

Guide to Managing Email

Getting Started with Public Records in Email



statearchives@sos.ri.gov



401.222.2353



www.sos.ri.gov



[@RIsecState](https://twitter.com/RIsecState)

This guide was produced by
the Rhode Island Department of State



Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State

Overview of Email

Emails are an important part of the daily business for all organizations. For government agencies, they may be public records and subject to R.I. Gen. Laws § [38-2-2\(4\)](#). The State Archives and Public Records Administration oversees records management functions including records management advice, assistance, and consultation to all state and municipal agencies.

This guide contains recommendations for creating trustworthy, identifiable, and meaningful records of email, just as every other public record created and received by an agency.

Things to Know

Why organize email?

Active email management is part of records management and just as it's vital to organize your paper records, records received via email are equally as important. The amount of born digital records being created continues to grow at a rapid rate and organized email folders make it easier to find email when needed.

Is email a 'type' of record?

No. Email is a format that records can be created or received in. The content of the email will determine if it is a public record and how long it may need to be retained.

Well-maintained records, including email, ensure accuracy, ease of use within the agency, adherence to the law, and public access.



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

How do I preserve email?

Emails should be preserved based on the retention of the type of record they are. This will be defined in a records retention schedule.

Before Starting

- Establish the information necessary to maintain a complete record. At minimum, all email messages should include:
 - Sender name;
 - Email address;
 - Recipient name;
 - Cc and bcc recipients;
 - Date of creation;
 - Time of transmission;
 - Subject (or name) of the message;
 - Email Signature of both parties;
 - Sender's name;
 - Title or Official Position;
 - Name of the Agency.
- Maintain all attachment documents and materials sent with the original email message.
- Establish who will be responsible for the creation and maintenance of your internal agency email policy.

Getting Started

Organizing your Inbox:

- For best practice in managing e-mail, follow these steps to ensure long term access and readability:
 - Familiarize yourself with the Records Retention Schedule for your agency (if one is currently in effect) and the General Records Schedules and/or Municipal Departments Records Schedules. Use the Schedule(s) to sort your email records by their records series.
 - Utilize the Rules function for your email inbox to sort messages into the appropriate folders based on the Records Schedule(s).

- Locate the Rules function in Microsoft Outlook under the “Move” heading in your “Home” screen to create a rule for automatic sorting. Follow the steps in the dialog box:

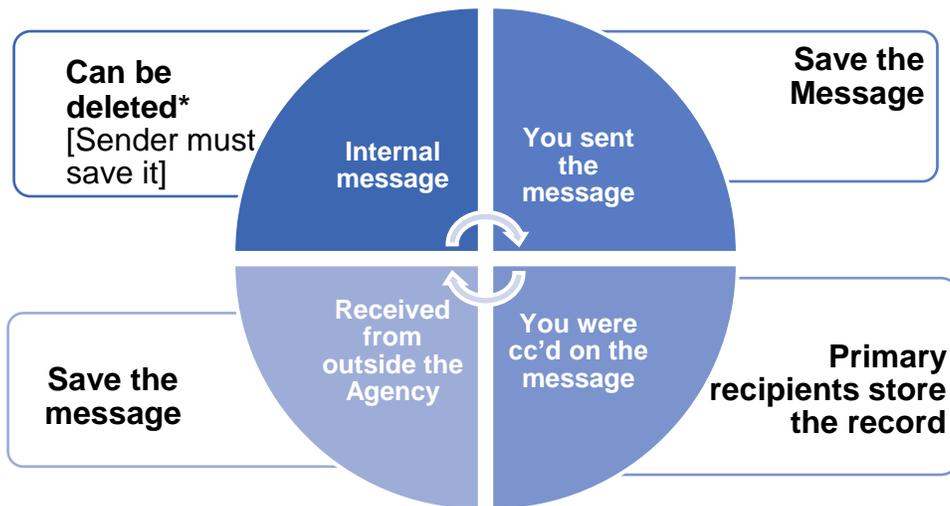
- Maintain uniformity in your records by organizing your email records as you organize your paper records. This promotes effective retrieval and timely identification and disposal of records.
- Delete only when records have met their retention according to an approved Records Retention Schedule and you have received an approved CRD.



A Certificate of Records Destruction (CRD) must be submitted prior to deletion and permanent destruction. Wait until the CRD has been approved by the State Archivist before you destroy/delete email records.

Creating an Agency Policy:

- Know who within the agency is responsible for capturing an official copy of external messages.
- The primary recipient (name is in the “to” field) is responsible for maintaining the message.
- If you are not the primary recipient, (your name is in the “cc” field), maintain the record based on its contents and importance to current projects.



- Agency policy should dictate who is responsible for capturing the official copy of the email record. Designate someone in the agency, or in each division for a complex agency, as the person who prepares [Certificates of Records Destruction \(CRD\)](#) and submits them to the Public Records Administration.



Municipalities and local quasi-public agencies must submit CRDs to the Local Government Records Program.

- Designate someone in the agency, or for large, complex agencies, in each division as the person who prepares and oversees the deletion and permanent destruction of eligible email.



This may require coordination with your agency IT department.

- Establish a strategy for the preservation of email which qualifies for long-term or permanent retention. For further information on long-term and permanent retention see the Digital Preservation Plan guidance document.

Going Forward

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

Contact the State Archives and Public Records Administration once the agency or municipality is ready to institute a file naming policy and we will provide guidance and training, as needed.

Helpful Resources

- Public Records Administration promulgated regulations.
 - <https://rules.sos.ri.gov/regulations/part/100-40-05-1>
- Approved Records Retention Schedules
 - <http://sos.ri.gov/divisions/frequent-filers/records-management>