

## Email Management

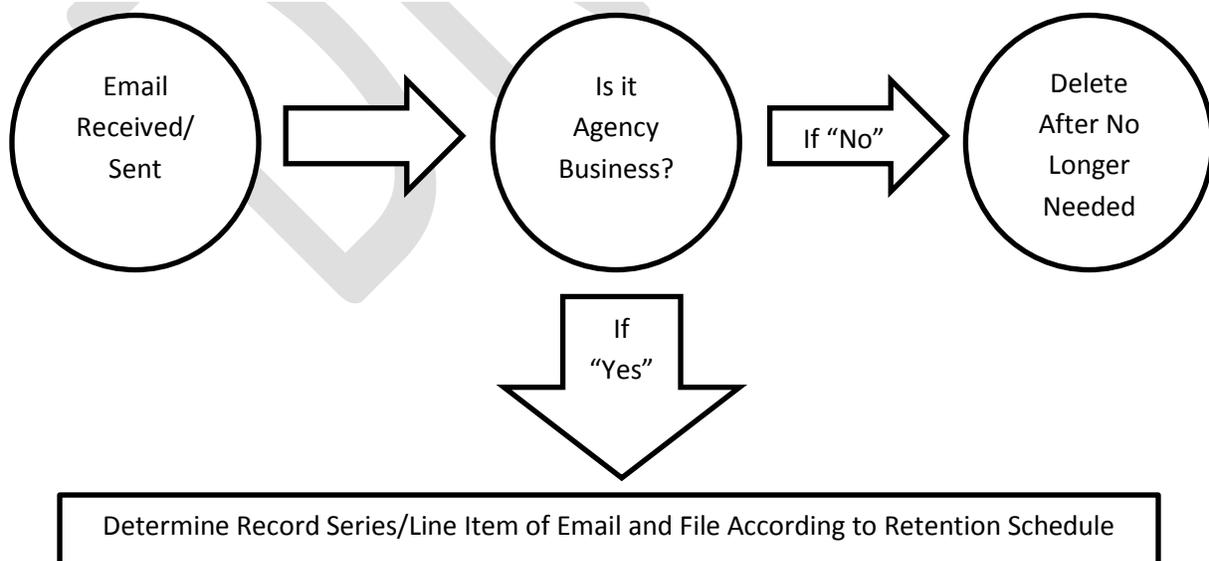
Electronic mail, more commonly known as email, is routinely used by state agencies. Email is often used as the mode of communication for brief messages that were once relayed by telephone and to disseminate substantive information previously committed to paper sent by more traditional methods. This combination of communication and record creation/keeping has caused ambiguity in the record status of e-mail messages.

The California Public Records Act (CPRA) defines a public record as, “any writing containing information relating to the conduct of the public’s business prepared, owned, used, or retained by any state or local agency regardless of physical form or characteristics.”<sup>1</sup> The CPRA thus applies to email messages and requires that proper identification and care of email be performed by the agency. An agency’s records management policy must address email messages to ensure record emails are properly identified and managed.

## Retention and Disposition of Email

Email is not considered a record series or category on its own. It is simply a format. Retention or disposition of an email messages is done in relation to the information they contain, the purpose they serve, and the relevant line item/records series to which it belongs. Given the frequent use of email, it should be evaluated on a regular basis with transitory emails being deleted when no longer needed. The content of an email message determines whether the message is a record.

The content of email messages may vary considerably and, therefore, must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine the length of time the message must be retained. Email that provides insight into the organization and functions of an agency and contains content with historical value must be “filed,” just as you would a paper record, in an e-folder with similar business or program items. Record emails may be flagged for transfer to the State archives at the end of their retention period. An agency must have an email management policy in place to ensure record emails are not deleted alongside transitory emails. A policy should outline a routine for ensuring record emails are properly identified and saved.



<sup>1</sup> Government Code Section 6252(e)

## Determining Value of Email

Based on CPRA's definition, email messages containing subject matter such as policies and directives, final reports, and meeting minutes are identified as record emails. Transitory and personal emails that do not provide insight into government business such as an email regarding a lunch time meeting should be deleted after no longer needed.

Remember that the transactional information (metadata regarding sender, recipient, time sent, and similar) associated with each message, and any attachments to the body of the message are all part of an email message. This means that a printout of an email may not be satisfactory as a record.

Email that are classified as official records are subject to the individual department's records retention schedules and must be retained for the same period of time as the record retention line item/records series that most closely matches the subject matter contained within the email. If there is no entry that resembles or matches the subject matter of the message, the "record" should be added to the appropriate retention schedule as a separate series of records.

Transitory e-mail consists of electronic messages that are created primarily for the communication of informal information as opposed to the perpetuation or formalization of knowledge. Destroy transitory email when it has served its purpose.

## Email Policies

An agency's email policy should be developed to enhance management of record emails. An effective policy includes direction on topics such as email filing methods, email subject lines, and storage and retention of email, thereby increasing the accessibility of records. Policies should include whether the sender or the receiver should save email records, how to determine if an email is a record, and how to segregate record email into the appropriate series and record storage. Non-record and duplicate emails should be deleted from mailboxes regularly. If an agency receives a request for an email record for a litigation issue, for example, a well-planned email policy can help ensure that the record is discoverable during its retention period or show that its deletion was properly carried out according to retention policy.

Subject lines are helpful for both the recipient and sender identification. They are also crucial for efficient email records discovery. Subject lines should be unambiguous and as descriptive as possible so that records are more accessible and searchable.

Poor or confusing subject lines:

"Helpful Info"  
"Report"  
"Minutes"  
"Important"  
"News"  
"Contract Status"

Better, descriptive subject lines:

"Contact Info"  
"Quarterly Financial Report"  
"January 2001 Board Minutes"  
"Revised Administrative Procedures"  
"New Agency Head Appointed"  
"PO 12345 Delivery Status"

A filing system developed for email is important to ensure accessibility to email records. Email systems should be configured so that email messages can be indexed in an organized and consistent pattern reflecting the ways in which records are used and referenced.

DRAFT