

Managing Public Records In Rhode Island

Getting Started with Records Management



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Overview of Managing Records

The State Archives and Public Records Administration oversees records management functions for all state and municipal agencies. This includes records management advice, assistance, and consultation. Records management is a comprehensive task encompassing all records, regardless of format or media.

This guide serves as a resource providing practical recommendations for maintaining records created and received in daily business.

Things to Know

Why do I need to care about records management?

The proper preservation of records promotes government transparency and ensures that generations of Rhode Islanders will have continued access to records of their government and encourages community trust and participation.

What is Records Management?

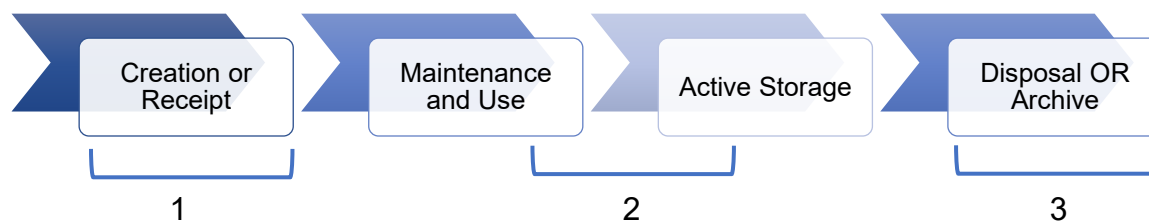
Records Management is the upkeep of records created or received by your agency and the efficient care of their creation, use, and preservation regardless of format. Records Management improves the flow of information in your agency and preserves agency information for the entire record life cycle.

What is a format?

Records can be any medium. Common formats of records include paper, recordings and digital media such as disc or USB drive, or electronic records such as PDFs or word processing files (ie. .doc, .docx, .rtf, .txt, .xls).

What is a life cycle?

Records go through three primary stages: creation (or receipt), maintenance and use & active storage, and disposal (or permanent preservation).



What is Records Retention?

The minimum amount of time a record should legally be maintained or "retained," regardless of its format.

What is Records Retention Schedule?

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

What is a Records Management Plan?

A records management plan outlines your agency's process for ensuring that records are accessible for the entire lifecycle and retention period of the record. It establishes the scope, legislative mandates, and records roles, responsibilities, and processes for the Agency. A sample plan for agencies is available from the Public Records Administration to assist with document organization and preservation.

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

Contact the State Archives and Public Records Administration once the agency or municipality is ready to draft a record management plan, create a records retention schedule, or to schedule a training.

Before Starting

- Gather information on the types of records you will be creating or receiving (i.e. forms, constituent requests, or internal working documents)
- Review the [General Retention Schedules](#) available on the Secretary of State's Website.
- Determine whether or not your agency has a retention schedule.

Getting Started

Protecting your Records

- Keep records in safe storage, protected from exposure to water, excess heat, or humidity, when not in use.
- Do not store records on the floor.
- File all records in folders with clear and consistent labels.



Remember, the records retention schedules are an excellent resource for consistent file naming based on record function.

- When boxing records, do not mix records series or retention periods in a single box. This will complicate the process of destruction in the future.

Organize your Records

- Organize records you create and receive by year and according to their name and function (record series).
- Make clear on all files and boxes what office and administration created the records.
- Establish how long a record is of daily use and when it can be designated inactive.
- Avoid duplication: Limit to 1-2 copies of reports, studies, or other records.

- Inactive records can be stored off-site at the State Records Center. Pricing is available in MPA-163.
- Records of permanent, enduring, or historical value may be eligible for transfer to the State Archives.



What is Enduring Value? Records which document the actions of an elected official, detail important agency duties, record events of significant public attention or community groups, or are otherwise deemed permanent by the approved retention schedule.

Keys to Storing your Records

- For safety of the records do not store them on the floor or stack boxes more than 4 or 5 high; doing so can result in crushed or otherwise damaged records and boxes.



- Standardize your storage for consistency and ease of use and access. Standard record carton boxes, 1.2CF, store letter or legal-size files. Large boxes are extremely heavy and weak in the middle.



- Use your vertical space, if erecting shelving ensure it is at least 18" below sprinklers and 3-4" above the floor.



- Hanging file folders are appropriate when storing records in file cabinets, however, hanging files should be removed if records are transferred into a record carton for continued storage.
- Monitor the amount of records in a single box. When full, a single record carton can weigh a minimum of 40 pounds. For your safety and the safety of records do not overfill record cartons.

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. For best results, plan to submit for annual destruction at the end of the fiscal year or calendar year.



Note: For most agencies, the destruction eligibility date is January 1 of the following year after records have met their retention. For example, a record with a 3-year retention created in October 2019, would be eligible for destruction on January 1, 2023.

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 (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. The form is available for download on the Secretary of State's website.

How do I know if a record should be transferred to the State Archives?

Records of enduring value represent a wide range of record series and record types and include the records of individuals leaving public office and historical records of state agencies. Ask the following questions to help distinguish what may be considered to have enduring value to the people of Rhode Island:

- Did the events or functions documented by the records provoke statutory revision? Are they related to policy decisions or legal opinions?

- Do the records document anything that led to significant organizational, policy, or procedural changes (or reaffirmation)?
- Do the records document events or functions that involve extensive litigation?
- Do the records document anything that produced a major economic, environmental, or health impact on state? (Positive or negative)
- Do the records document the actions of elected officials, office sponsored events and projects, communication and correspondence, or other government functions?



Fiscal records, Personnel records, and other records with non-permanent retention periods must be maintained by the office or successor until the retention has been met.

- Do the records document unusually high use of agency/government/public resources and expenditures?
- Do the records document activities or events that drew increased public attention?
- Do the records document prominent/notorious individual(s) in the community?
- Do the records document loss or saving of life?
- Are there records within the files that deal with an unusual, undocumented, or “under-documented” group or event?

If you are still unsure, contact the State Archives for assistance!

Helpful Resources

- Public Records Administration promulgated regulations.
 - <https://rules.sos.ri.gov/Regulations/Part/100-50-00-1>
- 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

Note: If you have specific questions about an entity or branch of government and the preservation of their records, please contact the State Archives for additional information on records transfer.