Top Tips for Government Agencies Working with Electronic Records

- **Consult your records retention schedule:** Know retention periods approved by the State Archives and take appropriate actions (e.g. transfer to the State Archives, destroy, etc.) when the retention period for your records has been met.

- **Plan system design carefully**: Talk to archivists and records managers in your State Archives and other stakeholders; determine the possibilities for system adherence to state retention and disposition guidelines.

- **Adhere to standards**: Ensure you have a trusted system and that your records are authentic and verifiable, with a clear chain of custody (see ISO 15489, ISO 16363, DoD 5015.02, or other metadata standards).

- **Create oversight and governance:** Who's in charge of a shared file? Are people using email as a filing cabinet rather than a communication tool? Which copy is the official record copy? Have stakeholders agree on policies, procedures, and rules for creating and sharing information.

- **Make the rules:** Naming conventions, file organization, version control, and disposition strategies all help now and in the long term. Ensure all staff (permanent, full-time, temporary, students, interns, etc.) know and follow the rules.

- **Create backups:** Does your backup system work? How well will it restore your e-records? Can you retrieve individual items? Test all assumptions to ensure your backup functions properly.

- **Understand metadata and context:** Metadata is the information that lets you search, retrieve, access, manage, and preserve your records. The content, context, and structure of a record give it meaning and make it usable. Metadata helps preserve these characteristics to ensure ongoing access.

- **Plan for the future:** No format, storage media, or information system is permanent. Do you have a plan for migrating records to new systems and formats as technologies change?

- **Provide for deletion:** E-records proliferate easily. Do you have a plan to manage deletion of all copies that *should* be deleted, according to records schedule instructions?

- **Think and plan before you scan:** Consider standards, worthiness, naming conventions, storage, and retrieval, among other things, before beginning a digital scanning project for the most efficient and useful results.