Information Governance Road Map: Mile Marker 3—Travel to America's Most Prized Treasures

Save to myBoK

By Mary Reeves, RHIA

Editor's Note: This article is the sixth in a series that provides a road map for implementing an information governance (IG) program in any organization. Each month a set of concepts will be discussed that tie to the IG Road Map Infographic developed by AHIMA. Any organization can take these implementation concepts and travel along the Road to Governance.

This year the US National Park Service celebrates its centennial anniversary and kicks off a second century of stewardship of America's national parks. Since 1916, the American people have entrusted the National Park Service to preserve and safeguard the country's most prized national treasures. Without a doubt the national parks represent one of the best ideas this country and our congressional founders ever had—giving Americans 84 million protected acres of iconic, treasured, and sacred places in 400 national parks.

Health information management (HIM) professionals have been stewards of healthcare information nearly as long—formally organizing into AHIMA in 1928—with a firm commitment to the ethical and responsible handling of personal health information (PHI). The National Park Service and the HIM profession share similar values of stewardship, protection, and accountability. These are crucial values for the next HIM professional challenge: planning and implementing a sustainable information governance (IG) program that effectively manages and optimizes the utilization of healthcare information. This is a critical initiative since healthcare information drives decision-making across an organization from the bedside to the C-suite. Truly it is one of the most valuable and longest lasting assets in an organization. In this month's IG Road Map article, Mile Marker 3 is passed and the IG journey advances to demonstrating IG's return on investment.

Demonstrating Value in an IG Program

Visionary leaders President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir of the Sierra Club had groundbreaking ideas to preserve America's treasures for future generations. In 1917 one of the National Park Service's first policy letters stated it was to faithfully preserve the parks for posterity in essentially their natural state.[1]

Today's information governance leaders must plan programs that will be long lasting, sustainable, and demonstrate value to the organization. The value can be best demonstrated by identifying both tangible and intangible returns on investment. Once established, the IG Stakeholder Committee has the responsibility to prioritize the program's projects based on the organization's strategic initiatives and business objectives with a clear return on investment objective for each project's success—that's the crux of a successful IG program.

Return on investment is arguably the most popular metric to use when comparing the attractiveness of one investment to another and evaluating where to spend resources. However, the return on investment metric cannot measure intangible values and has no means to align with the organization's business strategy and regulatory compliance. Although information is not always recognized as a strategic asset according to accounting standards, there are many reasons why organizations should value information and manage it as one. Both tangible and intangible returns on investment should be recognized in information governance programs.[2]

Information Governance Road Map

The journey to enterprise-wide information governance (IG) often seems difficult, but with the right direction and tools, successful navigation and realizing your IG vision is possible.

- Implement an IG strategy
- Conduct an IG gap analysis
- Compare quarterly assessment to baseline assessment and determine next steps
- Complete IG projects based on gap analysis findings: Measure/track progress
- Reassess quarterly IG programs
- Conduct IG workforce training
- Use analysis to demonstrate IG return on investments
- Create formal budget for IG office and program

MILE MARKER 3

Tangible Return on Investment

Objective, tangible ROI is evident in financial results and quantifiable evidence of value. Example: A reduction in e-discovery costs by 25 percent over the previous fiscal year through information governance electronic document production policy and process improvement. Another example of tangible ROI: A reduction in offsite storage costs by $500,000 in 2016 through information governance retention and destruction policy and process improvement.

Intangible Return on Investment

An intangible return on investment is subjective ROI with no financial results but with quantifiable evidence of value. For example: A reduction in readmission rates by 10 percent from the previous fiscal year through information governance coordination of care policies and process improvement. Another example: Increase patient engagement by 20 percent from the previous fiscal year through information governance portal policy and process improvement.

According to economists more than 25 percent of the value of any enterprise is contributed by the intangible assets—brand name, intellectual property, reputation, and customer loyalty.

"Forget ROI—wisdom can't be reduced to a ROI calculation. The most innovative improvements have no ROI; there was no decent ROI on installing the first Wang word processor in the 1970s or the first PC in the 1980s," said Mark Hall, editor of *Computerworld*, in an industry working paper.[3]

The real value of a well-organized IG program can't easily be measured using a standard ROI model with only tangible returns. The true benefit gained is through the intangible returns of protecting and better leveraging the information assets it owns.

The following offers reasons to include intangible returns on investment in an IG program ROI assessment:

- Trusted and reliable information—relevant information for decision making contributes to better decisions and therefore enhances the ROI

    - More timely information
    - Accurate and faster access for nimble decision making
    - Uniform reporting
    - Improved patient care, patient safety, and patient satisfaction

- Improved effectiveness of decision-making processes facilitates:

    - Strategic planning and operations
    - Resource control and asset utilization
    - Organizational planning
    - Organizational flexibility and transparency

Organizations that do not leverage their information assets effectively are putting their organization at a competitive disadvantage because they will underutilize or ineffectively use these vital strategic resources. Stakes in healthcare are high. The industry is transforming from fee-for-service to value-based care, and healthcare organizations simply cannot achieve performance excellence and transition to value-based care without a solid foundation of reliable and trusted information.

The information governance process needs to become more strategic and focus on delivering the right information, not just any information.[4]

Demonstrating Tangible and Intangible Value

As part of the New Deal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched the Civilian Conservative Corps under the National Park Service, employing thousands of jobless young men who planted three billion trees and constructed more than 800 parks between 1933 and 1942.[5] The necessary and difficult steps and investments that created our national parks are not unlike the steps necessary to demonstrate the value in an IG program. Here are a few practical ROI examples that "make the case" for IG.

- **Reduce Risk of Breach.** In 2015, over 111 million patient records were accessed as a result of cybercriminal activities. Stolen PHI has a shelf life that is much longer than credit card data and therefore has a higher black market value.[6] Organizations can defend against breaches and attacks by developing an enterprise-wide information governance policy and plan with a security framework. This should include mobile device management for enforcing security controls for tablets and smartphones. Educate the workforce about e-mail cyber attacks—staff are the first line of defense.
- **Digital and Paper Storage.** Healthcare must overcome the "store everything mentality" and realize holding onto data costs a lot of money. According to IBM, medical data will double every 73 days by 2020.[7]
- **Unused Information.** This becomes a liability when no value is extracted from it. With 69 percent of information having no legal, business, or regulatory value, organizations must clean up their information footprint. Information governance-driven policies can reduce costs by setting priorities and reducing infrastructure to store data.
- **E-Discovery.** Organizations involved in civil and government investigations are at risk because prosecutions are often built on electronic documents. Information governance policies that guide retention, defensible deletion, electronic

searches, subpoena responses, and production are increasingly crucial. Proactively managing information and adherence to retention schedules reduces the volume of information subject to e-discovery.

- **Mitigate patient record duplicates.** Accurate patient matching enables patient-centric care, health information exchange, population health, analytics, and value-based purchasing. Information governance policies and practices include the proactive management of duplicate patient numbers, the measurement, monitoring, and reporting of duplicate rates, and workforce education requirements. Also, centralization of master patient index responsibilities can reduce FTE requirements.
- **Safe Use of Health IT/Reduce Medication Error Rate.** Deaths caused by medical errors number more than 250,000 annually, making medical error a leading cause of death behind only heart disease and cancer. Order entry systems can do cross-checking and decrease medication errors. Information governance policies and practices requiring entry of dose and the medication into the system with evidence-based safety alerts can reduce risks and improve patient outcomes.[8]
- **Population Health Management and Coordination of Care Across the Continuum.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies and recommends analyzing population health with 42 specific metrics in order to depict an accurate blueprint of the population based on risks and associated costs. Information governance policies and processes will ensure timely and accurate data from multiple sources for population health metrics. With access to metrics and dashboards, healthcare providers can quickly identify and track high-risk patients and ensure they receive appropriate care.[9]

Values to Advance Information Governance

The National Park Service has been guided by the following values for the last 100 years:

- Vision: A purpose and plan
- Stewardship: Responsibility to protect and preserve
- Accountability: Obligation to account for actions and disclose in a transparent manner
- Partnership: Trust in partners and relationships with a positive impact

These same values can also advance information governance in the 21st century and create programs that establish policy, prioritize investments, value and protect information assets, improve patient care, and determine accountabilities for managing information. An effective information governance program is imperative for providing quality healthcare in a reliable, efficient, trustworthy environment.

Notes

[1] The National Park Service. "John Muir's Influences." www.nps.gov/yose/learn/historyculture/muir-influences.htm.

[2] Andru, Peter and Alexei Botchkarev. "An Introduction to Return on Investment for Information Systems." *All Sprouts Content,* March 13, 2011. http://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1428&context=sprouts_all.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] The National Park Service. "Chapter 3: The New Deal Years, 1933-1941." *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994. www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/anps/anps_3.htm.

[6] Dill, Mark W., Susan Lucci, and Tom Walsh. "Understanding Cybersecurity: A Primer for HIM Professionals." *Journal of AHIMA* 87, no. 4 (April 2016): 46-51.

[7] Janin, Anin. "IBM Watson's Improved Outcomes from Data and Knowledge Driven Insights." IBM Watson Health webinar, April 20, 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHFYSLQhPwY.

[8] Murphy, Kyle. "Reducing Medical Errors with Improved Communication, EHR Use," *EHR Intelligence*. May 20, 2016. https://ehrintelligence.com/features/reducing-medical-errors-with-improved-communication-ehr-use.

[9] Dé, Andy. "Five Best Practices to Enable Population Health Management." Tableau. www.tableau.com/learn/whitepapers/five-best-practices-enable-population-health-management.

Mary Reeves (maryreeves37205@yahoo.com) is a consultant specializing in HIM and information governance.

Article citation:
Reeves, Mary G. "Information Governance Road Map: Mile Marker 3—Travel to America's Most Prized Treasures" *Journal of AHIMA* 87, no.9 (September 2016): 48-52.

Driving the Power of Knowledge