Museum Information Management: Adapting to Change
Quick Guide 4: Assessing Risk

Introduction
Many museums are experiencing a reduction in resources and/or changes to their status or governance. Whatever the size, type, location or funding of your museum, it is likely that it will need to withstand the impact of significant change in the economic environment.

Effective information management is a vital tool in helping museums make important decisions and maintain confidence in all aspects of their work. For this reason it is important to understand the potential risks to information management which may be posed by change within your museum. By carrying out a risk assessment from the perspective of information management you can not only help your museum make informed decisions but also help ensure that the process of change is enabled.

This is the fourth in a series of six *Quick Guides*, aimed at helping museums identify and address the kinds of information management issues likely to arise from the kind of change now being experienced across the sector. They are designed to help you understand and tackle the impact of the external economic environment from the perspective of change management, identifying the risks, priorities and opportunities presented to your museum.

Scope
Quick Guide 4: Risk Assessment provides you with:
- A means of identifying information management risks which might be presented by change to your museum
- An understanding of how to assess and prioritise the risks identified
- Guidance for managing your information management risks
- References for further reading

Principles
Effective risk management involves the following stages:
1. **Identification of risks** which may exist
2. Assessment of the **likelihood** that a risk might happen
3. Assessment of the **severity of impact** of a risk were it to happen
4. **Prioritisation** of a risk based on assessment
5. **Identification of actions** which may help reduce or manage the level of risk
6. **Monitoring** the risk

Identifying risks
Quick Guide 1: Understanding Change provides a reminder of the eight key areas of information management. For each of these areas, consider the risks which may be presented by change to your museum. In the example below, some risks which might be encountered in the event of a separation are described. There are likely to be several risks for each area which will vary according to your museum and the nature of the change anticipated.

Information management area	Risk
1: Enabling effective information management and access	No clear responsibility for information resources across the museum
2: Informing strategic thinking	Changes to governance mean that existing information resources are not connected with corporate strategy

3: Gathering and using management information	Changes to funders or stakeholders mean that existing management information may not be appropriate.
4: Developing cohesive services and products	Existing information services and products (e.g. website) no longer reflect the museum's identity.
5: Developing effective records management	The museum no longer has access to a corporate archive and processes for records management
6: Developing and sharing skills	The museum no longer has access to specialist skills for ICT and information management.
7: Recognising the cost and value of information	In the face of organisational change information management is not perceived as a priority.
8: Fulfilling legal and ethical responsibilities	Without a parent organisation there is no corporate awareness of Data Protection or other information related legislation

Assessing risks

Each of the risks identified may vary in terms of how likely it is that the risk will actually arise, and if it does, how severe the impact of the risk will be. In order to assess the risks you have identified, score them on a scale of 1 - 5 for likelihood and severity, where 1 = less likely / mild impact and 5 = highly likely / grave impact. Use a format such as the one below to record your scores, providing notes to explain your scores where appropriate.

Risk	Likely?	Severity	Notes
1: No clear responsibility for information resources across the museum.	3	5	Staff in parent organisation assigned responsibility previously.
2: Changes to governance mean that existing information resources are not connected with corporate strategy.	3	3	Some strategic goals will remain constant; others likely to change.
3: Changes to funders or stakeholders mean that existing management information may not be appropriate.	4	3	Likely to happen but impact may not be immediate.
4: Existing information services and products (e.g. website) no longer reflect the museum's identity.	4	4	Website will not reflect new status; users likely to be confused.
5: The museum no longer has access to a corporate archive and processes for records management	5	5	Urgent need to put in place new policies to ensure no loss of corporate information.
6: The museum no longer has access to specialist skills for ICT and information management.	5	5	Absence of ICT skills & infrastructure in separated museum will have immediate impact.

Risk	Likely?	Severity	Notes
7: In the face of organisational change information management is not perceived as a priority.	4	3	Risk assessment indicates that information management must be prioritised.
8: Without a parent organisation there is no corporate awareness of Data Protection etc.	5	5	High risk of legal threat if appropriate policies & procedures not put in place.

Prioritising risks

It is likely that you will identify a large number of risks relating to information management. Set within the context of the wider landscape of organisational change these will form a small proportion of the number of issues which your museum is likely to have to tackle. For this reason it will be important to prioritise the risks identified. One means of doing this is simply to multiply the scores for likelihood and severity of impact. This will allow you to rank the risks you have identified. This means that the risks identified in our scenario would be ranked as follows:

Risk	Likely?	Severity	Priority score
5: The museum no longer has access to a corporate archive and processes for records management	5	5	25
6: The museum no longer has access to specialist skills for ICT and information management.	5	5	25
8: Without a parent organisation there is no corporate awareness of Data Protection	5	5	25
4: Existing information services and products (e.g. website) no longer reflect the museum's identity.	4	4	16
1: No clear responsibility for information resources across the museum	3	5	15
3: Changes to funders or stakeholders mean that existing management information may not be appropriate.	4	3	12
7: In the face of organisational change information management is not perceived as a priority.	4	3	12
2: Changes to governance mean that existing information resources are not connected with corporate strategy	3	3	9

If a risk has a low score, this does not mean that you need to ignore it. For example you may have a number of risks which are highly likely to happen, but which individually will not have a major impact. However the cumulative impact on information management could be substantial. Consider low-cost, low-effort means of managing these risks using the guidance in the next section.

Managing and monitoring risks

For each of the risks identified, agree one or more actions which can be undertaken in order to manage or reduce the risk. These actions will need to be incorporated into your museum's organisation-wide planning

and budget process and the priorities you have assigned will help your museum make decisions in this context. Examples of actions are:

Risk	Action
5: The museum no longer has access to a corporate archive and processes for records management	• Work with previous parent organisation to put in place policies, procedures and training for records management • Cost and source budgets to maintain corporate archive
6: The museum no longer has access to specialist skills for ICT and information management.	• Assign budget for third-party provision of ICT infrastructure and support services • Assign and train ICT liaison person to work with ICT provider

Particularly during periods of change, the risks to information management will change continuously. Risks which were initially priorities may be resolved in the short term, while the likelihood or severity of impact of others may increase. For instance in our example, an arrangement to put in place an ICT infrastructure (6 above) may be resolved swiftly, but the risk of disconnection with corporate strategy (2 above) may increase as your museum reviews its priorities.

What you can do
To assess and manage the potential risks presented by change within your museum, first review the earlier *Quick Guides* in this series in order to ensure that you have a good understanding of the nature of the change being faced by your museum, and the issues this may present. This will help you identify the likely risks which may be posed to the different aspects of information management in your museum.

Follow the steps set out above to **identify**, **assess**, **prioritise**, **manage** and **monitor** risks which exist. Ensure then that you work with colleagues across your organisation to ensure that you can communicate the risks you have identified. This will help inform your museum's decision-making based on an understanding the impact of planned change on a core function.

Further reading
The other five *Quick Guides* in this series provide more detailed advice on the steps to follow to help ensure that your information management is in the best possible shape to support your museum in times of change. The other titles in the series are:

Quick Guide 1:   Understanding Change
Quick Guide 2:   Surviving Separation
Quick Guide 3:   Museum Mergers
Quick Guide 5:   Maximising Opportunities
Quick Guide 6:   Real-life implementation

For a more detailed discussion of organisational risk management, refer to:

Chapman, Robert J., *Simple Tools and Techniques for Enterprise Risk Management,* John Wiley & Sons: 2011 ISBN 1119989973