

FAQs

Instant Messaging

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is instant messaging?

Instant messaging is a form of real-time, direct communication between two or more parties using personal computers or other devices such as smart phones or tablets. Instant messaging technologies are designed to support real-time conversational interactions. Examples of instant messaging include Blackberry Messenger (BBM), Text Messaging (includes messages sent via Short Message Service (SMS), Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) or iMessages, Skype for Business, and Microsoft Teams chat.

2. What are some examples of instant messaging technologies?

Instant messaging technologies are designed to support real-time conversational interactions. Examples of instant messaging include:

BlackBerry Messenger (BBM)

— A cross-platform messaging application available for BlackBerry

Text Messaging The text communication service component of phone, web or mobile communication systems, using standardized communications protocols that allow the exchange of short text messages between fixed line or mobile phone devices.

Skype for Business

- Instant messaging technologies such as chat, video and audio-conferencing allow users to communicate and collaborate with others using devices from any location.

Microsoft Teams

- Instant messaging technologies such as chat, channels, video and audio-conferencing allow users to communicate and collaborate with others using devices from any location.

3. Why do employees use instant messaging?

Instant messages are used to facilitate the flow of business. Typically, they replace a conversation that previously occurred in person or over the phone. “On my way to the meeting,” “Did you get the package?” or “Let’s meet for lunch” are the types of information often exchanged via instant messaging technologies.

4. Does the OCIO back up instant messages generated or transmitted on the government network or devices?

With Skype for Business the OCIO does not record, retain or back up instant messages. However, with M365 Teams technology, 1:1 chat will be retained for 24 hours, and chats created while collaborating in a Teams Channel will be retained for up to 30 days, unless users delete the chats immediately. The 24-hour and 30-day retention on chats occur when users don't delete them immediately. This means that any Teams chats retained will be discoverable and subject to the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015 (ATIPPA).

Challenges with searching and managing data stored in instant messaging make it difficult to segregate records that must be kept from those that should be deleted. Instant messages are not appropriate repositories for information management purposes. It is the responsibility of the information owner to transfer instant messages that form important decisions to a proper government recordkeeping format where required.

5. What is a government record?

A government record is a record created by or received by a public body in the conduct of its affairs and includes a Cabinet record, transitory record and an abandoned record. Disposal or destruction of a government record must be approved by the Government Records Committee (GRC).

If an instant message is determined to be a government record it must be managed appropriately by transferring it to an approved government recordkeeping system. It is the content of a message not its format which determines whether it is a government record.

6. What is a transitory record?

A transitory record is a government record of temporary usefulness in any format or medium having no ongoing value beyond an immediate and minor transaction or the preparation of a subsequent record. Transitory records can and should be securely destroyed when no longer of value. Destruction of transitory records does not require authorization of the GRC. It is not necessary to retain instant messages that have been determined to be transitory.

7. What should I do if I need to capture the content of an instant message as a government record?

For the most part, instant messages tend to be transitory records with short-term value and do not need to be stored and managed in a records management system. Occasionally, an instant message conversation will evolve into a discussion that has business value and must be managed as a government record.

If you need to capture the content of an instant message as a government record, it is your responsibility to transfer the instant message to an appropriate government storage system, just as you would do if it were a phone call or a verbal discussion on the way back from a meeting.

Once the conversation evolves into information that should be retained as a record the quickest way to transfer the content to an appropriate medium is to send an email to all those involved in the conversation. The process for doing this will vary depending on the technology – please see Quick Reference – Instant Messaging (Transitioning a Chat Conversation to a Recordkeeping Format).

8. What do I do with instant messages retained on my mobile device's memory?

Instant messages retained on a mobile device should be regularly reviewed by the owner of the device with the following focus:

- transition instant messages that have become government records to a government recordkeeping system; or
- dispose of instant messages that are transitory in nature and where it has been determined that there is no business value.

Supporting Materials

OCIO Website

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/exec/ocio>

Directive – Instant Messaging

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/exec/ocio/files/directive-instant-messaging.pdf>

FYI – Instant Messaging

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/exec/ocio/files/fyi-instant-messaging.pdf>

Quick Reference – Instant Messaging

(Transitioning a Chat Conversation to a Recordkeeping Format)

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/exec/ocio/files/quick-reference-instant-messaging.pdf>

Transitory Records

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/exec/ocio/transitory-records>

Version History

Date (yyyy-mm-dd)	Version
2012-02-01	1.0
2018-09-24	2.0
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