

On the record:

2013 Sir Rupert Hamer Award case studies



Just add water: engaging staff in recordkeeping

After an independent review it was clear, that like many other organisations, Wannon Water employees did not fully understand their recordkeeping responsibilities or how to meet them. The review, which was conducted against Public Record Office Victoria standards, led to the development of a strategy clearly outlining recordkeeping responsibilities and addressing other challenges. Wannon Water received a Certificate of Commendation at the Sir Rupert Hamer Awards.

The Category: Regional/Rural and Community Archives

About Wannon Water:

Wannon Region Water Corporation (Wannon Water) is Victoria's second largest regional urban water corporation by service area and is a statutory corporation constituted on 1 July 2005 under the Water Act 1989. The organisation is a major employer in south-west Victoria employing just over 200 operational, engineering, financial, environmental and administrative employees.

The Challenge:

A number of challenges came to light following an independent review and assessment of Wannon Water's records management capability and maturity and a risk assessment of its records management program. The review was conducted against Public Record Office Victoria standards to better understand the organisation's records management maturity. Like many organisations, the review revealed a lack of awareness of recordkeeping responsibilities, poor classification of records, ineffective archiving and a lack of a vital records register. Other major findings were that a number of changes were needed to reduce risk across the organisation and that there were also cost implications associated with keeping records for longer than required, which needed to be minimised.

The Solution:

Wannon Water chose to tackle the challenges in a proactive manner and began with the development of a long-term records preservation strategy. The strategy focused on key recordkeeping requirements for the organisation, such as the development and implementation of a vital records register, policies and procedures, and training for staff. The most important element was that, like the review, the strategy drew on Public Record Office Victoria standards and advice. The strategy was developed in line with the overall vision of Wannon Water and involved all members of the executive to ensure it reflected all areas across the business.

Approach:

The organisation developed a strategy that clearly outlined the corporation's recordkeeping responsibilities. One of the initial tasks was the identification of vital records and the establishment of a register to capture these. In order to ensure the organisation had the appropriate recordkeeping knowledge, Wannon Water invested in significant professional development for the records team.

The other challenge for the organisation was the cost associated with archiving paper records. A digitisation plan was developed for current records and provided a roadmap for the organisation to move to digital archiving to ensure this problem did not continue into the future.

In order to improve use of the organisation's electronic document and records management system (EDRMS) they established a TRIM and Records Advisory Group of power users and developed a wide-ranging training program for all employees including formal induction, masterclasses and "lunch and learn" sessions.

Finally, to close the recordkeeping circle within the organisation, they introduced an employee departure procedure to ensure records were appropriately managed at the conclusion of employment or a project.

The Result:

After input and support from across the organisation, Wannon Water has a records management strategy that has been endorsed and fully supported by the Board and the Executive. It is a part of the overall vision of the organisation as well as aligning with Wannon Water's commitment to an Integrated Management System. Information is now viewed as a major corporate asset.

Within the first 12 months of the renewed program, the Manager of Knowledge Services and the Team Leader have achieved their Advanced Diploma in Recordkeeping. In addition, all staff within the records team are currently studying a Diploma in Recordkeeping, which will enable team members to develop the knowledge and skills to deliver against the high quality program adopted by the organisation.

All risk improvement controls and mitigation strategies are part of an overall strategic action plan for the records team and components are built into yearly individual work plans.

The new TRIM and Records Advisory Group continues to provide significant feedback and has resulted in regular presentations at team meetings. It has also raised the profile of recordkeeping across the organisation and employees now better understand their own responsibilities.

The team continues a program of regular transfers to Public Record Office Victoria and Places of Deposit, they have a redeveloped and intuitive Business Classification System and the records training program focuses on technical skills and raising awareness.

Key Discoveries:

- Professional development for the records management team is critical to the success of an organisation's recordkeeping activities
- Records management needs to be included as part of organisation's strategic and executive visions
- Assessment against Public Record Office Victoria standards provides a good opportunity for review of organisation's recordkeeping capabilities and maturity

Benefits of Entering:

Entering the Sir Rupert Hamer Awards and receiving a Certificate of Commendation enabled the team to reflect and understand that their program was on the right path and that their achievements were worthy of recognition.

Internally, the award raised the profile of the team by creating more awareness of their important role in the organisation as well as their achievements and the long-term strategic importance of records management to Wannon Water.

This is the second time Wannon Water has entered the Sir Rupert Hamer Awards and this was the third Certificate of Commendation received by the team. Wannon Water supports these awards in order to develop, recognise and support achievements in quality records management.