

CASE STUDY

Out of the Box Thinking for... Boxes

 **INDUSTRY**
Government

 **COUNTRY**
USA



Storing physical records can be a straightforward affair. You identify what you can dispose, what you need to keep on-site, and what can be sent off-site. But what if you can't send your records off-site? Sure, you can find creative uses for all those boxes, e.g., ergonomic foot rests. But how long before you run out of space for your employees as the boxes pile up?

This was an impending concern for our client, a tribal government. Since their records represent both business documents and the tribe's history, they tend to have more records with a permanent retention than a typical company. Furthermore, they want their records to remain on tribal land so they can exercise their rights of tribal sovereignty over this information.

In parallel with their records growth, they also experienced a growth in operations, resulting in competing demands for office space vs. records

ISSUE

How to manage the growth of physical records when storing them off-site is not an option

storage space in existing and planned buildings. As a result, departments were independently storing records in various facilities located on and off the reservation. In addition, inconsistent information management practices made it increasingly difficult to track the location of records, reducing their ability to find them.

The tribe contracted Access Sciences to assess current record keeping practices, design a records center, and provide recommendations for the ongoing storage and maintenance

SERVICES DELIVERED:

- Content Analysis
- Ingestion/Imaging/Classification
- Policy and Process Development
- Program Assessment and Roadmap
- Program Design and Implementation
- Record Center Operations
- Taxonomy Development

of physical records.

FIGURING THINGS OUT TOGETHER

In order to assess their current record keeping practices, we conducted data gathering sessions across all tribal operations to understand how they currently manage their records, both physical and electronic, and to identify requirements for current and projected storage, scanning, classification, retrieval, security, and disposition.

Next, we conducted a physical records assessment to collect metrics and risk levels for all facilities where the tribe was storing records. For each facility we noted the environmental conditions, security access and controls, location of records storage, the records format, and the records volume. In addition, we noted the volume of non-record content and copies, and we identified which records were eligible for disposition per departmental records retention schedules in use. The following chart shows one example of how we presented our findings.

Based on our findings, it was evident many of the currently-used storage locations were not well suited for long term records storage and, in some cases, posed a risk to the integrity and security of the records. For example, at multiple facilities, palletized boxes had been stacked incorrectly, causing the boxes to lose their structural integrity resulting in damage to the records inside. Additionally, many records were at risk of deterioration due to lack of temperature controls, fire suppression systems, and insect and rodent exposure. Some of these facilities housed highly confidential records with an inadequate number of control points to protect this sensitive information. And without a formal, tribal-wide retention schedule, many departments were retaining records indefinitely that could have been disposed.

Armed with this information, we created a strategy to centralize the physical records, which included:

- A defined process for dealing with active records and a path forward to manage them as they become inactive
- Prioritized migration of inactive records from various facilities to a central records center
- Directions on how to assess inactive records on arrival at the central records center and how to properly box them

SOLUTIONS

- ☑ A strategy for long term records management
 - ☑ Interim solution to mitigate risks
 - ☑ Specifications for a permanent on-site, central records center
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- A comprehensive index and classification scheme enabling find-ability and tracking
- Decision support for to scan/convert physical records to electronic format

ON THE HUNT FOR A RECORDS CENTER

Identifying a facility to serve as the central records center proved to be a challenge. As previously stated, the tribe wanted to locate the records on tribal property. In addition to retaining tribal sovereignty over the records, a local facility would support efficient record retrieval and allow the tribe to control access to the records. Unfortunately, all available facilities fell short in one way or another. Below is a summary of the options we evaluated and rejected:

- Option A – a facility on tribal land that was far from headquarters. While it was temperature controlled, power outages were common.
- Option B – a more centrally located facility that could guarantee a stable environment, but it was not on tribal land.

BENEFITS

- ✓ Robust understanding of physical records requirements across the tribe
- ✓ A clear cut action plan for the long-term management, storage, and preservation of physical records

- Option C – using pre-fabricated buildings on tribal land, but proved to be too pricey, and they were not customizable. Their configuration was better suited for office use than box storage.

Given that those three options were rejected, we came up with Option D as an interim solution until a new facility could be constructed. It consisted of temporary refrigerated storage containers located on tribal land. While not what one would consider a typical records center, it met all of the tribe's

unique needs and concerns. The containers could be centrally located, secured, outfitted with fire suppression systems, temperature controlled, sized wide enough to accommodate pallets, and maximized for box storage. It allowed the tribe to address the risks to its records inherent with current storage locations, while having a vision and plan for the future.

PRACTICAL, ON-PREMISES SOLUTION DELIVERED

At the end of our assessment, the tribe had a solid solution to address the remediation, preservation, and growth of their physical records until a state of the art facility could be constructed. Their records management program also benefited from having a better understanding of the makeup and volume of their physical records, the requirements and specifications for a permanent central records center, and a clear-cut action plan to move forward.