

# Bringing Order to the Chaos: How SBO Consulting Helped Am Law 100 Firm, Nixon Peabody, Take Control of Information Governance



## Background

Nixon Peabody LLP is a prominent Am Law 100 firm with more than 600 attorneys and 13 offices across the United States. During her decade-long tenure as Chief Operating Officer, Lauri Walker oversaw every operational function of the firm, including IT, records, compliance, and administrative leadership. Like many large law firms shaped by growth and mergers, Nixon Peabody had accumulated a tangled web of systems, practices, and data repositories that had never been fully reconciled.

Information Governance (IG) had long been recognized as an area of concern, but internal initiatives to address it had faltered. A cross-functional IG team had been assembled but struggled to make meaningful progress. COVID-19 and the transition to hybrid work only accelerated the urgency to bring consistency and control to the firm's data. For Walker, IG was no longer just a compliance priority—it was a business imperative that required outside expertise and dedicated execution.

## Challenges

By the time SBO Consulting was brought in, Nixon Peabody's IG challenges were significant and deeply entrenched. There were no enforceable retention or deletion policies in place. Attorneys and staff were storing matter-related documents in a variety of locations—local drives, shared drives, and email remained, for the most part, in individual email boxes never making it to the firm's sanctioned document management system (DMS). This made it extremely difficult for matter mobility purposes as well as covering for those that were out of the office for other clients/purposes. Some firm leaders, including a prior General Counsel, actively resisted deletion altogether, advocating a "save everything forever" mindset that made risk exposure inevitable.

That exposure wasn't hypothetical. In one instance, the firm was subpoenaed in a case that had closed two decades earlier—and because the documents still existed, they had to be produced. Without a defensible deletion policy to fall back on, the firm had no shield. Meanwhile, the Iron Mountain storage bill continued to grow, filled with boxes no one had reviewed in years.

Despite repeated conversations at the leadership level, change didn't come. Internal politics, competing priorities, and the complexity of the problem kept the issue unresolved. What Walker needed wasn't another policy or another stalled initiative—she needed someone who could take over, execute, and bring order to the chaos without asking her or her team to carry the weight.

## Solutions

Walker was introduced to SBO Consulting through a trusted referral and selected Wendy Riggs based on her expertise, demeanor, and reputation for getting things done. From day one, Wendy operated not as an outside advisor, but as part of the internal team. She immediately began meeting with functional department heads and practice group leaders across the firm, building a complete picture of how information was being created, stored, and retained in practice.

She quickly discovered that the administrative side of the house was much further along—personnel files, for example, were well-organized and being purged appropriately. But on the practice side, behaviors were inconsistent and often noncompliant. Rather than pushing a one-size-fits-all framework, Wendy designed a flexible governance structure that could be adapted across departments while still creating firm-wide standards. She worked directly with every practice group leader to define their needs, understand their workflows, and find realistic paths forward.

Once the policy groundwork was in place, Wendy turned her attention to execution. She led the effort to identify legacy records for defensible deletion—both paper and electronic—and coordinated directly with the firm's IT department and vendors like Iron Mountain to begin that process.

She drafted and managed the firm's client notification campaign, set up the infrastructure to handle inquiries, and kept the initiative moving despite internal resistance. When the longtime Records Manager went out on medical leave, Wendy stepped in seamlessly, developing job descriptions, stabilizing operations, and ensuring that nothing fell through the cracks.



"At every stage, SBO did more than advise—they executed. They moved the project forward without requiring constant handholding, and without adding to the leadership team's already full plates."

Lauri Walker, COO, Nixon Peabody

## Results

Though the firm's IG transformation was still ongoing when Walker left Nixon Peabody, the change was already tangible. A comprehensive Information Governance policy had been developed and aligned with the firm's leadership.

A roadmap for defensible deletion had been launched, and legacy records were being reviewed and categorized for destruction. Costs tied to offsite storage were starting to come under control. And most importantly, the conversation around IG had shifted—from one of frustration and inertia to one of progress and accountability.

Beyond the technical outcomes, SBO succeeded in something much harder: shifting the culture. They didn't demand attention or create noise—they quietly made themselves essential.

"Of all the consultants I've worked with," Walker said, **"SBO Consulting was one of the easiest and most diligent. Wendy didn't feel like a consultant—she felt like a member of our team. She pushed projects forward without creating more work for me, and everyone at the firm loved working with her."**

What had started as a stalled initiative was now a firm-wide movement toward cleaner, safer, and more strategic information management. SBO Consulting didn't just create a policy—they made IG real.