

# Metadata for information and records

## 1 Introduction

Metadata is information that helps people to find, understand, authenticate, trust, use and manage information and records. If information and records have metadata, we know what it is, what it has been used for, and how to use it. Metadata also makes information and records easier to find.

Information and records consist of content and persistently linked metadata. Without key metadata, the value of information and records decreases significantly.

## 2 Definition of metadata

Different communities define the term “metadata” differently, and use metadata in different ways. The information and records management profession has defined the type of metadata needed to create, sustain and manage information and records, now and in the future.

## 3 Why use metadata

Metadata is a very flexible and powerful tool that serves many purposes. Some reasons for using metadata are described below.

- Metadata helps an organisation to create reliable and trustworthy evidence of its business activities. To obtain such evidence, the organisation should assign metadata to its information and records, and maintain that metadata for as long as required.
- Metadata helps an organisation to find, access and identify information and records.
- Metadata helps to promote and encourage the easy creation, use, reuse, and sharing of information and records, and to maximise and amplify its value by adding context and allowing greater understanding. This helps to create an efficient and sustainable business.
- Metadata can automate actions, helping to create an efficient and interoperable business.
- Metadata that is effectively implemented helps an organisation meet the minimum compliance requirements as defined in the *Information and records management standard*, particularly requirements 2.3, 3.2 and 3.3.

Minimum compliance requirement	Description
2.3 Information and records management must be a design component of all systems and service environments where high-risk/high value business is undertaken.	<p><b>Integration of metadata</b></p> <p>Integrate metadata into the specifications, to ensure that authorised people can identify, access and use the information and records. This applies when designing systems and service environments for a business whose operations are high risk, high value, or both.</p>

Minimum compliance requirement	Description
3.2 Information and records must be reliable and trustworthy.	<p><b>Appropriate use of metadata</b> Use metadata appropriately to ensure an organisation's information and records are reliable and trustworthy.</p>
3.3 Information and records must be identifiable, retrievable, accessible and usable for as long as they are required.	<p><b>Appropriate use of metadata</b> Use metadata appropriately to guarantee that authorised people can identify, access and use the information and records for as long as required.</p>

## 4 What is included in metadata

Metadata for information and records:

- consists of data describing the context, content and structure of information and records, and their management through time
- identifies, authenticates and contextualises information and records, and the people, processes and systems that create, manage, maintain and use them
- focuses on transactions and activities (how records and information are created, received, exchanged, managed, used and reused).

Metadata for information and records can include information about:

- business context
- dependencies and relationships among information and records systems
- relationships to legal and societal contexts
- relationships to individuals, workgroups or organisations that create, manage and use information and records.

## 5 The different types of metadata

Metadata for information and records includes **point of capture metadata** and **process metadata**.

### 5.1 Point of capture metadata

Point of capture metadata documents the content, appearance, structure and technical attributes of information and records, as well as how they are created.

Point of capture metadata is acquired or assigned when the information or record is created or captured. This metadata does not change. Additional point of capture metadata is captured if the information or record is repurposed in a new system.

### 5.2 Process metadata

Process metadata documents the processes performed on information and records. Such processes include registering into a system, applying or changing security and access rules, transferring control, and destroying or migrating.

Process metadata also includes information about how information and records are used. It will keep accumulating for the lifespan of the information and records.

### **5.3 Types of metadata: controlled term or free text description**

Metadata can take many different forms. Types of metadata include:

- a controlled term, carefully constructed or chosen from a formal list and entered into a pre-established category
- a free text description or set of keywords used to annotate or 'tag' a resource.

Metadata may be:

- entered manually
- derived automatically from software.

### **5.4 Common examples of metadata**

Common examples of metadata for information and records include:

- identifiers (such as document numbers, client numbers, supplier numbers, contract numbers and asset numbers)
- dates (such as date registered, date actioned or date destroyed)
- protective markings to identify sensitive information and records
- system process information that provides an audit trail of who has used the information and records, and for what purpose
- workflow information that shows how information and records were tracked and actioned across an organisation.