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**2017 Public Records Committee (PRC)**

**Digital Communication Technology Report**

**March 2017**

**Prepared by**

**Records and Licensing Services Division**

**Approved by the Public Records Committee**

**Executive summary**

This report responds to the requirement set forth in Ordinance 17382 to describe the forms of digital communication used by County agencies; the methods used to retain records of digital communication to meet applicable records retention requirements; and the methods used to search records of digital communication to meet applicable public record disclosure requirements.

King County agencies use digital communication in a variety of ways. Specialized applications facilitate business processes, gather statistics on effectiveness of social media tools, and provide access to legislative materials. General-purpose tools are used for: communication, education, information sharing with both internal and external customers, partners and stakeholders; business transactions; public engagement; distribution of general information, news, advisory messages and alerts; marketing of county services; and media relations.

The Records Management Program of the Department of Executive Services’ Records and Licensing Services Division (RMP) in conjunction with the Public Records Committee (PRC) continues working toward establishing records management best practices in King County through the countywide records management initiative process, which provides the records management foundation of training and tools necessary for County agencies to implement records management best practices.

**Background**

On May 21, 2007, the King County Council passed Motion 12511, approving the vision, guiding principles, goals, governance and management structure of the King County Public Records Committee (PRC) as outlined in the PRC Charter. The PRC was established by Ordinance 15608, which called for the creation of a public records committee to advise both the Council and the King County Executive on policy recommendations regarding public records, specifically including both paper and electronic records. Issues coming under the purview of the PRC include privacy, access to and charges for copies of public records, display of records on county websites, planning and implementation of a countywide records storage management plan, and the countywide records management initiative. Ordinance 17382, passed by the Council on July 24, 2012, added the responsibility of advising County agencies on their use of digital communication technology and serving as a forum for sharing and discussing information about the County’s use of digital communications technologies. In addition, Ordinance 17382 directed the PRC to submit a report annually to the Clerk of the Council that includes:

1. description of the forms of digital communication that are in use by each County agency;
2. description of the methods used by the agency to retain records of digital communication to meet applicable records retention requirements; and
3. description of the methods used by the agency to search records of digital communication to meet applicable public record disclosure requirements.

The Public Records Committee used SurveyGizmo survey to gather the information for this report. Ten agencies responded to the survey. A summary of the survey results are included as appendix A with the responses from each responding agency included as appendix B.

**A description of the forms of digital communication that are in use by each County agency**

King County agencies use digital communication in a variety of ways. Specialized applications enhance customer services by facilitating business processes, gather statistics on the effectiveness of social media tools, and provide access to legislative materials. Tools in general use, such as digital voicemail, email, and various social-media technologies, are used to:

* communicate with, educate, and inform residents, internal and external customers, partners and stakeholders;
* conduct County business;
* engage the public and promote public involvement;
* distribute general information, news, advisory messages, alerts, and emergency communications;
* market County services;
* facilitate media relations;
* conduct investigations;
* recruit for open positions; and
* share photographs, historical documents, posters and graphics.

**Retention of records of digital communication**

A variety of records retention methods are used to retain records generated by digital communications technologies, including social media. These methods range from contracting retention through a social media vendor, relying on tools native to the social media site or digital communication technology, storing copies of social media entries as electronic or paper records, or using an off-the-shelf product/service like PageFreezer to capture daily snapshots of web and social media sites. Some agencies that are using the King County Electronic Records Management System (KC ERMS) reported that they retain copies of social media and digital communications in KC ERMS.

**Searching digital communication to meet applicable public record disclosure requirements**

Most agencies that create records using digital communications technologies or on social media sites report either using the search functionality available on those sites, using the tools native to the repositories used to store those records (whether shared drives, KC ERMS, Outlook, paper copies, etc.), or manually searching through the posts. Agencies using a third-party tool or system to generate or store digital communications or social media posts use the search functionality built into those tools or systems to search for records. Others use web-based search tools, such as Google or Bing, to search for posts. Copies of web-pages stored in PageFreezer are searched either manually or using the search function of that system.

**Lessons learned**

**Records retention**

When records management staff reviewed the records retention strategies and practices outlined in the responses to requests for information for this report, they identified opportunities for improving both awareness about records retention requirements and practices to ensure compliance with those requirements. As part of the countywide records management initiative, records management program staff have embarked on awareness-raising efforts, including trainings and individual coaching on best practices. The records retention issues identified in this report are being addressed by ongoing training and the educational materials used by the Records Management Program and Executive Policy, INF 15-4 (AEP) Management of King County Public Records, which became effective July 31, 2015, <http://www.kingcounty.gov/operations/policies/aep/informationaep/inf154aep.aspx>.

**Public record disclosure requirements**

While reporting agencies showed an awareness of the search functionality of the digital communication tools they used and reported strategies for searching for records to respond to public records requests, the inconsistent understanding of records retention requirements presents a continuing opportunity for improvement. Here again, records retention issues will be addressed by ongoing training and educational materials used as part of the countywide records management initiative process as the King County Records Management Program works to progress the County on the records management maturity model. These trainings will be done in the context of public disclosure compliance, in addition to records retention compliance.

**Conclusions**

King County agencies use digital communication in a variety of ways. Specialized applications facilitate business processes, gather statistics on effectiveness of social media tools, and provide access to legislative materials. Tools in general use are used for communication with both internal and external customers, partners and stakeholders; to conduct County business; engage the public; distribute general information, news, advisory messages and alerts; educate and inform constituents, internal and external customers, partners and stakeholders; market county services; and conduct media relations.

Storing County records with third-party service providers, which may include social media tools as well as software as a service and hosted applications, pose risks to the records--including accessibility, security, storage location, retention, and ownership of records. The Records Management Program develops retention schedules and advises agencies in proper management of records in these new and continually evolving applications, and the PRC reviews major IT initiatives for records management and public disclosure implications. The PRC and the Records Management Program continue to address the ongoing countywide need for education on records management best practices and records retention requirements. These education efforts facilitate and enhance searches for records to respond to public records disclosure requests.

This is the 5th year we have provided this report, and it has been valuable for raising awareness among social media and digital communications tool users of their records management and public disclosure responsibilities, while also providing the PRC and the Records Management Program an insight into where training and other guidance is most needed. At the same time, we hope that this report has provided Council with a snapshot of how King County agencies are using social media and digital communications as an internal and external interface.

**Appendix A**

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**Appendix B**

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