Laserfiche Records Management Edition Terminology (version 8.0)

White Paper

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What is a Record?

A record is a unit of recorded information, generated or received by an organization. Most records are in the form of a document, although records in other forms are possible. A record is more than just a document. A document is merely a unit of filing in a document or records management system, whereas the notion of a record encompasses the roles the underlying document plays within an organization over time, the relationship that different people may have to that record, and the relationship between the record and other records.

Records Management

Records management is the application of systematic controls concerning the creation, maintenance and destruction of records required for the operation of an organization. A chief concept underlying records management is the *life cycle.* Every record passes through a series of stages, during which its relationship to the organization changes. There are five major stages in a record's life cycle:

1. *Creation:* Information is generated and gathered into a record.

2. *Distribution and use:* The record, along with any additional information about the record, is distributed within the organization according to the organization's practices.

3. *Storage and maintenance:* The records are filed using a logical and defined scheme into a managed repository, available for retrieval by authorized users. The records management system is most important here. It is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the records, facilitating backup, and assisting users in filing and retrieval.

4. *Retention and disposition:* The information in the record has declined in value. The record is no longer active, and is made inaccessible to most users   Depending on the nature of the record, it may be destroyed immediately upon deactivation, or kept in retention for a defined period of time.

5. *Archival preservation:* Records that have will be useful enough in the long term to offset their storage costs are preserved permanently in an archive.

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The chief duties of a records management system lie at various points in this life cycle for each record. Filing, searching, retrieval, creating retention schedules, transfer, destruction, etc. all are part of managing the life cycle of a record.

Requirements of a Records Management Application

This section describes, at a very high level, some required features for a DoD 5015.2 certified Records Management Application (RMA). The purpose of this section is to introduce and explain the jargon used in records management.

Record Series

An RMA must allow users to control the life cycle of records, to maintain the relationships among records, to provide for filing according to a logical scheme, and to allow for rapid retrieval based on partial information. RMAs are organized around the central concept of *record series*. A record series is a group of records which includes instructions that control the life-cycle of those records. A record series can also be contained within another record series; in that case, the 'child' record series would inherit the instructions from the 'parent,' and any additional instructions would serve to make the instructions more specific.

Record folders exist within record series as areas to file documents. A single Record Series can contain multiple Record Folders. Record Folders may be at different stages in their record life cycles, but they will all follow the guidelines dictated by their Record Series. (Record folders, like child record series, can also contain more specific instructions.) The record management instructions applied to a given record depend on the record series it is contained within, as well as any additional instructions from its record folder or nested record series.

Each record corresponds to at least one document in a record folder. A document is filed in exactly one record folder. The RMA must allow records to be re-filed into different folders or series after the initial filing. Every object (record series, record folder, record, or document) has a unique identifier while it is managed within the RMA.

Record Folder

A *record folder* is a collection of records that are governed by the same set of disposition instructions and that are all at the same stage in their records life cycle. All Records Management operations are performed on the record folder; this affects all records contained within that folder. Although record folders may contain additional instructions, they are distinguished from record series in that the contents of record series may be in different stages of the records life cycle, but the contents of a particular folder will all be at the same stage.

Metadata

Each record, record series, and folder includes a set of *metadata fields.* Every metadata field has a human-readable name or designator, and can contain corresponding data. Some fields are *mandatory,* meaning that every object must be assigned valid data for these fields when it is filed. Other fields may be filled in or left blank as appropriate. The RMA should automatically fill out and maintain fields where reasonable and appropriate, although it must also provide for specifically user-created fields.

The RMA must be able to constrain the type of data that can be entered for a field. It must also limit the editing of an object's metadata to the time of filing, except for authorized users who will have the ability to edit and correct filing errors. The RMA must include facilities to search for objects by their properties, field contents, and retention instructions. Note that if a user does not have rights to edit a mandatory template field, and that is not auto-populated, the RMA will not allow that user to file records using that template.

Linking

The RMA must allow the RM to define document relationship types in the form of *document links*, which users can apply to mark documents that are related to one another. Each link type has a unique human-readable name, and each link contains the identifier of the source and linked to documents. There must be a way to view any linked documents, and to view the type of link used, for each document. Some examples of document links are superseded/successor records, multiple renditions, email/attachments, supporting documents and incremented versioning. As a form of metadata, document links can be established by all users, and created, modified or removed by authorized users only.

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Versioning

The RMA must allow the users to establish record versioning, which is a special case of document relationships. Versioning is used to indicate an auto-incremented sequence of revisions to a particular record. Different versions of the same document must all be retrievable as if they were independent documents and contain their own metadata, although the metadata for new versions can be based on that of a prior version. Versions can also be spread among multiple record series and have independent dispositions. The RMA must clearly indicate if a record is involved in versioning and if it is the most recent version.

Security Markings

The RMA must allow the Records Manager to define *security markings,* and to allow users to assign markings to records when they are filed. These markings serve as a security-based metadata item. They can define and restrict access as well as aiding in classification and retrieval. The RMA may also allow the Records Manager to define *informational markings*. These markings are non-security metadata, and are intended solely as an aid to classification and retrieval. Only authorized users can remove markings after an object has been filed, whether these markings are for security or for information only.

Vital Records

The RMA must track which records are deemed *vital records*, which are subject to periodic review and update. The RMA will allow the Records Manager to designate records as vital, and will provide a means of officially indicating that the records have been reviewed as mandated. For instance, emergency operating records or legal and financial rights records would be considered vital to the organization's operation.

There must be a way to assign a review cycle to vital records and to note when they were last reviewed. There must also be ways to retrieve all vital records, retrieve the dates of their last reviews, or retrieve a list of all the records due for review at a certain time. Vital Record status is determined by the Record Folder, such that all records inside a Vital Records Folder are considered Vital Records. Vital Records Cycle periods may be any time range from daily on up, and may also be specified by the   Records Manager. Only authorized users can indicate that a record has been reviewed.

Cutoff

When a record is *cutoff*, it is no longer considered active, and enters the disposition phase of their records life cycle. Each record has an associated set of instructions, which must include the series' cutoff instructions, as well as the retention period and disposition actions. (For more information, see "Retention" and "Disposition," below.) A record's instructions are determined by the record series (and, in some cases, record folder) in which it is contained.

Cutoff criteria define the *cutoff eligibility* for record folders located within a given record series. A cutoff eligibility requirement is a strict rule; you cannot cutoff a record folder unless it is specifically eligible. Cutoff criteria can take three forms: *time disposition, event disposition,* and *time-event disposition.*

Time dispositions

In time dispositions, the record series defines a time-based cycle period and the records in that series become eligible for cutoff at the beginning of each new cycle period. (For example, a monthly cutoff period would make records eligible for cutoff at the first day of the following month).

Event dispositions

In event disposition, eligibility occurs when an external event has occurred. The specific trigger for the event or events is defined on the individual record folder level within the record series. The Records Manager will generally have to indicate to the RMA that the event has occurred, although there are circumstances where it would be preferable for the RMA to automatically note an occurred event (for example, when the event involves changes recorded within the RMA itself).

Time-event dispositions

In time-event disposition, the triggering of the event inactivates the record, but it does not become eligible for cutoff until a certain period of time has passed. For example, a record folder with a time-event cutoff criteria where the event was 'account closed' and the time cycle was 'fiscal quarter' inactivated when the account closes, and eligible for cutoff on the first day of the next fiscal quarter.

Anytime after a record folder is eligible for cutoff, the Records Manager may elect to cutoff the folder. Since a record series acts to define the retention/disposition process, it can never be cutoff itself – all cutoff and

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further disposition events must occur at the folder or record level. While the RMA determines cutoff eligibility, it is the Records Manager that must initiate cutoff -- there is no automatic cutoff of folders. Cutting off a folder prompts the beginning of the retention period and also closes and inactivates folders located within Time series. An Records Manager can also uncutoff a folder at any point before the first post-cutoff disposition action.

Closing Records

When the Records Manager or RMA indicates that an event has occurred for a record folder with an Event or Time-Event record series, the folder is *closed* (no new records can be filed) and all the records in the folder are held *inactive* (no modifications allowed). During the interval between any folder being closed and being cutoff (regardless of cutoff eligibility), the Records Manager can *reopen* the folder allowing for further filing and re-activation of records; folders that have been cutoff can also be re-opened if they are first uncutoff. For Event and Time-Event series, reopening the folder has the same effect as telling the RMA that the event did not occur. If the folder is reopened, the RMA will clear the original event date and remove any cutoff eligibility the folder may have had.

Retention

The first retention period, known as the hold period, can be any duration including zero. Once the retention period is over, the records in a folder become *eligible for disposition.* They may then *enter disposition* by going through a further disposition action. During the hold period, the records are stored within the current file area and must still be accessible within the system. Anytime during the hold period, the Records Manager may choose to *un-cutoff* folders within an event or time-event series. This would be done primarily to invalidate inappropriate event eligibility – for instance, if a record was believed to be no longer needed but was later determined to be still in use – and has the same effects as reopening a non-cutoff folder. When a folder is un-cutoff, the RMA changes the status of the event to a non-occurred status. The hold period ends when a further disposition action is performed on the specific record folder, moving it out of the current file area.

Disposition

After the hold period is over, inactive documents can be subject to one or more disposition actions. The RMA must handle two types of available disposition actions, *interim transfers* and *final disposition.* Zero or more

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interim transfers can be selected. If selected, these actions will be applied in sequence, with a retention period between each transfer. The available actions for final disposition are *accession, destruction* and *none*; a disposition of "none" means that the record is considered permanent. Disposition always occurs after any and all transfers have taken place. At most one final disposition can be chosen.

Interim transfers and final dispositions also differ in their eligibility requirements. The eligibility requirement for a final disposition is a strict rule – a final disposition can not be performed if the record folder is not specifically eligible for it. Interim transfers are much more lenient, however, allowing for transfers to take place when they are not necessarily eligible, in different orders then outlined by the record series, or even to be outright skipped. This is because the record is still under the authority of the original institution and they can choose how to handle it; leniency in interim transfers also allows final disposition – which is not lenient – to occur on schedule even if the intermediate transfers did not.

Transfer

Transfer is the act of moving records out of the current storage area. For physical records, this might entail moving boxes of records out of prime office-space into low-cost warehouses. For electronic records, this might mean exporting the documents to optical media and then deleting the on-line copies.

Destruction

Destruction is the act of permanently destroying documents. For most RMAs, this means deletion. Records located within Record Series designated as containing *Permanent Records* cannot be destroyed.

Accession

Accession is very similar to transfer. Unlike transfer, during which the organization maintains authority over the records, accession entails transfer of responsibility and authority over the records to another organization, generally for archival purposes. Records with no final disposition are held inactive but available for access in perpetuity.

The RMA must allow the export of entire record folders and their metadata values for transfer and accession events. Following confirmation of a successful transfer, the RMA will maintain the records, maintain just the

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metadata or completely delete the records, depending on the action specified in the retention instructions. Accession or Destruction events require the RMA to delete the electronic records, although the Records Manager must be allowed to specify whether to save and store the associated metadata components. Following each transfer, the next action may be another transfer, or it may be a final disposition.

Freezing

At any time, a record series, record folder or individual record may be *frozen* by the   Records Manager. The RMA must request a freeze reason from the Records Manager upon freezing. The act of freezing a folder halts all dispositions on it. Furthermore, when a folder is frozen, no records may be removed from the folder (regardless of whether they were in the folder when the freeze event occurred), and no records in the frozen folder may be modified. If the folder is active, then the folder may not be cutoff while it is frozen, even if the folder would normally be eligible for cutoff. If the folder is being held inactive, it will not enter disposition, even after the retention period is over. If the folder is held in disposition, it will not progress to the next action. A frozen folder may be *unfrozen* by the RM, which allows it to re-enter normal retention/disposition.

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