

Records Management Policy: RMP-2020-11

Subject: Preserving Text and Instant Messages as Federal Records

1. Effective Date:

This policy is effective on **June 8, 2021**.

2. Version:

Version #	Description	Comment
1.0	Initial Policy	Initial Policy Issued

3. Rescissions:

OCIO Directive 2014-003: Acceptable Use of Bison Connect Electronic gChat Technology

4. Prepared By:

David D. Alspach, Departmental Records Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

5. Purpose

This policy outlines the requirements for preserving text or instant messages that are considered Federal Records.

6. Scope

This policy applies to all Departmental Staff. Bureaus and offices may issue clarifying implementing procedures consistent with this policy. This policy is applicable to text messaging and instant messaging; it does not cover the use of email, voicemail, or other forms of messaging technology. The use of personal messaging accounts is covered under OCIO Directive 2015-003: Notice of Disclosure Requirements for Official Business Conducted Using Non-Official Electronic Messaging Accounts.

7. Authorities

- A. [44 U.S.C. Chapter 31](#) (Records Management by Federal Agencies)
- B. [National Archives Bulletin 2015-02](#)

8. Policy

Text or instant messages when created or received in the course of agency business may be Federal Records. Departmental Staff must manage text and instant messages that are Federal Records per federal records management laws, regulations, and policies. All Federal Records must be retained in accordance with National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved records schedules. Text or instant messages may be subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, litigation holds, and other independent preservation holds, regardless of whether they are considered Federal Records.

- A. Text Messaging: Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) and Short Message Service (SMS) or similar formats are used on mobile devices to communicate in a peer-to-peer fashion. Text messages are typically Transitory Records and should be used only for brief notifications or non-substantive communications. Text messages are not automatically archived.
 - 1. Only native text messaging applications that come factory installed on mobile devices are authorized for use within the Department.
 - 2. Departmental Staff must:
 - a. preserve text messages that warrant preservation by either performing screen captures or by requesting device backup services provided by their supporting information technology (IT) organizations; and
 - b. capture appropriate metadata including sender, recipient, date, and time, which must be preserved with the text message content in order to constitute a complete Federal Record.

- B. Instant Messaging: Instant Messaging is another form of peer-to-peer communication that may be included within applications or operating environments (e.g., the chat function in Microsoft Office 365). Instant messages are typically Transitory Records and should be used only for brief notifications or non-substantive communications.
 - 1. Microsoft Teams is currently the only Instant Messaging application authorized for use within the Department. No other third-party messaging applications, such as “Snapchat” or “WhatsApp” are authorized for use on any DOI device.
 - 2. Associate Chief Information Officers (ACIOs) may authorize additional instant messaging applications or services for use only within their respective bureau or office based upon a documented risk assessment.
 - 3. Departmental Staff may request copies of Microsoft Teams instant messages to support FOIA, litigation or other document production purposes by submitting an approved DI-4003: Department Audit Request Form through their IT organization.
 - 4. Departmental Staff are responsible for preserving instant messages within applications approved by their ACIOs through methods and processes documented in collaboration with their respective IT and Records Management organizations.

9. Responsibilities

All Departmental Staff are responsible for retaining text and instant messages per NARA-approved records schedules. Departmental Staff should coordinate with the Responsible Records Officer on any questions regarding Federal Record retention.