



RPA Speeds Agency Adoption of M-19-21 Paperless Mandate

The National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) mandate to help federal agencies drowning in paper is set to take effect in a year, with agencies looking to December 31, **2022 to have all permanent federal records and appropriate metadata created, managed, and maintained in electronic format.**

Even though NARA's Directive M-19-21 will stem the tide of paper documents, turning them into digitized data, it isn't just for the sake of going digital. Digitizing paper records and putting them in an online format that federal workers can easily retrieve can help federal agencies better deliver on their mission—and save millions of dollars.

That efficiency translates into benefits in the real world. **Robotic Process Automation (RPA), which can speed up the digitization process across the records lifecycle,** can boost those benefits even more.

When documents are readily accessed, for instance, veterans don't have to wait weeks for vital medical claims to be processed. Flood victims can get claims processed and insurance checks in their hands faster so they can rebuild.

Paper costs money

The paper problem has been well-documented. The Association for Intelligent Information Management (AIIM) estimates American businesses waste about \$8 billion every year on managing paper. A typical office worker in the U.S. uses 10,000 sheets of paper a year.

The costs are staggering. One study on the paperless office found that each four-drawer file cabinet holds an average of 10,000-12,000 documents, takes up nine square feet of floor space and each one costs \$1,500 per year. Multiplied by a factor of several thousand file cabinets, plus the cost of real estate to store all the documents, and the costs explode even more. The study also found that more than **70% of today's businesses would fail within three weeks if they suffered a catastrophic loss of paper-based records because of a fire or flood.**

It's no longer tenable for American businesses to remain so vulnerable and the same holds true for federal agencies.

As the NARA deadline looms, can federal agencies meet the deadline in time? After all, the federal government has been trying to digitize its paperwork since the early 1990s when the first document imaging systems were deployed.

"Agencies that started this process before the pandemic closed down office locations and limited access to paper documents are likely in a good position," said Rob Johnson, senior industry consultant, government, at Hyland. "But most federal IT organizations now have competing priorities such as supporting a remote workforce. This is where **newer solutions like RPA can help agencies catch up.**"



The bots have arrived

While it's not news that federal agencies have been trying to solve the paper glut for more than 30 years, today we have RPA, **innovative technology based on artificial intelligence, that can eliminate many of the time-consuming, labor-intensive manual tasks that have held federal agencies back.**

Troy Doller, director, federal government at Hyland, said his team has identified key steps in the information lifecycle where RPA can automate records management tasks typically done by humans; tasks that when automated can help federal workers meet the NARA mandate while also freeing them up for more value-added activities.

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By deploying bots, agencies can improve efficiencies in these three stages of the records lifecycle:

- **Ingest/capture.** Instead of a human needing to look at every document that comes into the agency and manually apply a file plan or retention schedule, Doller says a bot can recognize the document and automatically apply appropriate document retention and policy information.

- **Document classification.** In the past, a human would have to review a document and look for specific verbiage that indicated the document should get marked classified, top secret, or unclassified. Here again, Doller said a bot can determine the document's classification, then identify and mark whether it's classified content.

- **File disposition and document destruction.** Humans traditionally have had to manually keep track of retention and destruction schedules. Instead of notifying a user when a document needs to be archived or destroyed, Doller said RPA can send the documents to a repository for archiving, and then automatically delete the documents that the agency no longer needs.

"The idea is to **eliminate the bottleneck of manual human intervention** when it's possible," said Doller.

"Agencies can take a big step forward and quickly deploy RPA bots to propel records management into the age of intelligent automation."

RPA offers new path

Rich Rowe, solutions engineer at Hyland, added that agencies may be clinging to paper on a cultural level, or have set the goal that electronic document management needs to be based on a single system where all information lives in one place. That is the notion of "one source of the truth."

RPA looks for "where the clicks are happening" in a system and acts as a standalone workflow engine, Rowe said. So, for example, if an employee retires from an agency, the bot can reach across the core systems in the agency to find the right HR documentation. This might include the person's salary history, medical claims, and tax information.

"Instead of having a worker log-on and off multiple systems to find the information, a bot lets the system work in concert via automated hooks so the relevant documents can be retrieved automatically," Rowe said. "So once a person retires, an automated workflow is set in motion to find all the information and expedite the process for the retiree to receive benefits."

Let the bot do it

RPA looks to automate repeatable, rules-based tasks that government workers do every day, according to Doller. For example, records managers would no longer need to send email notifications that an employee's records were updated every time an employee leaves government service. The bot does it. Another example: Administrators can create rules that stipulate that a department should automatically upload and send all of its financial documents to specific people to prepare for an audit at the end of each fiscal year.

"People needing to contact multiple individuals and physically log-in and log-out of systems is eliminated," Doller said. "They no longer have to fill out an information request form, where someone has to look up the information and, then in many cases, hand-deliver paper records to the agency where someone then has to input all the documents."

Automating document and records management will also let agencies consolidate redundant systems,

according to Doller. Very often, federal agencies run well in excess of 20 systems. With RPA, they can identify which systems they really need, then write "hooks" that integrate the systems and workflows together so the agency can run more efficiently, he said.

Federal agencies that are seeking a provider to help digitize and automate records management processes should look for several critical capabilities. **The vendor's system should be certified to the DOD's 5015.02 Chapter 3 standard for both classified and unclassified electronic records.** Also, a platform that is open-source, cloud native and can run in the secure DOD versions of Amazon Web Services helps reduce exposure while maximizing efficiencies.

"If the platform runs in the cloud, it can scale dynamically," Doller said, who added that federal agencies often provision tens of thousands of users. Adding those tens of thousands in the cloud can help keep costs in check.

Hyland

Hyland's solutions help federal agencies meet today's challenges of digital transformation, modernization and information governance while laying the foundation for simplified, streamlined and digital government. To hear more on automating records management, go to Hyland.com/RMWorkshop. To learn more about robotic process automation, visit Hyland.com/RPA.