

# Early Learning from AHIMA's IG Pilots

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In the summer of 2015, AHIMA embarked on an ambitious project to recruit healthcare organizations that were embarking on the information governance (IG) Journey to serve as pilot sites that would provide greater insight into how healthcare IG organizational capabilities develop and to begin to identify best practices and critical success factors for IG. Eleven healthcare systems (representing over 50 hospitals and over 400 affiliated physician practices) and health data organizations representing most care delivery settings, every region of the US, and of various types (for profit, non-profit, governmental, etc.) stepped forward to share their experiences as they applied principles, the Information Governance Adoption Model (IGAM) and other tools developed by AHIMA. Many (73 percent), but not all, IG organizational initiatives in the pilots were led by health information management (HIM) professionals.

Some of the early learning may prove instructive for those who are just starting down their own IG path:

- Education of senior leaders about IG and the identification of one or more champions at the executive level are critical as the organization gets started with IG. The most successful sites invested time not only in educating senior executive leaders about IG, but also communicated clearly about how it would enable the executives or the organization to address business goals such as growth, cost reduction, or identifying the source of truth so that decision-making could truly be data-driven (the latter being a major challenge in many organizations, today). Part of the education of senior leaders is that IG, although it may have been initiated by HIM, is not only about HIM, or the electronic health record (EHR), or even IT. Rather, it addresses planning, integration, and optimization of the information lifecycle across *all* departments or business areas of the organization.
- IG leaders must engage early and often with a broad array of stakeholders. Silos must be addressed early on. IG cannot occur in a vacuum. Although some may start with a specific project or goal, there must be engagement and communication with all key decision-makers on a regular basis and these stakeholders must understand how IG will benefit them or the area(s) for which they are responsible. Existing committees and ad hoc work groups are fine for starting the initiative—there does not have to be a separate council or committee structure when starting out. But not too far down the road, a new or existing group specifically chartered to strategically address IG will be necessary in order to advance and sustain IG.
- Data governance (DG) is a top priority for many healthcare organizations today and provides a strategic stepping stone to enterprise IG. DG is crucial for healthcare transformation goals related to analytics, population health management, and care coordination. But it is just that—a starting point—that facilitates IG. The distinction between IG and DG is still not well understood, but will become clearer as organizations start to utilize and optimize decision making from the much improved data that comes from effective governance process. Also, although IG and DG are not only about the EHR, because it is a core clinical system where much data and information is created and resides, it remains a central governance focus, particularly with respect to the information coming out of it and how easy or difficult that information is to access.
- Finally, an IG assessment tool is essential for getting started with IG. Because IG is still new to many, an effective assessment tool like AHIMA's IGHealthRate™ provides a framework and context for determining the organization's IG posture and providing a path for developing short and long term goals and a road map to reach them. Critical organizational competencies and success factors are identified that can predict readiness, spot strengths and weaknesses, and suggest next steps. As the AHIMA pilots have discovered, such a tool can go a long way toward getting around the initial barrier of just knowing where to start.

Continue to watch this blog for more of the learning to be gleaned from the progressive and dynamic organizations and professionals who are sharing their IG journey with AHIMA.

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