Records Management for Local Government Agencies

The Rhode Island State Archives and Public Records Administration is part of the Division of Archives, Library, and Public Information within the Office of the Secretary of State. We are responsible for the following:

- The State Archives preserves and makes available for research Rhode Island's historical public records from 1638 – present;
- The Public Records Administration provides records management assistance and storage services to state agencies; and
- We also provide advice on records management to Local Government.

IS IT A PUBLIC RECORD?

The crucial factor in deciding whether a document is a public record depends on its function and contents, not the physical means used to create, send, and keep the document. (Reference: R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-1-1.1).

Questions to ask yourself:
1. Do the contents concern public business?
2. Does it serve a public function?
3. Whose office is it from?
IS IT A PUBLIC RECORD?

Public Records can be any media and come in many forms, such as:

- Correspondence (paper, email, text documents)
- Maps/GIS
- Work Calendars
- Sound recordings
- Spreadsheets
- Textual documents
- Diagrams, drawings, pictorial and graphic works
- Databases
- Photographs and film
- Video recordings
- Web content, blogs
- Photographs and film
- Video recordings

WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL RECORD?

- COOP and disaster plans (ri.dplan.org)
- Land titles and deeds
- Leases
- Payroll
- Tax records
- Insurance policies
- Historical documents
WHAT IS RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

1. Management of records and information that support the short-term business and long-term interests of an organization;
2. Classification, filing, storage, retention and disposition policies (preserve or destroy); and
3. The care of records for their entire life cycle.

Life Cycle of a Record

You are responsible to maintain records for their entire life cycle, regardless of format.
WHY RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

We manage Public Records because they:

- Provide **documentary evidence** of all agency business activities;
- Enhance **government transparency**, responsiveness, and public trust;
- Ensure **continuity of government** operations, **recovery from disasters**;
- **Protect** state and citizen rights and interests;
- Promote better grounded agency **decision making**; and
- **Preserve** **institutional memory**.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AND YOUR TEAM’S ROLE?

Agencies bear responsibility for the establishment of records management programs and for the proper management of their records. You need to ensure that your team is knowledgeable about how to …

- **Identify** public records in all media for appropriate care;
- **Organize/classify** and file records in a consistent way across the agency so that you and your staff can retrieve them quickly when you, fellow workers, other agencies, or the public needs to consult them; and
- **Maintain** records in good order and condition so that they remain usable for as long as they need to be retained.
OUTCOMES OF POOR RECORDS MANAGEMENT

- An inability to properly perform the core mission;
- An inability to resume operations after a disaster;
- Legal penalties for failure to find and produce records;
- Public distrust due to inability to produce controversial or requested records; and
- Costs for remediation of damaged records that have not yet met retention.

OUTCOMES OF GOOD RECORDS MANAGEMENT

- Ability to properly perform the core mission;
- Effectively retrieve and dispose records;
- Ensure regulatory compliance;
- Safeguard important information;
- Cut costs and save time and effort;
- Better management decision making;
- Preserve agency knowledge; and
- Control the generation and growth of records.
WHAT IS A RETENTION SCHEDULE?

What is a Retention Schedule?
A document establishing the official retention, maintenance, and disposal requirements for a series or type of record based on administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical values for the scheduled records.
(Reference R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-2)

Municipal Departments Records Retention Schedules (LG)
- Records Schedules specific to Local Government Departments.

Agency Specific Schedules
- Agency-specific schedules govern the retention and disposition of records unique to a particular state agency’s programs and functions.

General Schedules (GRS)
- General Records Schedules cover the types of records created or received by all state and local government agencies.

Current Schedules
- Approved schedules can be accessed online, at http://sos.ri.gov/divisions/frequent-filers/records-management
# BREAKING DOWN THE RETENTION SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record Series Number</th>
<th>Record Series Name</th>
<th>Record Series Description</th>
<th>Retention Period (How long it must be kept)</th>
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<tbody>
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**CREATION OF A RETENTION SCHEDULE**

- State Archives drafts the Schedule based on Agency information
- Draft Schedules are sent to Agency for comment
- Proposed Schedule is submitted to RIAG and RIAOG for approval
DESIGNATING STORAGE

- Make it secure – locked, fire/water alarms;
- Keep it dry – not near water or sewer pipes;
- Maintain a pest-free, contaminant free environment; and
- Prohibit storage of non-record materials.

DESTRUCTION AND DISPOSITION

Certificate of Records Destruction (CRD) is submitted
CRD is approved and signed by State Archivist and a designated Agency representative
CRD is returned to the Agency and destruction is carried out appropriately
WHAT ARE ELECTRONIC RECORDS?

- Electronic Mail;
- Digitized (scanned records);
- Word processed documents;
- Database management systems; and
- Web-based pages.

What do I save?

- Internal message
- Received from Outside the Agency
- You sent the Message
- You were cc'd on the message
- Save the message
- Primary recipients store the record

*unless edited or updated by you
Organizing Your Mailbox

Imagine people need to find your information quickly
- Determine the category of the record.
- Think in terms of file folders with names or titles.
- Your Agency Records Control Schedule is your best guide.

Organizing means Naming + Classifying + Filing
- Save the entire email with all header/footer information and all previous messages in the thread.
- Save all associated attachments (unless they are completely irrelevant to the message).
- Apply your organization’s file naming conventions (if available) or use meaningful file names when saving email.

File Naming Guidance
- Keep file names short, but meaningful.
- Use only alpha-numeric characters.
- Do not use spaces.
- Put the most important information first.
- Include dates and format them consistently.
- Include a version number.
- Use leading zeros when using sequential numbering.
- Don’t overwrite file extensions.
- Be consistent.
Email Best Practices

- Limit the email to one main topic to ensure accuracy in filing/classifying the message, when possible.
- Use meaningful subject lines that reflect the content of the email message.
- Use meaningful and descriptive titles on email attachments.
- Be careful with personal comments and opinions – they will become part of the record.

DIGITIZING PUBLIC RECORDS

Step 1: Draft a policy (review annually)
Considerations: What is your preservation plan? What will be the strategy to maintain the records in electronic format? How will you convert or migrate the records?

Step 2: Determine the “official” copy of the record

Step 3: Identify scanning requirements based on record retention
Consult the regulation and standards. A Digital Preservation Plan is required for records with a retention of 10+ years.

The Key: You must be able to support and provide access to records for the entire lifecycle.
In Review

- **Records Management Accountability** Establish accountability for the identification and safekeeping of all agency public records in order to adequately document or provide evidence of agency activities.

- **Public Records – All Media** Know that the content and function, not the medium, determine whether a document is a public record. Public records may exist in any format.

- **Records Retention Schedules** Understand that identifying and codifying classes of non-permanent and permanent agency records lies at the heart of effective information/records management.

- **Timely Disposal** Attend to the timely disposal of eligible non-permanent records

- **Records Preservation** Develop appropriate safeguards, preservation policies, strategies, and procedures for long-term and permanent records and information.

Rules of Thumb

- 5% of records are considered essential records

- The first time you apply retention schedules can be time consuming.

- Generally, 33% of records are eligible for immediate disposal.

- After that, records eligible for destruction per the approved schedules and regardless of media type, should be destroyed on an annual basis (CY or FY).

- Generally, 3-5% of records have permanent historical value.
Questions?

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