

Aligning Information Governance Initiatives with Organizational Change

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By Lydia Washington MS, RHIA, CPHIMS

How do I start an information governance (IG) program or initiative? The question is a popular one in today's healthcare organizations. But perhaps the better question is, "WHEN do I start an IG program or initiative?" Timing can be everything. If an IG initiative is started at the right time, the steps associated with "how" may almost suggest themselves. Examples of the "right" timing to start an IG program could include:

- When new information systems are anticipated to be selected or replaced
- When organizational changes are imminent, such as acquiring or merging with another organization
- When cost cutting initiatives are required
- When new care and payment models requiring new and different data and information are implemented
- When process improvement is undertaken

All of these are examples of opportune times of change to look at how a broader, more integrated approach can optimize organizational information that is needed or that will be created and used to effect the change.

We spend a lot of time thinking about and discussing how to "make the case" for IG, but I would offer that the case is a lot easier to make when it is closely tied to or aligned with other organizational initiatives. This is what we refer to in AHIMA's Information Governance Adoption Model (IGAM™) as strategic alignment. In fact, making the case for IG without strategic alignment is nearly impossible in most organizations.

Such an approach to IG means that we don't try to start with a full-fledged formal program. Rather, the effort is scaled to meet an immediate need. Starting small and successfully executing on a small project will go a long way toward establishing a more robust program in the future.

Gartner reminds us that IG is really about "decision rights and accountabilities." At no time is it more important to define decision rights and accountability than when an organization is undergoing change. Change is hard because there is often a lot of ambiguity and unanswered questions that accompany it—but to the extent that we know who is accountable and responsible for those decisions, it's a little bit easier on everyone associated with the change. In a nutshell, decision making by those who are accountable requires four essential steps:

1. Assessment: Understanding the issues, questions, current state, needs
2. Planning: Identification of the objectives, projects, steps, and activities needed to effect the change
3. Implementation: Deploying new or updated policies, processes, technology, and education/training to effect the change
4. Monitoring: Ongoing review to ensure the change "sticks" and back to step 1 when it doesn't

The IGAM provides guidance related to all four of these steps within its ten organizational competencies and associated markers or key performance indicators. The IGAM is outlined in [AHIMA's IG Tool Kit](#), which is free for members.

The bottom line is this: Leverage organizational change to get great IG in place.

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