Building the Archives of the Future:
The Electronic Records Archives

For many years, the mission of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) involved preserving the paper records that have been created over more than two centuries of our nation's government.

Now, however, we face the challenge of preserving the records of the present and future, which are increasingly electronic.   The volume and types of electronic records are expected to increase exponentially in the coming decade. NARA's response to this challenge of preserving authentic electronic records free from specific hardware and software - and providing access to these records in the future - is the Electronic Records Archives (ERA).

For over 30 years, NARA has provided archival services, such as accessioning, initial processing, description, and reference services for its electronic records holdings. However, the current method of processing files cannot support the needs of NARA's staff, clients, professionals, and researchers. Since 1998, NARA has taken bold steps to address these electronic records challenges by establishing important research partnerships for developing the requirements and evaluating new technologies needed to build the ERA System.

The goal of ERA is to enable NARA to preserve and provide access to electronic records created anywhere in the U.S. Federal Government. ERA will provide a comprehensive, systematic, and dynamic means of preserving and providing continuing access to authentic electronic records over time.

ERA will be one of the most important services that NARA can offer to the public in the coming decade.

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