The Records Requirements Analysis and Implementation Tool

CTG.MFA - 005

Models for Action Project: Developing Practical Approaches to Electronic Records Management and Preservation

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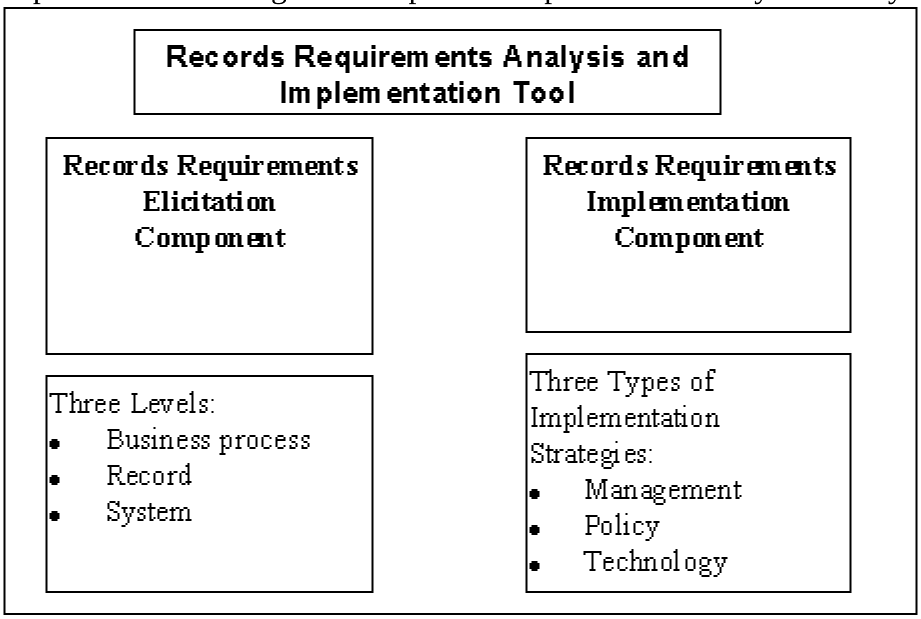
The Records Requirements Analysis and Implementation Tool (RRAIT) is one of the key products of the Models for Action project. The tool is being developed to support the identification of records management requirements as well as the strategies for their implementation during business process improvement and system analysis activities.



The RRAIT is comprised of two parts: the Records Requirement Elicitation Component (RREC) and the Records Requirement Implementation Component (RRIC). The RREC provides a framework for the identification of records management requirements during business process and systems analysis stages of information system design. The RRIC focuses on the identification of management, policy, andtechnology strategies that address the requirements once they have been identified.

The Records Requirements Elicitation Component

The purpose of the Records Requirement Elicitation Component (RREC) is to translate the Project's revised set of functional requirements for electronic records management into a set of questions or prompts that identify application-specific records management requirements at the business process improvement and system design stages. Once identified, the records management requirements can be addressed through appropriate technology, management, and policy strategies. The goal is to seamlessly integrate the capture of these requirements into activities normally conducted in business process improvement and system design. The RREC is divided into three components: The Business Process Level; the Record Level, and the System Level. The Business Process Level section focuses on those records management requirements associated with the overall business process that is to be automated. The Record Level section focuses on the identification of records management requirements that surround the record generated during the course of a business transaction or process, while the System Level section focuses on those records management requirements associated with technology and system configuration alternatives. The discussion around the System Level section is currently under development and will be made available soon.

As the project team continues to gather the information specified in the RREC, the methods employed in doing so will be documented as will the rationale for choosing the methods.

Additionally, the final project report will outline the factors that should be considered in identifying the appropriate method. In recent presentations of the project at the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and The National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) conferences, it was stressed that the 'tools' that we are developing provide a framework for identifying the appropriate method for answering the questions and that one wouldn't for example, just hand out the RREC to staff within an organization. Rather, using the RREC as a checklist or guide, appropriate methods for addressing the questions must be identified and implemented. Also, as has been emphasized throughout the project, the tools are designed to be used in conjunction with activities that an organization would be required to complete in system design and development. Therefore, the questions that need to be answered can be integrated into normal methods or techniques used to identify other information relevant to system design. In other words, the same array of techniques that would be used in business process improvement and system design and development activities can be used to obtain records management requirements. Below is a brief description of the purpose and methods for use for the Business Process and Record Level sections of the RECC.

Business Process Level

This section of the RECC was developed to support the identification of records management requirements associated with a given business process. It is designed to capture records management requirements associated with legal and regulatory requirements, as well as professional and agency best practices. The Business Process Level section of the RECC is also a useful tool for identifying tasks or sub-tasks within a process that are unnecessary or add no value to the overall process which can then be eliminated, modified or moved to another part of the process as part of a business process improvement activity.

Using the Business Process Level Section of the RREC

While there are most likely a number of different ways to obtain answers to the questions in the Business Process Level section of RREC, The Models for Action team recommends that it be implemented in the context of a business process improvement activity. There are also a number of ways that the background information can be gathered to support the business process improvement activity. In this case, the preliminary information to support the BPI activity was gathered through interviews of all staff involved in the process. The Business Process Level section of the RREC was implemented and evaluated during a business process improvement activity with the New York State Adirondack Park. A sample of the responses to the questions for one subtask is also available. A brief description of the steps involved in the use of the Business Process Level section of the RREC is provided below.

- Interviews were conducted to identify records management issues.
- The interviews also captured a process diagram from the perspective of each person interviewed. The individual process diagrams were integrated into one process model. A group decision conference was conducted with all staff involved in the process as well as legal and other expert staff.
- The group decision conference was comprised of the following steps:
    - Develop consensus and common definitions around the process diagram representing the current business process.

- Identify sub-tasks or logical breaks in the process.
- For each of the sub-tasks, pose the questions in the Business Process Level of the RREC (careful transcription and organization of responses is critical).
- Distinguish wherever possible whether the records management requirement is associated with a legal or regulatory requirement, professional or agency best practice or policy.
- Identify areas where there exists uncertainty in the responses and identify individuals for follow-up.
- Based upon the responses, begin to identify options for business process improvement.
    - Hints:
    - Sub-tasks that result in no change in the record are likely to add no value to the process and may be candidate for modification, elimination, or movement to another part of the process.
    - Minimizing the number of times that a record is passed back and forth between staff within a process can reduce total transaction time. Attempt to identify opportunities for consolidating task work within a pass.
    - Records management requirements that are not based upon legal or regulatory requirements are candidates for modification or elimination. For each of the identified requirements, ask the questions "Why is it done?" and "Does it need to be done?"
- The improved process and the preliminary set of records management requirements will serve as the foundation for the automation of the business process and system specifications that will be supported by appropriate management and policy strategies.

The Record Level Section

Unlike the Business Process Level section of the RREC, where the implementation method is relatively defined, there are a variety of different ways that the answers to the questions in the Record Level section can be obtained. For example, the answers could be acquired through interviews of relevant agency staff, conversations with experts such as the Agency's legal staff, group decision conferences, or surveys. The RREC, in particular, the Record Level section specifies the information that needs to be collected in attempting to identify a comprehensive set of records management requirements but does not dictate the mechanisms by which the questions get asked and answered.

The method used to answer the questions outlined in the Record Level section of the RREC should be determined in much the same way a research method would be selected to answer a research question. A variety of factors need to be considered and the most cost-effective mechanism for gathering the information should used. For example, the cost of the method should be considered (e.g. interviews tend to be a much more expensive way of gathering information from people than surveys). The organizational structure and environment must also be considered. For example, the individuals within an organization who can adequately and authoritatively answer the questions must be identified. The degree of alignment or consensus among relevant staff as to how records should be managed will also affect the method used in addressing the questions in the Record Level section of the RECC. If consensus does not already exist, then a method such as a group decision conference could be used to create consensus or alignment.

Additionally, the type of question will dictate the methods that can be used to elicit information. For example, open-ended questions that require elaboration and discussion are best answered through interviews while those with an easily identified set of answers could be addressed through the implementation of a survey. Other key factors in choosing methods for gathering records management requirements include the size of the organization, the geographic distribution of staff, and the scope of the information system under development. In cases of very large organizations, it is unlikely that information can be gathered from every staff member that will be affected by the development of an information system and therefore a representative sample of different perspectives will have to be identified and appropriately defined sub-groups of users of records will have to be sampled during the information gathering activities. The Models for Action team has concluded that the implementation of the RECC will differ substantially across organizations and that there is in fact, no one ideal way for implementation. For a more comprehensive description of methods that can be used and the advantages and disadvantages of each, please refer to CTG's Making Smart IT Choices handbook.

Given that APA is a small agency of under 40 individuals, many of whom require access to the Project record, the Models for Action team decided to include all Agency staff in the survey designed to capture internal agency uses of the project record.

The following section provides a brief description of using a survey to capture information for the Record Level section of the RREC.

A survey designed to capture internal access needs to project records

- The survey was designed to identify answers the following questions in the Record Level section of the RREC:
- Which other agency business processes or purposes might require access to the project record?
- For each of these business process or purposes, what components of the record need to be accessed?
- For each of these business processes or purposes, what are the most efficient/effective ways of accessing the records (i.e. indexing)?

The questions focus on internal secondary use of project records. Based on the survey results, we have identified the types of documents or components of a record that each of the individual staff members within the agency require access to as well as their preferred mode of access in terms of indexes. While additional work may have to be done to collapse the categories of documents, the Models for Action team feels confident that a comprehensive set of documents and indexing methods have been identified from Agency staff. An additional indirect benefit to surveying the entire agency was reported to the project team by agency staff. An APA staff member indicated to the project team, that by including all staff members in the survey, buy-in from agency staff on the overall project approach was increased. In other words, the process of collecting input and assessing the needs of all agency staff has enhanced overall support for the project. While this approach may not be possible in all agencies, the survey approach which is relatively inexpensive allows for an increased degree of input from staff in an organization and further fosters feelings among staff that there will be benefits to not only those directly involved in the business process being automated but to all staff requiring access to those electronic records.

System Level

This section of the RREC was designed to identify records management requirements associated with the specific technology tools selected for a system implementation.

Records Requirements Implementation Component

The Records Requirements Implementation Component (RRIC) is currently under development.

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