership organization of the state and territorial government archives in the fifty states, five territories, and District of Columbia. Through collaborative research, education, and advocacy, CoSA provides leadership that strengthens and supports state and territorial archives in their work to preserve and provide access to government records. CoSA facilitates networking, information sharing, and project collaboration among its member organizations to help state and territorial government archives with their responsibilities for protecting the rights and historical documents of the American people. Read more at www.statearchivists.org

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