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Follow Up – Audit of Recorded Information (August 2001) As of November 2002

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Purpose	3
Scope.....	3
Approach.....	3
Recorded Information Context.....	3
Major activities undertaken since the 2001 audit report	4
Continued exposure to risks.....	4
Conclusion	5
Next steps.....	5
Appendix A.....	6
Appendix B	7

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Introduction

Purpose

In the summer 2001, an audit of recorded information was conducted by Nashel management inc. The audit was a joint audit for NSERC and SSHRC. The purpose of the 2001 audit was to carry out a thorough assessment of the Recorded Information Management function within the Councils. The audit project looked at the Councils' information collections from two perspectives: as a corporate function to be managed, and as a source of information to support Council operations.

The purpose of this follow up is to assess progress made on recommendations raised by the audit and evaluate management actions.

Scope

The follow up is not an audit, and will not reassess effectiveness and efficiency of recorded information measures at this point in time. The follow up is intended to provide to the audit committee an overview of recorded information activities undertaken since the audit and to identify recommendations implemented. The follow up was specific to NSERC only.

Approach

The assessment of progress was primarily based on discussions with key individual (Appendix A) at NSERC that support the recorded information function and a review of the Information Management Strategic Plan. The progress has been recorded in the Management Responses Follow Up Verification Sheet (Appendix B). For each recommendation and management response raised in the 2001 audit a brief description of the progress is included as well as the status for each recommendation. The status is either C = CLOSED where recommendation has been fully implemented or O = OPEN where recommendation is pending.

Recorded Information Context

Since the audit, Treasury Board has issued a draft Management of Government Information policy. The policy provides guidance on issues similar to those raised in the audit findings. It focuses on management of information throughout a life cycle and through a variety of service delivery channels (i.e.: paper based information, electronic information, e-mail, etc...) The new government policy also defines requirements for the governance structure, accountability and the management of government information.

Major activities undertaken since the 2001 audit report

Information Management Strategic Plan

The focus in the last year has been on the review of the recorded information model and the definition of a new model which supports a variety of service delivery channels. The model is defined in the Information Management Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan was approved by Management Committee on November 4, 2002. The plan identifies major activities that will be included in a more detailed action plan. As examples, planned activities include:

- development of the Information Management function mandate and vision;
- development of the Information Management policy;
- definition of the staff profiles;
- development of a communication plan and a promotion plan; and
- identification of technical solutions.

Development of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) job description

The CIO job description has been finalized. The competition is expected to start in the next few months. Amongst the responsibilities of the CIO is the development of a detailed action plan on how the model described in the strategic plan will be fully implemented.

Storage

Storage facilities has been reviewed for space availability, type of information on hand and age of information on hand. Plans are in place to clean up the recorded information collections and are scheduled to be implemented in the next few months. As well the information disposition calendars are being developed.

Continued exposure to risks

The strategic plan provides an overview of the information management business model. This plan is not a detailed action plan, and therefore it is still unclear what actions will be undertaken to put this model in place at the Council. The detailed action plan is critical to the successful implementation of the new model. Management should monitor closely the development of the action plan as it will define the scope of the work. Management should also monitor closely progress made against the action plan.

It is also critical to the success of this project that a solid and a proven methodology be followed. This will reduce project risks. Elements of the methodology may include: documentation and approval of user requirements, assessment of technical solutions against user requirements, user acceptance testing, etc...

The iRIMS software (content management index software) has been purchased by the Council. This software will index the different sources of information. A content management warehouse is also required to store the electronic information. An RFP will be issued shortly for the evaluation and purchase of such a warehouse. Meanwhile, the E-Business project has purchased a content management warehouse for the storage of the electronic submissions. The Council faces a risk of having different content management warehouse solutions which may not fully integrate.

As stated in the scope of the follow up, this is not an audit. Therefore the observations above are based on limited evidence gathered.

Conclusion

This project is still in its infancy. Significant planning (action plan) is still required. The action plan will clearly define the scope of the activities.

Going into an era of electronic information, Council information will play a crucial role in program delivery and processing. Program officers are already aware of this reality and significant interest by the users is apparent (comments gathered through the LT Audit Plan workshops conducted in November). It is critical that users are involved in the design of this solution and that the use for information is well defined and understood.

Next steps

The greatest risk to the Council is implementing a solution that does not meet the requirements of the Council. I would recommend a system under development audit of this project after one year in the action plan. This would ensure that appropriate structures and controls are in place to ensure success of this project. The system under development audit should be done in 2004-2005.

Management should be kept informed regularly on the progress of this project.

Appendix A

Individuals consulted for the follow up

Name	Affiliation
René Quirouette	Director, Administration Division and DSO
Louis Bélanger	Consultant, Nashel management inc.

Appendix B

Management Responses Follow Up Verification Sheet

	Recommendation	Management Response	Progress	O / C
Corporate Management Framework				
Authority, Responsibility and Accountability				
1	A corporate Recorded Information Management policy coupled with an awareness campaign would serve the Council in enhancing its current practices, increasing its service delivery capacity, and meeting its obligations as a corporate citizen. The policy should be developed with the participation of representatives from branches and divisions and should be endorsed by senior management	Agreed. The development of a Recorded Information Management policy will serve as a cornerstone for future strategic planning and for the re-definition of the function	No policy is yet in place. The policy is identified as one of the major deliverables listed in the Information Management Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is redefining the Recorded Information function as the Information Management function for the Council and defining a new delivery model.	O
2	A communications strategy should also be developed to identify the priorities and delivery mechanisms. Periodic information sessions and ad-hoc communications to Council employees should then follow.	Agreed. The Recorded Information team will work with the Council's Communications Division to develop a communications strategy	No communication strategy is yet in place. The communication strategy is identified as one of the major deliverables listed in the Information Management Strategic Plan.	O
Recorded Information Management Function				
3	NSERC should update, publish, and promote directives and procedures on the management of its recorded information. These directives and procedures would enable all Council staff to have on-hand reference material and serve to set-up the training and awareness sessions previously mentioned. These directives and procedures would also reflect positively on RIS if they were to promote practical approaches and solutions for Council staff in dealing with the daily challenges of managing records collections, regardless of the medium.	Agreed. Procedures that support the current Recorded Information business model have been identified and are under development through the Administrative Guide project. The team will complete them as soon as possible. However, review and adjustment to procedures will be required as the recommendations of this report are implemented. As for directives, a developmental exercise will follow the issuance of the RIM policy	The Program competition material procedure has been documented. No other procedures have been documented because the procedures are expected to change with the implementation of the new information management business model.	O
4	RIS should review the qualifications of its professional complement in light of the	Agreed. Management intends to re-engineer the RIS with the objective of creating a professional	No review of qualifications has been undertaken except for the Chief Information Officer (CIO)	O

	Recommendation	Management Response	Progress	O / C
	Council's competing priorities, information requirements, and the results of a forthcoming comprehensive RIM strategy. RIS should then make necessary adjustments through the upgrading of the knowledge and experience levels and/or the acquisition of qualified individuals. This exercise may lead to a different organisational/ reporting structure in response to a possible renewed mandate, new services, and adjusted work approaches	service tailored to meet the Council's future requirements. A learning plan for Recorded Information will also be developed	position. Upon staffing of the CIO position in the months to come, the CIO will be tasked with reviewing the qualifications of its professional complement. This activity is identified in the Strategic Plan.	
5	RIS must fully assume its functional role within NSERC, including the provision of advice and training to Council employees and the development of effective, user-related tools and solutions. In order to champion the RIM function within NSERC, RIS must also obtain stronger senior management support to effectively carry out its mandate	Agreed. Stronger Senior Management support to the RIS will be provided. An enhanced functional role in the Council will also be developed.	No progress made, it is identified as an activity under the Strategic Plan.	O
6	RIS should review the space requirements and storage equipment layout and type, or the use of it, in the NSERC Records Office to accommodate all current program case records	The NSERC Records Office provides services to all NSERC program divisions. It contains a high volume of information in limited space stored on the maximal amount and type of equipment. The situation will be reviewed to ensure maximal effectiveness in the use of the equipment	The space requirements have been reviewed in the basement warehouse and at the service points on floors 10, 11, and 14. A plan has been developed to integrate two service points and clean up the information collections therein. The plan should be implemented within the next few months.	O
Planning, Organizing and Directing				
7	A comprehensive RIM strategy, with detailed work plans and a project management framework, should be developed. These improvements should help RIS address some of the deficiencies and the many challenges facing it. In addition, the audit team believes that with the development of RIM standards, RIS would be in a position to conduct regular reviews of Council RIM operations. These improvements should also enable NSERC	Agreed. A comprehensive RIM strategy will be developed	The Information Management Strategic Plan has been developed and approved by Management Committee on November 4, 2002. Detailed workplans and project management framework will be developed in the next few months. The CIO will be tasked with these activities.	O

	Recommendation	Management Response	Progress	O / C
	to avoid experiencing other possible future inconsistencies, reducing the cost in managing its records collections, closing the gap in the Council's "corporate memory", and reducing the potential risks of not being able to find information in support of decision-making or to respond to access to information and privacy requests. Such potential risks will likely increase further within the next five to ten years when the Public Service, and NSERC, will have to face a large proportion of its work force retiring, leaving with the undocumented knowledge and best practices			
Information Needs of the Council				
8	As part of the development of its RIM strategy, RIS should define its role and approach in major corporate information content-related projects and should develop action plans accordingly	Agreed. A Recorded Information role in major corporate information content-related project should naturally evolve with the implementation of the preceding recommendations	While not documented, the role of the new Information Management function in major corporate information content related projects has started to be defined. This has been the case with the e-Business project, where information needs have been discussed.	O
9	RIS should review its methodology and, perhaps, even the type of records classification structure it proposes to implement, involving users in the process to make sure the structure is complete, accurate and pertinent. This structure should account for all types of records - including paper, and electronic records such as e-documents and e-mail messages	The subject records classification system has recently been revised and harmonised for the two Councils. It is based on a block-numeric system and adjustments are continually made to its primary and secondary subjects as information demands. Our focus will be on ensuring its simplification, pertinence and continued evolution in meeting the information holder's needs	A decision has been made no to revisit the classification system. The item will be included in the action plan.	O
Organizing the Recorded Information				
Organization				
10	RIS should evaluate the branches and divisions' feasibility of using the services of the records offices or, at the very least, negotiate the most appropriate arrangements with hem and formalize these into written agreements. These	Agreed. Negotiating service agreements with Divisions is integral to re-establishing good Recorded Information Management practices in the Council	One Service Level Agreement model has been developed between Information Management and Human Resources Division. It is still in draft.	O

	Recommendation	Management Response	Progress	O / C
	agreements must define the responsibilities of both RIS and the branch/division, including the organization and maintenance, access rights, and disposition of the records			
11	RIS needs to work with branches and divisions who are maintaining their own records collections with the view to integrate the current information into the corporate collections	Agreed. Divisions with such collections will be identified and Recorded Information will work with them to achieve full integration. Resource levels in support of corporate records will also have to be reviewed	Some meetings have taken place; it is expected under the new business model that the promotion on the use / disposition through RIS will increase.	O
12	RIS should adjust the corporate records classification system, in consultation with users, to simplify the parallel system approach for the records of an administrative nature held in the Corporate Records Office. RIS should, as well, rearrange, where necessary, the records organised by source rather than by subject	Agreed. Adjustments to the corporate records classification system are an ongoing responsibility of the Systems group. The number and qualifications of resources available for this will need to be reviewed	Please refer to 9 for progress.	O
Electronic Recorded Information				
13	To follow-up on the needs expressed by Council employees, RIS should provide them with the necessary guidance on how to structure their electronic directories, possibly using the corporate records classification system as a basis, as well as on what type of e-mail messages that need to be retained and what type that can be disposed of safely	Agreed. Employees have received information on the management of electronic information but, as the audit reveals, few people have taken the necessary actions. This points to the need for a fundamental cultural shift in how employees assume this responsibility. Efforts in this area will be undertaken at an opportune time	No specific progress made. However, the change of philosophy from recorded information to management of information will be addressed through the detailed action plan.	O
14	Until more appropriate solutions are put into place to automatically capture records electronically, RIS should pursue its efforts to convince Council employees of the need to continue to use the "patch", with a view to preserve the corporate memory. In some other cases, employees should be encouraged to continue to print copies of important records to be stored into the corporate collections	Agreed	Decision was made not to promote the use of Patch and concentrate the resources on the development of the Strategic Plan. Given that a new solution will be implemented in the years to come, patch has not been promoted. However, the existent solution is still in operation and being supported.	O
15	The Administration Division, in collaboration with the Information Systems Division, should	Agreed. These two policies are as much a part of a good Recorded Information foundation as is	No specific policy developed, it will be incorporated in the Information Management	O

	Recommendation	Management Response	Progress	O / C
	develop an e-mail policy and an e-document policy to set direction, and both policies should be endorsed by senior management	the RIM policy (recommendation 1)	policy for the Council. Policy has been identified as a deliverable under the Strategic Plan.	
Automation in Support of the Recorded Information Management Function				
16	RIS, in cooperation with the Information Services Division, its business partners such as Security and ATIP, and a group of interested Council employees, as well as in conjunction with Council initiatives requiring an e-document infrastructure, should launch a project to identify and acquire the RIM application and infrastructure required to fully manage electronically records	Agreed. This project is expected to be launched this fall.	iRIMS has been purchased. iRIMS is a content management index. It is a background system that indexes information from various sources. This system does not store electronic information but indexes the information. The system is the foundation for the Information Management model. The software (iRIMS) has been selected because of its flexibility and universality. The next step will be to purchase a warehouse system. An RFP is currently being developed.	O
Access, Retrieval, Issue and Control of the Recorded Information				
17	RIS should ensure that the RIM automated application to be selected supports the retrieval aids required by the records offices. The automated application must be capable, among other features, of providing file history information such as the volume number, creation date, volume disposal actions, medium of the records, and storage location	Agreed	Please refer to 16.	O
18	RIS should implement proper RIM-keeping practices such as file recall whereby records charged out for extensive periods of time are called back to the records office for updating	Agreed. The file recall feature will be reviewed for implementation at a later date. The current File Tracking System in place at both Councils meets this need for the present	Please refer to 16.	O
19	RIS should eliminate the backlog of loose and unorganised paper-based records in the Corporate Records Office and in the Compensation unit of the Human Resources Division	Agreed. The Recorded Information Section is currently addressing this concern	A Service Level Agreement has been drafted with Human Resources Division. Progress is underway to eliminate the backlog.	O

Recommendation		Management Response	Progress	O / C
Storage and Protection of the Recorded Information				
Security				
20	RIS should take appropriate steps to ensure that classified information be kept under lock in the Corporate Records Office	An appropriate cabinet will be made available in the Corporate Records Office. We will ensure classified information is kept under lock	Very few documents have been identified as classified (i.e.: secret). For those cases, proper locking cabinets have been provided.	C
Essential Recorded Information				
21	For the Council to benefit from such a plan, RIS staff should work with officials responsible for emergency planning within NSERC to identify these essential records. NSERC should then take measures to safeguard these records by storing a set of these at a secure site and updating the collection regularly	Agreed. The Council is scheduled to develop a business resumption plan over the next year. Essential records will be identified as part of this exercise	No progress made.	O
Inactive Recorded Information				
22	RIS should start identifying and moving the inactive records from its records offices to the B4 area and dispose of them by applying the appropriate disposition authorities	Agreed. The basement storage area has been restructured to accommodate the transfer of inactive records to the basement. Disposition will continue with the application of the current schedules	Project has been initiated. A Plan is in place and should be implemented in the months to come. See also 6 and 24.	O
Disposition of the Recorded Information				
23	Considering the sensitiveness in destroying records, RIS should provide Council employees with clear direction about what information can and cannot be destroyed, in particular, information in electronic medium. A policy in this regard supplemented with training and awareness sessions may help in addressing this issue	Agreed. Clear direction will be provided to employees. Implementation of the new policies mentioned above will provide us with an ideal opportunity	Once approval is received from the clients, RIS will start to dispose of information and this will reduce approximately half of the storage. Disposition of the Recorded Information will be included in the policy which should be included in the detailed action plan.	O
24	RIS should proceed with the updating and the development of retention and disposition schedules for all Council operational records. As well, RIS must discontinue using the obsolete GRDS in applying schedules to the inactive records of an administrative nature	Agreed. National Archives and NSERC have now agreed to a Multi Year Disposition Plan. Updated schedules should be developed by next winter. Usage of the Government Records Disposition Schedule will be discontinued at that time	Development of the schedules has started. The Program competition information is the initial focus.	O



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