

Public Records Brief

A recordkeeping update for Queensland public authorities – December 2011

Collaborative workspaces and recordkeeping

This public records brief provides advice to public authorities on the use of collaborative workspaces and the management of public records created in these spaces. This brief aims to raise awareness of recordkeeping considerations when using collaborative workspaces and is not designed to provide specific technical guidance. Queensland State Archives recommends having a working partnership between chief information officers, information technology staff, records managers and information management staff when considering a public authority's recordkeeping approach in these digital environments.

What is a collaborative workspace?

Collaborative workspaces¹ provide a real-time digital environment for multiple users to work together on documents or projects online regardless of their location and can be:

- developed in-house
- provided by proprietary software purchased by the public authority, or
- a web-based application hosted by a third party.

Examples of collaborative workspaces² include:

- *SamePage*, web-based wiki for knowledge management and collaboration
- *Google Docs*, web-based real-time collaboration including document editing
- *Microsoft SharePoint Workspace*, desktop collaboration application
- *Oracle Beehive*, combines email, team collaboration, and conferencing on one platform
- *Blogtronix*, web-based suite combining blogs, wiki, documents, multimedia, workflow and more.

Virtual meeting example: users may collaborate in a synchronous environment to work concurrently in a 'virtual meeting'. The meeting would be in a virtual online room, with meeting papers distributed electronically, plus visible chat sessions for written interaction and a virtual whiteboard to document discussion.

When is information in a collaborative workspace a public record?

Information created or modified in a collaborative workspace is a public record if it provides evidence of a public authority's business activities such as decisions, actions, or provision of services.

For example, records created in a collaborative workspace may need to be retained if they:

- gather responses or information that is used to inform a decision or a policy
- are used to document decisions or actions regarding work flow, policy, program or service delivery.

Information created in a collaborative workspace is **not** a public record if it is:

- only a compilation of external resources
- providing information only about a public authority's programs or services

¹ Collaborative workspaces are also known as shared workspaces, collaborative working environments, groupware or collaboration platforms

² Examples sourced from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_collaborative_software



- not related to a staff member's role or undertaken as part of their work activities (e.g. personal use)
- already captured or recorded in another form within the public authority.

From a recordkeeping perspective, working in a collaborative workspace is no different to working in a traditional workspace. The same rules apply.

What needs to be considered in the management of collaborative workspaces?

Managing collaborative workspace technology in public authorities requires a combination of technical and administrative controls. Technical controls may include a secure log-in, version control, revision history and ability to lock-down certain pages³. Administrative controls will include the public authority's policies and procedures to manage involvement in collaborative workspaces.

These administrative controls may deal with:

- the circumstances under which collaborative workspaces should be used for the purpose of transacting business
- establishing the type of public records to be created from those business activities, and
- determining how and when a record needs to be captured into a records management system from this environment.

How should risks in the use of collaborative workspaces be managed?

Use of collaborative workspaces may involve risks to the security, privacy, integrity and long term accessibility of public records. Public authorities are encouraged to conduct adequate risk assessments in determining the appropriate use and management of this technology⁴. Consideration needs to be given to the level of risk involved with the business activity being conducted and how this is reflected in the public records created.

Different approaches will be required depending on the collaborative workspace being utilised e.g. use of external third party site or software versus utilising the public authority's internal software. Using the virtual meeting example previously mentioned, if the online meeting was being conducted between different areas of the same department using their purchased in-house SharePoint software, the risk would be much lower than if they were utilising external third party owned and managed software such as Google Docs.

Read the fine print. Where third party sites or software are used for collaborative work purposes, be aware of the terms and conditions of use. Some terms and conditions may assign irrevocable content rights to the site or software owner, or place liability for created information on the public authority. This may make public records available for republication without appropriate authorisation, or place the public authority at an unacceptable level of legal risk.

Queensland State Archives' [Strategic Recordkeeping Implementation Plan](#) template and workbook provide an easy to follow methodology for identifying, analysing and evaluating the particular recordkeeping requirements of a public authority. The plan includes useful information for conducting a risk assessment including a risk assessment matrix and register template (p23-25).

³ Mann, J; Austin, T; Gootzit, D; Gilbert, M; Burton, B (2007) Recommendations from Gartner's Portals, Content and Collaboration Conference 2007 Gartner research

⁴ For further information on conducting risk assessments and managing records of online resources and services, see Queensland State Archives' [Managing Records of Online Resources and Services Policy](#) and [Guideline](#).

What recordkeeping considerations exist when using collaborative workspaces?

Decisions about the use of collaborative workspaces in the public sector are best made in partnership with chief information officers, information technology staff, records managers, archivists and information management staff. This will ensure the range of issues and responsibilities related to the recordkeeping implications of these tools are suitably addressed.

Remember: Recordkeeping obligations under the *Public Records Act 2002* and *Information Standard 40: Recordkeeping* (IS40) and *Information Standard 31: Retention and Disposal of Public Records* (IS31) must be met when managing public records created through the use of collaborative workspaces.

Public authorities should ensure they have a suitable policy which includes details of such partnerships and notes which agency is responsible for capturing records of transactions created in a collaborative workspace in the event of business collaborations.

Management strategies should allow for access throughout the lifecycle of any public records created in these spaces. For more information on management strategies of digitally created records, see Queensland State Archives' [Ten steps for ensuring the continued accessibility of digital records](#).

Some practical suggestions for public authorities in the use of collaborative workspaces include:

- assess what collaborative workspaces are to be used by the public authority and what business is to be transacted in them
- ensure staff are aware that recordkeeping responsibilities apply to work activities carried out in collaborative workspaces: i.e. in accordance with the *Public Records Act 2002* and *Information Standard 40: Recordkeeping*. Public records are determined by content, not format
- conduct risk assessments and build recordkeeping requirements related to the use of collaborative workspaces into policies and workflows. This may require:
 - ensuring business and electronic document records management systems (eDRMS) capture public records created in collaborative workspaces and relevant metadata is assigned
 - understanding software terms and conditions of use
 - producing clear guidelines regarding who is responsible for capturing the records created by these activities and incorporating these requirements into contracts where multiple parties are collaborating.
- consider how records from collaborative workspaces will be managed within the corporate recordkeeping system. Can the recordkeeping system keep digital records? If it cannot, how will such records be managed?
- ensure records created in collaborative workspaces are sentenced and retained using Queensland State Archives' [General Retention and Disposal Schedule for Administrative Records](#) or an approved agency-specific Retention and Disposal Schedule.

In summary, the same recordkeeping requirements apply in a collaborative workspace as in a traditional workspace. Organisation-wide consultation is recommended when considering the public authority's recordkeeping approach in these digital environments to ensure the full range of issues and responsibilities related to recordkeeping are suitably addressed.

Further Information

For further advice related to the management of public records associated with use of social media and Web 2.0 technologies, refer to the Web 2.0 tool kit page on the Queensland State Archives' website at <http://www.archives.qld.gov.au> or contact us on telephone: (07) 3131 7777 or email: info@archives.qld.gov.au