Electronic Records Management at a Federally Funded Research and Development Center

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter provides an overview of the electronic records management initiatives by the Records and Engineering Document Services Group at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, a Federally Funded Research and Development Center managed by the California Institute of Technology for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The Records and Engineering Document Services Group's activities included the investigation of add-on records management applications to existing information technology systems, as well as follow-on work using a "Records Management-IT Compliance Checklist" to measure the records management capabilities of IT systems in development.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND: JET PROPULSION LABORATORY

The Jet Propulsion Laboratory's (JPL) origins were in the mid-1930s, when some California Institute of Technology (Caltech) students began experimenting with rockets on the Caltech campus. The group eventually moved to JPL's current location, an area next to the California San Gabriel Mountains. The Jet Propulsion Laboratory was given its official name in 1944, and its work was sponsored by the U.S. Army. When the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was formed in 1958, JPL was transferred to NASA, under the management of Caltech, as a Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) to concentrate on the robotic exploration of space ("JPL Defined," 2012).

FFRDCs are administered by corporations and universities to do research for the federal government. Established under Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 35.017, FFRDCs possess the flexibility to pull together teams of technical experts on a project basis. FFRDCs promote the transfer of technology into the private sector, resulting in the development of commercial products (Kosar, 2011).

The Laboratory's main site is located in Pasadena, CA, and it also has posts at the three Deep Space Network complexes: Goldstone, located in the California Mojave Desert; Canberra, Australia; and Madrid, Spain. JPL also has locations at an astronomical observatory at Table Mountain, California, and a launch operations site at Cape Canaveral, Florida. In 2011, JPL's workforce numbered 5,000 employees and on-site contractors, and its budget was approximately $1.6 billion (NASA, 2011).

The Records Management (RM) function is centered in the Records & Engineering Document Services Group within the Library, Archives & Records Section, which is one of the organizations within the Logistics and Technical Information Division. The Logistics and Technical Information Division is one of seven divisions in the Business Operations Directorate. The Director for the Business Operations Directorate, who reports to the Lab's Center Director, is the Chief Financial Officer and a member of JPL's Executive Council (see Figure 1).

The Records and Engineering Document Services Group's staff includes the JPL Records Manager, a records management specialist, records storage and retrieval staff who interface with the offsite records storage vendor, and staff that scan, microfilm, and fill requests for documents and drawings. The JPL Records Manager coordinates the Records Liaisons Program, a network of over one hundred records coordinators spanning the Lab's line organizations and Information Management Engineers (IMEs) assigned to projects.

The responsibility for records management is dispersed at JPL. The Records Manager takes a lead role in the development of the institution's records management requirements and procedures. The daily responsibility of capturing and organizing

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