

Integrity Spotlight

V1.0 – February 2024

Advisory Government Emails

Introduction

This Integrity Spotlight includes some of the key requirements government employees and their employers must be aware of when approving, using and monitoring government email.

Misuse of government email, including using emails for dishonest purposes, may lead to disciplinary action or prosecution.

Employee Obligations

Use of a Government Asset

Government email is owned by the Crown and identifies the sender as a government representative.

While emails may be used to send personal communication, this should be on a limited basis and must align with government and organisational requirements. This means that government emails should not be used to conduct or advertise private business, or used to intentionally convey an association with government when conducting personal affairs.

Emails should not deliberately contain false or misleading information, and should not contain information that would bring the government into disrepute, or include information that is otherwise improper.¹ This includes using emails to intimidate or harass individuals.

Government employees should be aware of and comply with their agency's confidentiality and privacy obligations.

Record Keeping

All emails recording business communications are official records.²

Email use, including creating, saving, and deleting emails, should be conducted in accordance with the agency's records management and classification requirements, including State Records requirements.³

Private Messaging Services

Private messaging services and personal emails should not be used to conduct government business unless it has been approved by the agency. This creates an unacceptable level of risk, including significant security risks and a loss of transparency over government dealings.

¹ Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment, *Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector* p 6.

² *State Records Act 1997 (SA)* s 3.

³ See <https://www.archives.sa.gov.au/managing-information>.

What Can Agencies Do?

Policy

Public authorities should have clear standards outlining the acceptable use of government email. Standards should:

- be aligned to the Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector or other applicable organisational code.⁴
- make clear that emails are primarily to be used for government related purposes.
- include a clear direction to staff that organisational resources, including emails, should not be used for outside employment.
- ensure emails containing official information are saved into systems in a timely manner that meets relevant government requirements and whole of government security frameworks.⁵ Emails captured into an electronic document and records management system must adhere to the minimum recordkeeping metadata requirements outlined in the *State Records Information Management Standards*.⁶
- ensure emails contain protective markings to reflect the highest sensitivity or classification of the email's contents, and are classified in accordance with the *South Australian Information Classification Standard*.⁷
- Ensure emails are only deleted in accordance with the agency's authorised agency disposal process.⁸

The *Department of Premier and Cabinet Email Usage Policy* provides further measures that agencies must take when adopting policies, procedures and practices.⁹

As with all policies, agency leaders must ensure relevant staff are trained in policy requirements and that they are accessible to all. Standards should be known, communicated and enforced.

Approvals, Non-government Employees and Generic Emails

Public authorities should make clear which employees are permitted to approve access to a government email and in what circumstances.

Non-government employees should only be permitted to obtain a government email in exceptional circumstances. It is recommended that the individual's email access include a sunset period commensurate with the individual's contract of engagement, and that the external user sign an acceptable use and confidentiality declaration containing at least the same requirements expected of government employees.

The use of and access to generic emails should be only permitted on a needs basis. This is because there are higher risks associated with generic emails as multiple individuals can generally access and send information. Appropriate permissions should also be considered when granting access to generic emails.

4 Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment, *Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector*. Local Government and the Universities have their own equivalent Codes of Conduct.

5 State Records of South Australia, *Guideline: Information Governance* (21 April 2023); State Records of South Australia, *Information Management Standard* (12 April 2023); State Records of South Australia, *Minimum Record Keeping Metadata Requirements Standard* (30 November 2020); State Records of South Australia, *Contracting and Information Assets Standard* (21 April 2023).

6 State Records of South Australia, *Minimum Record Keeping Metadata Requirements* (30 November 2020).

7 State Records of South Australia, *Guideline: Information Governance* (21 April 2023); *South Australian Protective Security Framework, South Australian Information Classification System Overview* (1 December 2019). State Records of South Australia, *Information Management Standard* (12 April 2023).

8 State Records of South Australia, *Managing Digital Records in Systems* (30 November 2020) p 9. See also <https://www.archives.sa.gov.au/managing-information/general-disposal-schedules-gds>.

9 See Department of Premier and Cabinet Across Government Policy, *Email Usage Policy* P4.44 (21 September 2023) p 1-2.

Departing Employees

It is common for employees to move between public and private sectors. However, there is a risk that an employee leaving government might take information they had access to in their public role. This also applies to employees who have a right of return to government employment.

Agencies must protect their information and commercially valuable assets from exploitation. Robust exit processes are a means to manage these risks.

Exit processes should ensure individuals have captured all relevant emails within their agency's corporate systems and understand their continuing obligations to the public sector after they leave.

Public authorities should have clear employee exit processes which include defined roles and responsibilities for ensuring an existing employee's access to technology is removed. This should be monitored and those who have not completed the process held to account.




Audit

Public authorities should have an ability to conduct audits to detect unusual patterns of email use. This is particularly so for employee's occupying positions of trust, and for employees leaving government to work in organisations which may benefit from receiving official government information. An example of this is where a future employer is bidding for a government contract, or competing for a grant or similar disbursement of public moneys.

Further Resources

- [Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector](#)
- [Department of Premier and Cabinet Email Usage Policy](#)
- [Premier and Cabinet Circular PC012 – Information Privacy Principles Instruction](#)
- [State Records of South Australia, Information Management Standard](#)
- [State Records of South Australia, Information Governance Guideline](#)
- [State Records of South Australia, General Disposal Schedules](#)
- [State Records of South Australia, Minimum Record Keeping Metadata Requirements](#)
- [Independent Commission Against Corruption Integrity Spotlight, Confidentiality, and misuse of information](#)
- [South Australian Cyber Security Framework](#)
- [South Australian Protective Security Framework](#)
- [ICT, Cyber Security and Digital Government Strategy](#)

CONTACT US

-  GENERAL ENQUIRIES
(08) 8463 5191
-  LEVEL 9, 55 CURRIE ST
ADELAIDE SA 5000
-  @ICAC_SA

ICAC.SA.GOV.AU



ICAC

Independent Commission
Against Corruption
SOUTH AUSTRALIA