

Information Governance: Just Get Started

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If there was one central theme that ran through AHIMA's 2015 IG Summit, it was "just get started." With the disruptive changes currently emerging in healthcare, there is no time to waste. We can no longer tolerate the "one-off's" and silos that engulf the creation of our information and its use. After all, just like people, buildings, and financial resources, information is an asset that we must give as much attention and effort to managing.

In our quest for a surefire method for getting IG off the ground, various catalysts—including the prospect of "valuation," or assigning a value to information—were discussed as a way to not only get started but also sustain IG. The idea here, of course, is that since information is truly an asset, we can assign a monetary value to it. As we increasingly utilize information to better coordinate care through applying tools such as analytics and population health management, we will achieve better outcomes at lower costs and a dollar value can definitely be assigned to that. We know that all information is not equal in value, but by placing a value on various types of enterprise information we can better understand how to create, classify, manage, protect and preserve it and a governance strategy is critical for this. So goes the thinking.

However, while there may be some legitimacy to "information valuation" as a reason to stand up an IG program or initiative, this approach requires special accounting expertise that typically is not widely available to healthcare—or, for that matter, to many other industries. The valuation approach will likely take off only *after* IG is off the ground in an organization—only after it is a bit more mature, not as it is getting off the ground.

This still leaves us with the quandary of how/where to get started. If we bear in mind that we don't do IG in a vacuum or IG for IG's sake, and we remember the very essence of why we need good information in the first place, it may help things along. Organizations usually have a mission and vision that they carry out through developing business strategies that help to achieve their goals. Looking carefully at those business goals and strategies can give strong hints about how and where to start an IG initiative since almost no goal can be achieved without good information.

Those goals can be as varied as expanding service offerings or capacity through acquiring and integrating other healthcare providers or businesses, better management of space/real estate, creating new treatment protocols or reducing the costs associated with care for a patient population, or something entirely different. But at some level, information and its governance will have to be part of the strategy to achieve the goals. This is what we refer to as "strategic alignment." When you start with this in mind, you have identified the perfect place to start your IG initiative. Figuring out how to support the organization's strategic initiatives with good, solid data and information will ensure a strong start for an IG program.

The nature of IG, and the reason for pursuing it in the first place, is—or should be—strategic.

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