

COVID-19 & Virtual Public Meeting Records

Guidelines for Retention Compliance with Virtual Meetings and Broadcasts



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Overview of COVID-19 Virtual Meetings Recommendations

The State Archives and Public Records Administration oversees records management functions including records management advice, assistance, and consultation to all state and municipal agencies.

Records management is a comprehensive task encompassing all records, regardless of format or media.

This guide serves as a resource providing practical recommendations and guidelines for legal compliance with Open Meetings records retention while Emergency Declaration – Public Meetings and Public Records Requests, [Executive Order 20-05](#) is in effect.

Things to Know

Why should I care about retention of meeting broadcasts?

The proper preservation of records promotes government transparency and ensures that generations of Rhode Islanders will have continued access to records of their government, its work and decision-making processes, and encourages community trust and participation. It is also important to remember that retention is part of compliance with the Open Meetings Law, R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 42-46.

What is Records Management?

Records Management is the upkeep of records created or received by your agency and the efficient care of their creation, use, and preservation regardless of format. Records Management improves the flow of information in your agency and preserves agency information for the entire record life cycle.

What is Records Retention?

The minimum amount of time a record should legally be maintained or retained, regardless of its format. Meeting broadcasts or recordings are records and therefore need to be retained for a specific amount of time in order to remain compliant with records retention laws. Retaining these broadcasts or recordings ensures transparency and accessibility to the public.

What is a Records Retention Schedule?

The document that establishes the official retention, maintenance, and disposal requirements for a record, based upon its value.

What does format mean?

Records can be any medium. Broadcasts and video of public meetings are a record. Common formats of records include recordings and digital media saved on disc or USB drive, paper, or electronic records such as PDFs or files (e.g..doc, .docx, .rtf., .txt, .xls, .mp4, .wav).

What is a life cycle?

Records go through four primary stages: creation (or receipt); maintenance and use; active storage until retention has been met; and disposal (or permanent preservation).



When do I contact the State Archives and Public Records Administration?

Contact the State Archives and Public Records Administration if you have any questions regarding the use of the retention schedule or how to preserve electronic records.

To contact the State Archives by email, send questions to statearchives@sos.ri.gov or call us at (401) 222-2353.

Before Starting

- Know the type of digital record you will be creating or receiving.
- Review the [General Retention Schedules](#) available on the Secretary of State's website.



**For Open Meetings for State Agencies, view GRS1
For Open Meetings for Municipal government, view LG4**

- Determine how your agency will record your meeting. Does the platform allow for simple export of the broadcast for retention purposes?
 - Zoom calls can be recorded and saved: [Additional Information](#)
 - Skype calls can be recorded and saved: [Additional information](#)
 - Facebook Live can be shared and downloaded.
- Ensure your agency has a specified location to store open meetings records and recordings. This can be on a local hard drive, a shared network drive, a cloud-based storage platform (Office 365 or AWS, for example) or a USB drive. It is important that you save and store your recordings in a secure, stable environment.

Getting Started

Protecting your Records

- Keep your digital records in a safe, specified storage. Put safeguards in place so that no record will be deleted prematurely and without approval. Examples of common safeguards include password protecting the file or storage device, storing in a restricted access shared or network folder, or storing locally on a hard drive.



Include the date of the meeting, its series name (per the Retention Schedule), and other vital identifying information specific to your agency's records management plan to assist with proper identification and destruction in the future.

- Do not store records without proper file naming.
- Organize your digital records in clearly labeled computer folders with consistent language.

- Do not mix records series or retention periods in a single file folder. Clearly designate individual meetings.
- Videos and/or audio recordings must be retained directly by your agency or public body.

Retaining your Records

- Records of public meetings must be retained by the originating agency or board per the Retention Schedule. This means you must have the ability to watch or listen to the entire recording for the entire length of time it is retained.
- The General Retention Schedules (GRS) provide the required minimum retention for public records and cover the types of records created or received by all state and local government agencies.
- For Open Meetings, GRS1 – [Executive, High Level, and Policy Making Records](#) states the following:
 - GRS1.7 Meeting Minutes
Accounts of the proceedings of any meeting or sub-committee meeting of the agency. Includes recorded minutes of meetings, agendas and supporting documentation. Supporting documentation may include but is not limited to meeting notices, meeting dockets, roll call votes, correspondence, reports, and revised agendas (R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-7).
 - e) Recording audio or video tapes and/or digital media (revised 1/2009)
Retention: Retain six (6) months after verbatim transcription and approval of minutes or proceedings, or retain five (5) years if recordings are not transcribed. Retain transcripts permanently.
 - *Note: Retain tapes permanently (unless transcribed) of proceedings, debate or actions of boards, commissions, committees or councils document significant or landmark issues*
- Municipal Department Records Retention Schedules (LG) provide the required minimum retention for public records and cover the types of records that are specifically created by Local Government departments and entities.

- For Open Meetings, LG4 - [Municipal Boards, Commissions, Committees and Councils](#) states the following:
 - LG 4.1 - Meetings & Hearings (Formerly LG4.1.1 through LG4.1.11) Accounts of the proceedings and actions of any board, commission, committee or council. Included are Council Meetings, Commission Meetings, Committee Meetings, Board Meetings, Business Meetings, Financial Town Meetings, School Committee/Board Meetings, Special Meetings, Task Forces, Work Sessions, Executive Sessions and Hearings. Includes minutes, transcripts, recordings and notes.
 - (f) Recordings for Public Broadcast
Video or digital images created of the proceedings of any municipal board, commission, committee or council and used for public broadcast.
Retention: Retain three (3) years.
 - *Note: Retain tapes permanently (unless transcribed) if proceedings, debate or actions of municipal boards, commissions, committees or councils document significant or landmark issues*

 **The broadcast of your meeting is not permanent; however, the Minutes of your meeting are a permanent record and must be retained by your agency.**

Going Forward

When should I destroy eligible records?

Records can be destroyed after they have met their minimum retention as established in the records retention schedule (see page 5). For best results, plan to submit for annual destruction at the end of the fiscal year or calendar year.

 **Note:** You can submit for records destruction at any time. However, we recommend creating a schedule within your agency for consistent records destruction as part of your records management workflow.

What happens when I am ready to destroy eligible records?

Document all records that the agency is ready to destroy in the Certificate of Records Destruction (CRD).

The following information must be included on the CRD for each record:

- Name of agency or department;
- Division or unit within the agency;
- Date of submission;
- Record Series Number;
- Record Series Title;
- Date span of records;
- Volume to be destroyed; and
- Confirmation that all retention conditions have been met.

The CRD must be signed by a records custodian or other staff member designated by the Department Head. Once signed by the Department Head or designee, submit the CRD to the State Archives and Public Records Administration for approval.



The CRD form is available for download on the Secretary of State's website on the [Records Management](#) page.

What does the law say about Open Meetings?

To view the entire Open Meetings law, R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 42-46, please visit the [Rhode Island General Assembly's Website](#).

For additional information on Open Meetings compliance, please visit the Attorney General's [Open Government](#) website.

Helpful Resources

- Public Records Administration promulgated regulations.
 - [100-RICR-40-05-1](#)
- Records Retention Schedules
 - [Records Management webpage](#)
- R. I. Gen. Laws for record keeping
 - [R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-6](#). Public records custody and disposal
- Executive Order regarding Open Meetings
 - [Executive Order 20-05](#)
- COVID-19 Updates and Resources
 - Contact: RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov
 - Information: [Coronavirus Information Webpage](#)