

Collaborative Workspaces and Recordkeeping

This Public Records Brief provides advice to authorities on the management and use of public records generated in collaborative workspaces.

What are collaborative workspaces?

Collaborative workspaces, also known as shared workspaces, provide an electronic environment for multiple users to work together online. Some examples of collaborative workspaces include blogs, wikis, document sharing, virtual classrooms, instant messaging, web conferencing and discussion forums.

The tools that make these collective forums possible may be developed in-house, provided by proprietary software purchased by the public authority, or web-based applications hosted by a third party. They allow for active participation and communication between users regardless of location.

Using collaborative workspaces

The technologies can sometimes be combined. An example of a synchronous environment, where users are online concurrently is a “virtual meeting”.

It may be held in an online room with meeting papers delivered electronically, visible chat sessions for written interaction, and a virtual whiteboard to document discussion.

When is information in a collaborative workspace a public record?

Information in a collaborative workspace is a public record if it provides evidence of the decisions or actions of a public authority during its business activities. For example, records from or about the collaborative workspace may need to be kept if they meet the following criteria:

- provide information about an authority’s programs or services
- gather responses or information that is later used to inform a decision or a policy position; or
- are used to record decisions or actions that document a work process.

Information created within a collaborative workspace is not a public record if:

- it is only a compilation of external resources
- it is not part of a staff member’s role or related to their involvement in agency work processes; or
- the official record of the business activity is captured in another form.

Managing use of collaborative workspaces

In implementing and managing use of collaborative workspace technology in public authorities, a combination of technical controls and administrative controls are required. Technical controls may include a secure log-in, version control, revision history and ability to lock-down certain pages¹. Administrative controls will include the policies and procedures within an agency to manage involvement in collaborative workspaces. These administrative controls may also limit the circumstances under which such technology is permitted for the purposes of transacting agency business and generating records of that business activity.

Use of collaborative workspaces may involve some risks to the security, integrity and long term accessibility of data. Public authorities are encouraged to conduct adequate risk assessment in determining the appropriate use and management of this technology.

¹ Mann, J; Austin, T; Gootzit, D; Gilbert, M; Burton, B (2007) *Recommendations from Gartner’s Portals, Content and Collaboration Conference 2007* Gartner research



Recordkeeping considerations for use of collaborative workspaces

Decisions about implementing or permitting the use of collaborative tools in the public sector may be best taken by Chief Information Officers (CIO) and information technology (IT) staff in conjunction with records managers and information management (IM) staff. This will ensure that the range of issues and responsibilities related to the recordkeeping implications of these tools are addressed.

Of primary importance is ensuring that public records are created and kept in accordance with standards and guidelines. Some practical suggestions for records managers might include:

- Ensure staff are aware that their recordkeeping responsibilities apply to work carried out in collaborative workspaces. Public records are determined by information content, not format.
- Conduct risk assessments and build recordkeeping requirements related to use of collaborative workspaces into acceptable use policies and workflows. This may require:
 - confirmation that back-end services record and log necessary metadata
 - understanding of software conditions of use
 - documenting a statement of the elements required to create a “full and accurate record” in accordance with the *Public Records Act 2002* and *Information Standard 40: Recordkeeping*; and
 - producing clear guidelines regarding who is responsible for capturing the records generated by these activities.
- Consider how records of collaborative workspaces will be managed within your recordkeeping system. Can your recordkeeping system keep electronic records? If it cannot, how will such records be managed?
- Records created from electronic tools such as collaborative workspace technology should be sentenced and managed using Queensland State Archives’ *General Retention and Disposal Schedule for Administrative Records* in conjunction with agency-specific Retention and Disposal Schedules, as with all other public records.

Read the fine print

When using third party sites or software for collaborative work purposes, encourage users to be aware of the terms and conditions of use.

Certain terms and conditions require you to assign irrevocable content rights and assume liability related to the information you submit to the workspace.

Further advice from Queensland State Archives

Queensland State Archives has published a number of Public Records Briefs with further advice on issues relating to this matter, including:

- [Creating full and accurate records](#)
- [When to make and keep records of blogs \(weblogs\)](#)
- [Capturing records of meetings, conversations, text and instant messages](#)
- [Managing records of online resources and services: policy and guideline](#)

For more detailed guidance on the management of public records visit the Queensland State Archives’ website at <http://www.archives.qld.gov.au>, or contact us on:

Telephone: (07) 3131 7777

Email: info@archives.qld.gov.au