Governance Processes and Organizational Structures for Information Management

Custom Research Brief

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I. Research Methodology

Project Challenge  Leadership at a member institution approached the Roundtable with the following questions:

- Do other institutions have a written information management strategy? What framework have other institutions developed to guide their information management strategy? Do they use the “information as service” framework (i.e. “The right information is available to the right people at the right time and in the right format.”)?
- What groups are involved in governance of information management (e.g., executive leadership team, governance committee, etc.)? Who is included in these groups and why were these individuals chosen?
- What are the responsibilities of each governance group? How do the groups interact with each other?
- What problems fall under the category of information management? What is the process to resolve these information management concerns? How does this differ based on the type of concern (e.g., data privacy, intellectual property)?
- Which senior executive is responsible for making decisions that relate to information management concerns?
- Which campus unit implements the information management strategy? Is this an independent unit (e.g., information management program office) or part of an existing unit (e.g., libraries)?
- Which campus unit oversees records management (i.e., controls the “creation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposal of records”)?
- To whom does this unit report? Does the unit reside in an academic or administrative division?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of this organizational structure?
- How many staff work in this campus unit(s)? What are their responsibilities?
- What metrics (e.g., accuracy of requested information, timely release of records, availability of information, etc.) do administrators use to evaluate the effectiveness of an information management strategy? How do they evaluate these metrics?
- How do administrators communicate the information management strategy to users across campus?
- What challenges have administrators encountered in the implementation of an information management strategy? How have they overcome these obstacles?
- What advice do administrators have for others who seek to implement an information management strategy?

Project Sources  The Roundtable consulted the following resources for this report:

- Education Advisory Board’s internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
- National Center for Education Statistics (http://nces.ed.gov)
- Institutional websites
The Roundtable interviewed directors of information management and records retention at large, public, research universities.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment (Total/Undergraduate)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Mountain Western United States</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>72,300/58,400</td>
<td>Research University (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Atlantic Canada</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>13,600/11,700</td>
<td>U15 Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>Southern United States</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>41,000/32,200</td>
<td>Research University (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>Southern United States</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>32,000/24,100</td>
<td>Research University (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Central Canada</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>17,100/14,700</td>
<td>U15 Member</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Western Canada</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>28,400/24,300</td>
<td>U15 Member</td>
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<td>Central Canada</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>27,800/25,900</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** National Center for Education Statistics (U.S.) and institutional websites
II. Executive Overview

Key Observations

Information management strategies combine policies on data administration, information security, and records retention. Few institutions employ a comprehensive information management policy; most staff rely on a combination of related policies. These policies communicate data ownership, storage, and governance.

Federal regulations and the institution’s strategic goals function as a framework for information management. Staff view information as a means to achieve strategic goals, such as improvement in student retention. They prioritize projects, such as development of dashboards to present information or tools to monitor student performance, based on the impact of a project on strategic goals.

Provosts govern information management initiatives that serve an institution’s academic goals or focus on student data, and vice presidents for finance and administration oversee information management initiatives that serve business needs. The provost’s office guides information management at many institutions because staff manage large amounts of student data and frequently request data analysis.

Information technology (IT) staff, the general counsel, and representatives from offices that house information (e.g., registrar’s office) lead information management initiatives. IT staff ensure projects remain within the office’s capacity and provide technical expertise. General counsel advises staff on federal regulations regarding information, particularly student data. Staff from offices that house information typically initiate projects and operate as subject matter experts on the data they hold.

Staff from the IT office implement information management projects and often manage electronic records retention. Staff from units that house information, such as academic affairs or financial affairs, assist with project design and identify optimal outcomes.

Archives staff typically oversee paper records, and other staff rarely access these records or use the information from archives. The campus community views records within archives as outdated historical documents, not active information sources. One institution reassigned records management to an access and privacy office to emphasize that records management includes current data.

Quantitative metrics that describe service-related outcomes, such as number of data requests met, demonstrate the effectiveness of information management strategies. Staff build metrics into project charters. Existing units, such as university audit, use these metrics to measure the value of projects to campus. Business intelligence tools support these efforts; for example, tools measure the number of data users and the most popular data analyzed.
III. Governance Structures for Information Management

**Information Management Policies**

*Policies on Data Administration, Information Security, and Records Retention Guide Information Management*

Few institutions create comprehensive information management policies; most rely on records retention and information security policies to govern information management. Institutional guidelines on data management must comply with federal regulations. The decentralized nature of information management complicates policy development and governance.

**University G** follows an information management statement which outlines principles and practices for institutional information management and delineates employee responsibilities. The statement identifies other policies relevant to information management, such as the information security policy and records management policy. A data administration policy at **University B** defines data terms, describes the institutional database, outlines the role of information users, and charges a committee with information authority and responsibilities.

**University F** lacks a comprehensive information management policy, but its records management policy and access and privacy policy guide aspects of information management. The chief information officer is considering creation of a policy that would meet legal obligations, identify information management needs, and include archives as an active partner in information management.

**University C** uses state and federal laws in place of a campus records retention policy.

At all institutions, administrators aim to make data accessible and share the most information possible with the university community. Information management at **University A** has evolved beyond the institution’s outdated policy, but leaders follow the spirit of the policy and promote employee access to information with few barriers.

*Frameworks for Information Management Draw from the Institution’s Strategic Plan and Legal Regulations*

Presidents and provosts encourage information management to advance strategic initiatives on campus. The five goals of **University D**’s strategic plan guide information management. The first strategic goal is to increase enrollment, and projects that give the institution a competitive edge in student recruitment receive priority. Staff at **University A** seek information management solutions to campus-wide problems, such as development of tools to help staff increase the student retention rate.

Universities with less developed information management strategies typically approach information management as a legal duty, not a tool. Staff provide information in accordance with requests, but offices do not solicit information management projects.
Governance Bodies

Institutions that promote active data use require governance bodies to support the information management strategy. Campus leaders publicize the information management strategy and solicit proposals for information-driven initiatives. Increased demand necessitates project prioritization so that requests for information projects do not overwhelm the capacity of the IT staff.

Committees Mobilize Campus Support for Information Management and Prioritize Projects

A large committee of ten or more senior administrators ranging from academic to student affairs garners support for information management. Its members promote the information strategy to campus. A small committee of five to six people decides priorities and leads action. At University H, this core group must include the secretary, legal counsel, the archivist, an IT representative, the internal auditor, and possibly a finance representative.

Governance groups prioritize information management projects (e.g., displays to show student performance and expected persistence) at most institutions. IT staff prefer administrators work together to prioritize projects rather than overwhelm IT staff with competing requests. At University D, campus decision-makers better understand the limitations on projects and the capacity of their IT department when they discuss projects among themselves and with IT. Staff at University B find a small number of vice presidents decide more effectively than a broad committee where many members lack necessary technical knowledge of IT staff or the broader campus perspective of vice presidents.

Information Management Strategy Governance Groups

Core Group

- Data management team: Small group of 4-5 technical staff and chief information officer

Stage

1. Identify and Collect Data
   Collect data from custodians to house centrally

2. Publicize Strategy and Gather Campus Support
   Promote strategy to campus units

3. Prioritize Projects for IT Staff
   Determine project priorities based on strategic goals

Includes: provost, associate provosts, all vice presidents, archivist, and chief information officer

Include: university secretary, provost, vice president for finance and administration, legal counsel, archivist, internal auditor, IT representative, and chief information officer
Committees Include Representatives from Academic Affairs, Business Units, and IT Offices

Academic affairs and business units represent the users of information management projects and the owners of campus information; IT representatives contribute their technical expertise. The IT steering group at University D includes nine administrators who set overall university strategy and the chief information officer. Similar committees govern information management at University B and University E. At University B, assistant vice presidents from all campus divisions meet once per term to prioritize projects related to IT and to plan transformative IT projects (e.g., transition to the cloud). Deans and operational units (e.g., physical plant services) at University E send representatives to the committee that prioritizes information management projects. This body recommends what information management projects a committee of vice principals should approve.

Many committees also include records management staff. At University F, representatives from the access and privacy office participate in information management. Archivists or librarians join governance committees that addresses records retention strategies in addition to project prioritization.

At University G, information management occurs in a more decentralized structure; steering committees govern major enterprise systems for finance, student administration, and other units. Technical and functional representatives (e.g., IT staff and student administration staff) meet monthly to monitor the system and prioritize additional services. The chief information officer serves on all steering committees.

Governance Structures at University A

Staff at University A use institutional data to serve strategic academic goals. The provost’s office, registrar, and general counsel guide information management decisions because of the regulatory focus on student data.

Three groups supervise information management decisions.

- The development group focuses on continuous improvements to the information management system. A leader from the IT office convenes technology office staff members monthly to recommend and create modules.
- The prioritization group meets monthly to set data-related priorities, such as upgrades to reporting software or development of dashboards.
- The warehouse users group gathers 40 to 60 staff from offices that use student and academic data (e.g., registrar’s office). Two representatives from the registrar’s office and the vice provost for planning and budget’s office lead the group to update staff on ways to use data and tools to meet strategic goals. Staff from University A’s multiple campuses participate remotely.

The Provost or Vice President for Finance and Administration Oversees Information Management

Provosts govern information management at institutions that use information to meet strategic academic goals. Their information management teams create tools to analyze student retention data or determine strategies to increase enrollment. Vice presidents for finance and administration lead the information management strategy if business units primarily use data resources. Their teams access data to produce institutional analysis reports or understand campus processes.
At University H, the provost and the vice president for administration and operations jointly serve as senior executives for information management strategy. Deans or directors largely oversee information management, but they bring concerns to the provost or vice president on a case-by-case basis.

**Centralized Information Management Improves Data Quality but Risks Creation of an Inflexible, Generalized Approach**

Administrators prefer centralized information management to increase control over data and improve information management projects. Staff in decentralized systems lack oversight and wield complete authority over the information in their offices. This structure endangers a unified information management strategy because no single unit enforces an information management policy. At University H, a committee publishes timelines for records management but units in possession of records manage implementation and may choose to ignore the schedule. Decentralization complicates communication to all staff and decreases staff awareness of the policy.

Centralized information management reduces feelings of individual data ownership and improves access to information for all users. At University E, a campus-wide Peoplesoft implementation helped create a culture where the institution, and not data custodians, owns information.

Centralized office staff better guide campus information management but must recognize the needs of each unit and acknowledge possible exceptions to the policy. Staff at University C value the decentralization of their records management and caution against the indiscriminate application of campus-wide policy to all units.

### Benefits of Centralization
- Improved data quality
- Institutional ownership of data
- Simplified communication
- Increased data access

### Cautions of Centralization
- Standardized approach must recognize the need for exceptions and customized strategies

**Design of an Information Management Office**

No institution has an information management office. Chief information officers are considering data centralization but have yet to create an office.

Creation of an information management office enables administrators to rethink how to use information. Administrators find the concept of data custodians outdated in a centralized information management structure. Data custodians become entrenched and possessive of information, and a new office gives authority for all data to a central figure instead.

Information management units blend the functions of institutional research and IT. The information management director supervises institutional research staff and reporting staff.

Administrators identify how they intend to use information on campus and choose a reporting structure to best serve that goal. The information management director reports to the provost in an office that serves student and academic needs, where the provost needs the most data and holds the most information. This structure gives the director greater influence because the provost acts a chief operating officer for the institution. The director reports to the vice president for finance and administration if the office primarily supports business operations.
IV. Implementation of Information Management Strategies

**Implementation Offices**

*All Offices Conduct Information Management*

One unit lacks the capacity to manage all information or records for an entire institution. Staff in units across campus serve as leaders and guides to help others manage information effectively.

Information management policies should evolve. At University B, data custodians or trustees are becoming irrelevant in both practice and policy. Staff will store information centrally when the cloud transition completes, and administrators aim to create a central unit to control data.

*IT Staff Partner with Functional Units to Implement Projects*

IT staff produce information management projects at most institutions. At University A, the IT office holds technical responsibility for information management, but staff rely on subject matter experts from across campus to complete projects. Throughout a project, developers work with data users to ensure the final product suits users’ needs. Staff at University D, treat the IT office as a service provider. IT staff create a project charter with input from functional staff that identifies resource needs, potential constraints, and return on investment. The functional unit owns the data and the project, and IT staff develop the project to the functional unit’s specifications.

**Information Management Project Implementation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Staff from an operational unit bring an idea to IT</td>
<td>Academic advisors come to IT with an idea to display student performance data and expectations of persistence based on analysis of past performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Operational staff and IT staff develop a project charter</td>
<td>IT staff outline the technology needs and expected return on investment for the creation of a display based on specifications from academic advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Operational staff submit the project charter to the information management committee for approval and prioritization</td>
<td>Committee members approve the project based on academic advisors’ expectations that it will improve student advising and increase student retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) IT staff develop the project with guidance from operational staff</td>
<td>IT staff create the display with feedback from academic advisors throughout development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Information Management Committee, General Counsel, and Information
Users Address Concerns Such as Information Security

Staff receive training on data requests and responsible data use to prevent information security breaches. Electronic tools enable data trustees to view who has access to data they control. The same tools enable supervisors to see what data their staff has permission to access. If a security breach occurs, the information security officer and general council resolve the problem.

Continuous Communication Educates Faculty and Staff about the Information Management Strategy

Administrators communicate the information management strategy to staff through handbooks and trainings. Records retention staff use listservs to distribute guidelines and policy changes to relevant groups to avoid overwhelming the entire institution with constant updates. A monthly finance and administration newsletter at University C informs deans, department chairs, and department administrators of changes in a records retention policy.

At University F, records retention staff communicate concerns and solutions to the president, vice presidents, and unit heads. University leaders disseminate the information to their units.

Archival Oversight for Records Management Isolates Records from the Information Management Strategy

Records within archives appear inaccessible and outdated. At University E, staff view archives as a special collection of university records about research and teaching, not as a data warehouse or storage for active documents. To give records management greater influence at University F, the access and privacy office within the legal affairs office oversees records management and guides campus records retention and destruction. The distinction between the access and privacy office and legal affairs office highlights their separate purposes; access and privacy staff comply with government regulation and provide access to information, while legal affairs staff protect the university.

Role of Electronic Documents

Staff Differentiate between Paper Records and Electronic Records in Information Management Practices

Staff often divide responsibility for management of paper and electronic records. At University H, archives staff manage paper-based records and the information systems group manages electronic records. The two groups work together to create plans for the retention of electronic records.

Electronic documents create challenges for records retention staff because people treat them differently than paper documents. People think in terms of recording medium (e.g., paper, email) but not in terms of information, which leads them to maintain information in improper formats (e.g., printing paper copies of electronic forms for storage). Faculty and staff fail to perceive electronic documents as official records and include information in emails that should not be in an official record.

Electronic records complicate traditional records retention schedules. Records retention staff worry that hardware will not last for the required retention period. Information that survives through the entire retention period concerns staff as well because it is difficult to destroy electronic records when the time comes.
V. Effectiveness of Information Management Strategies

Evaluation of Information Management Strategies

Quantitative Metrics, Such as Number of Users or Completed Projects, Demonstrate the Value of Information Management to Campus

Business intelligence tools track the number of people who use data at University A so information management staff can see what data people use most and how they use it. Other institutions apply service-oriented metrics; for example, staff at University C judge their effectiveness by their ability to provide requested data. They nearly always fulfill data requests, though people often withdraw requests if they need to wait for the information.

Administrators contract with outside services to assess their use of technology resources on campus. Dell will study University D’s technology resources this fall and recommend design, strategy, and system changes.

At all institutions, information management teams value project charters that delineate measurable outcomes. The charters allow staff to measure a project’s progress against goals and due dates.

Existing Structures Evaluate Information Management Practices

The university audit office at University E evaluates information management projects. Staff design projects with metrics to make this audit possible. One year after creation of a policy, audit staff investigate if people follow the policy. IT security staff audit project compliance with data security standards. Security staff review disposed hard drives, for example, to determine if staff properly eliminated the data they contain.