Checklist

Slack Records Retention Considerations for Public Agencies

Slack is one of the most widely used, fastest-growing workplace collaboration tools today. It centralizes communication into one platform, so workers can send direct and group messages, and share files and other multimedia across multiple teams, projects and devices. Its user-friendly interface and send-and-response immediacy have made organizations of all types more efficient. Public organizations like the Department of State, the General Services Administration and NASA are all seeing the benefits of Slack.[1]

Government organizations have the unique responsibility to preserve all agency-related communications. At one time, this meant archiving emails. But with a tool as dynamic as Slack, allowing employees to stay always connected comes with the challenge of preserving new types and growing volumes of communications data. Without the right solution in place to govern usage, public organizations face legal, reputational and financial risk when they can't respond to records requests, audits or subpoenas.

If you've already chosen Slack as your agency's collaboration tool, you've taken the first step toward achieving new levels of employee engagement and productivity. Next up is to put guidelines and technology in place that will address potential risks at the same time. This Slack governance checklist will help you cover all your bases, whether you are:

- Interested in Slack, but still evaluating tools to support your recordkeeping initiatives
- Using a free Slack account but not yet archiving communication records
- A brand-new Slack Enterprise Grid customer and part of the implementation team
- Held up on deployment of Slack Enterprise Grid because of concerns about legal risk

Find out where you stand and where you need to be to embrace and manage Slack effectively, and keep your organization prepared for records requests and legal inquiries.

Organizations using Slack are reportedly seeing these benefits in efficiency:

32% less email

23% fewer meetings[2]

1 https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/01/are-slack-messages-subject-to-foia-requests/429243/
2 https://a.slack-edge.com/eaf4e/marketing/downloads/resources/IDC_The_Business_Value_of_Slack.pdf

Why did you start using Slack?

When surveyed about why they started using Slack, **18%** of respondents said their organization rolled it out as a corporate tool, but **41%** said they started using Slack because their colleagues or peers were using it.[3]

Initial Questions

Yes No
☐   ☐   **Did you know that Slack messages are subject to public records laws?**

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requires access to records from any federal agency. By state, the language differs, but the sentiment is the same: all government-business related communications are part of the public record and can be requested as such. This includes email, text messages and content from newer communications technologies, like Slack.

Yes No
☐   ☐   **Are you using the free version of Slack?**

Due to limited resources, some government agencies may be tempted to use the free version of Slack. It's also common for employees to start a free Slack account merely for casual conversation. But if work matters come up, it's a liability and a security risk. As organizations begin to rely more heavily on collaboration tools for workplace business, casual and work conversations will inevitably become intertwined.

Slack's free version is useful for most individuals and some small businesses. But messaging data expires, which is risky if a government agency has to quickly review and produce large volumes of historical content for a public records or legal request. In this case, it may not be sufficient to rely solely on the storage and retrieval mechanisms included with the free version of Slack. Slack's Enterprise Grid—which connects with content capture and archiving solutions—is the best option. The Slack Enterprise Grid also provides an important governance capability: prohibiting users from creating free accounts.

> ! As we move forward with the checklist, consider the power and reliability of a centrally managed solution for capturing, archiving, supervising and producing any amount of historical communications content on demand.

3 https://www.businessprocessincubator.com/content/slack-a-communications-lifeline-for-small-teams/

☑ Slack Checklist

☐ ## Are you capturing all the types of content and metadata that will be produced, directly from the source?

One of Slack's benefits is the diverse range of communication and collaboration it supports. However, many of the subsequent actions—activities like editing or deleting Slack messages, file sharing in private chat, collaboration on a document, etc.—are part of the public record and can be material to an investigation.

Unfortunately, many tools for capturing message content miss important "event" information, as well as interactive activities. Here's a list of data types that now fall into the category of government-business communications with the use of Slack:

- One-to-one chats
- Multiparty chats
- Channel messages
- Files in all formats: PDF, document, image, GIF, emoji
- Metadata: network, location, devices
- Transitive data: edits, replies, deleted info

A solution that is capable of capturing this information in its native context, directly from the source, is the most reliable way to mitigate potential risk when the time comes.

☐ ## Can you preserve and play back all content in its native conversational context?

Records managers and legal teams need to be able to search, review and understand the context of an expansive, complex and interactive conversation among an organization's participants. And when it does come time to search and retrieve communications content for an investigation or request, it will need to be delivered promptly and comprehensively. This is a laborious process if the data is hard to access and missing key details.

First, consider your current archiving status:

☐ We do not yet have an archive for Slack content

☐ We have an archive, but it can't capture Slack content

☐ We have multiple archives for all of our different channels

Then decide which of these capabilities are essential:

☐ One archive that handles multiple content types

☐ User-friendly search and retrieval

☐ Long-term storage

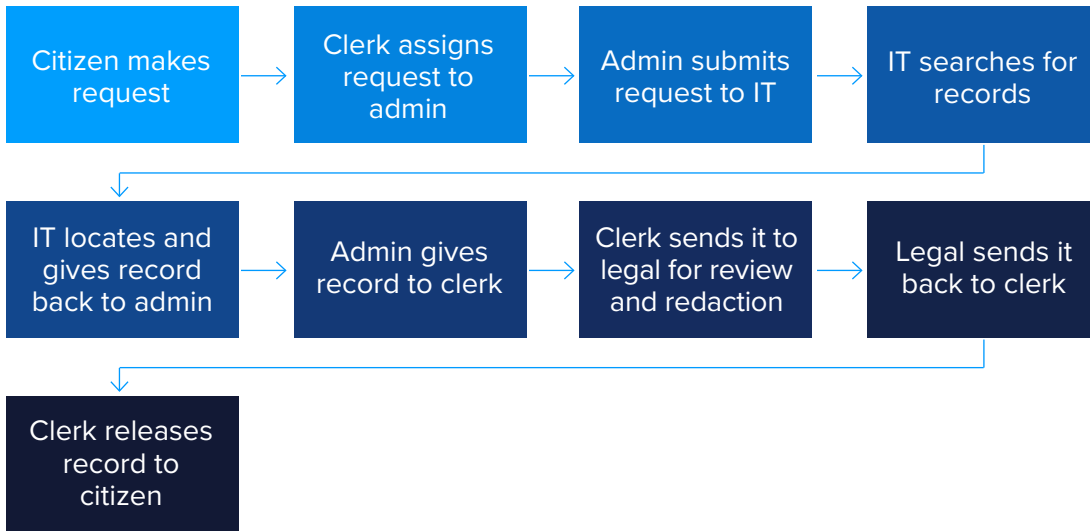☐ Flexible deployment for the cloud or on-premises

☐ Could your content retrieval and review process be more efficient?

Think about the process itself and how much time and resources are used to make each records request happen. For many government organizations, this can be cumbersome and inefficient.
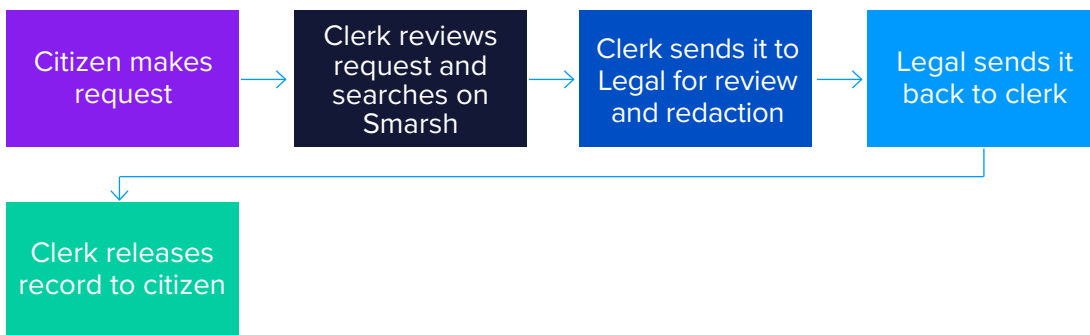
Yes No
☐   ☐   **Does your content retrieval process look like this?**

Citizen makes request	→ Clerk assigns request to admin	→ Admin submits request to IT	→ IT searches for records
IT locates and gives record back to admin	→ Admin gives record to clerk	→ Clerk sends it to legal for review and redaction	→ Legal sends it back to clerk
Clerk releases record to citizen			

Yes No
☐   ☐   **Would you prefer a process that looks more like this?**

Citizen makes request	→ Clerk reviews request and searches on Smarsh	→ Clerk sends it to Legal for review and redaction	→ Legal sends it back to clerk
Clerk releases record to citizen			

❗ With a user-friendly archiving solution, any of those people could just sign in and satisfy the request from a shared interface. Hiring more staff wouldn't be necessary, and you would be able to relieve your IT team from the process altogether.

☐ Have you considered all the people in your organization who might benefit from an archiving solution for Slack?

- **Records managers:** Can respond to public records requests or legal inquiries thoroughly and efficiently and can be the go-to person to provide communications content as backup for internal audits. They will be the power users of your archiving solution.
- **Legal:** In addition to responding to records requests, legal teams can leverage archived Slack data for discovery purposes related to litigation and other legal issues.
- **IT:** Will appreciate the ability to automate the archiving of Slack data so they can focus on the technology and be relieved from the process of producing records.
- **HR:** Internal employee investigations will be much easier with all employee electronic communications in a search-ready state. A full comprehensive archive provides recorded proof in the case of conflicting employee reports.

☐ Do you have a training program to address employee use of Slack?

For some, Slack can look like a place to socialize. Training employees on Slack usage policies early and often is a key part of managing comprehensive compliance. We recommend putting together guidelines documenting how employees should conduct themselves on messaging apps. Make sure training is explicit and outlines both acceptable and prohibited terms of communication. Engaging Slack power users to help guide those newer to the platform is also useful to ensure that everyone stays within the appropriate guard rails.

Wherever possible, automate policy enforcement with existing infrastructure and incorporate into onboarding processes. If an employee's content is being captured and supervised, make sure they know it at the outset. Require signed attestation that they have gone through training. Stay engaged with employees as the tool and its integrations evolve, and reassess your policies as needed.

Smarsh & Slack

☑ **Capture:** Smarsh directly captures Slack content from the source through an API integration. This includes point-in-time snapshots of joins, leaves, edits, deletes, comments, replies, attachments and other events, which is especially important for collaborative conversations. No matter what type of communications data is produced in Slack, and regardless of a user's device, location or network, Smarsh preserves its chain of custody, context and original format.

☑ **Archive:** Slack communications can be sent seamlessly to the Smarsh Professional Archive—an immutable and context-aware data store. You can perform advanced search for Slack-specific records, and data is produced quickly and easily, which makes the process faster and more accurate. Slack content can be easily added to an existing deployment of Smarsh alongside all other types of archived content—eliminating the need for organizations to seek a separate archiving solution for Slack.

☑ **E-discovery and risk mitigation:** With Smarsh, users can quickly collect, organize and cull data to enable informed strategic decisions during early case assessment, while managing risk. The combined solution provides a highly secure, defensible and auditable workflow across all electronic communication.

☑ **Training:** Smarsh has a wealth of resources for risk-mitigation and usage policies. Our Implementation Services, Professional Services and support teams are available in varying capacities to get your staff on track and in accordance with the rules. In addition, Smarsh University offers training courses for using any of the Smarsh Connected Suite family of tools.

☑ **Ensure that all of your agency's required communications data is captured, archived and easy to produce with**

smarsh + slack

Smarsh® helps government organizations get ahead – and stay ahead – of the risk within their electronic communications. Utilizing the Smarsh Connected Suite, agencies can reduce the burden and time required when responding to records requests and consolidate from multiple systems into a modernized, comprehensive retention and production solution. Capture, archiving and monitoring solutions extend across the industry's widest breadth of channels, including email, social media, mobile/text messaging, instant messaging/collaboration, websites and voice. Government agencies in 40 of the 50 U.S. states rely on Smarsh to help meet their recordkeeping and e-discovery requirements. Founded in 2001, the company is headquartered in Portland, Ore. with nine offices worldwide, including locations in Silicon Valley, New York, London and Bangalore, India. For more information, visit www.smarsh.com.