Strengthening the Management of Public Records in Singapore Through a Records Management Community of Practice

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What I’ll be talking about today

• Why a Community of Practice?
• What is a Community of Practice?
• Round #1
• Round #2
• Reflections and aspirations
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE: CUSTODIAN OF SINGAPORE’S COLLECTIVE MEMORY

• Established in 1968 by National Archives and Records Centre Act (1967).

• Guided by the National Library Board Act to advise public agencies on recordkeeping standards, take custody of records transferred from public agencies and act as the Official Keeper.
DEVELOPING CAPABILITY IN AGENCY RECORDS MANAGERS

Dedicated Business Partner (BP) Approach

- Nine archivists serve as BPs to groups of agencies, providing advice on records management

Training Sessions for Public Officers

- Regular sessions on records management; including ones customised and held at agencies’ premises
- Variety of topics covered
MOVING TOWARDS A SELF-SUSTAINING COMMUNITY OF RECORDKEEPING PROFESSIONALS

• Agencies to be proactive and to take ownership of managing their records
  • Going beyond the minimum required to meet requirements
  • Communicating and collaborating with each other to identify and seek solutions to challenges, particularly where these lie beyond NAS’ mandate/expertise
WHAT IS A “COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE”? 

A group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Manage Knowledge, by Etienne Wenger, Richard A. McDermott, William Snyder,
OUR PLAN FOR SEEDING A RECORDS MANAGEMENT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN SINGAPORE

• NAS to get the ball rolling, organising and facilitating several rounds of RM Community of Practice meetings.

• Through these meetings,
  • Encourage records managers see themselves as members of a community
  • Help records managers see the value of belonging to a community through sharing and discussion
  • Identify records managers already committed to the idea of a community of practice to nurture as potential leaders
Round #1:
26 Feb & 7 Mar 2019
### ROUND #1: 26 FEB & 7 MAR 2019 PROGRAMME

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<th>Duration</th>
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<tr>
<td>15min</td>
<td>Introduction by NAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>15min</td>
<td>Icebreaking session</td>
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<td>1h 20min</td>
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- Held over half a day
- Most time dedicated to sharing and discussion by participants
- Identical programme for the two sessions
- Each session attended by 50 participants, seated in groups of 10
ROUND #1: 26 FEB & 7 MAR 2019
SHARING BY AGENCY RECORDS MANAGERS

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- Theme: “Managing current records”
- Four agencies invited to share, speaking 20min each, on different topics:
  - File classification
  - Records management policy
- Opportunities for questions
## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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- Participants seated in groups of 10
- Four broad questions to select from, including questions submitted by participants beforehand
- Flipcharts provided for taking notes
- Groups to present their main findings at the end
ROUND #1: 26 FEB & 7 MAR 2019
PICKING PEOPLE

Participants

• Agencies informed of inaugural CoP meeting by email
• Registration on our website, on first-come-first-served basis
• Limit of three officers per agency
• Participants pre-assigned groups

Agency presenters

• Preferably experienced records managers from agencies with better-established programmes
• Agencies who had previously expressed interest also invited
• Slides sent in beforehand
FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS WAS VERY POSITIVE

• Nearly all participants agreed the session had provided them with greater knowledge and confidence to implement an RM programme in their own agencies.

• Over half expressed interest in sharing at a similar CoP session in the future, or even co-organising one.

Appreciate you organising these sessions. They were most certainly helpful.

Really enjoyed the COP last week. I personally found it to be very enlightening!

We have come away with more ideas how we can manage our records and engage our colleagues too. Hope there will be more of such sessions to come!
THERE WERE ALSO LESSONS TO LEARN

- Discussion groups too big – 10 people
- Discussion topics not focused enough, and participants spent more time choosing a topic than actually discussing it
- Not enough time for discussion
- Not enough time for post-discussion presentations
- The programme needs to be flexible
- Tea break was an important part of the programme, not to be skipped
Round #2:
15 & 22 Aug 2019
ROUND #2: 15 & 22 AUG 2019
APPLYING LESSONS FROM ROUND #1

• Smaller discussion groups – 6 instead of 10
• Fewer agencies sharing, more time for small group presentations
• Small group discussion topics with concrete deliverables, assigned to group from outset
### ROUND #2: 15 & 22 AUG 2019 PROGRAMME

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- **Theme:** “Managing electronic records”
- Just two agencies invited to share, speaking 25min each, on their electronic registry system
- Assigned questions on how each agency manages a particular category of electronic record

More time allocated that likely needed
DID THE CHANGES HELP?

• Smaller groups definitely helped – everyone got a chance to participate
• Extra time definitely helped – ability to allow more time for particularly productive discussions
• Discussion questions worked better, but could be improved – discussion outputs were interesting, but without obvious applications
Onward!
DEFINITELY GOING AHEAD WITH MORE COP MEETINGS, BUT...

- **We need a better way to measure results** – Feedback great, but are we deriving those benefits we set out to obtain?

- **Getting agencies to present is difficult** – Organising further meetings a challenge, transitioning to something ground-up still a ways off

- **Records management still an imposition** – We still set requirements, and have a duty to ensure they are complied with
Thank you