

# Making Records Management a Daily Practice

## A Guide for New and Current Government Employees



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## Overview

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 on the proper care of records during their lifecycle, including the preservation of historical records in their care. Records management is an essential practice to carry out daily agency business, encompassing all records, regardless of format or media.

This guide is intended to serve as a resource, providing recommendations to create a reliable system to manage your records as an employee of the State of Rhode Island.

## Things to Know

### Why is records management important?

Having a records management program ([R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-7](#)) at an agency (as defined in [R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-2\(1\)](#)) enhances the ability to efficiently perform the agency's core mission, effectively retrieve and dispose of records, ensure regulatory compliance with State Law (including the [Access to Public Records Act](#)), and safeguard important information to preserve agency knowledge.

### Am I a records manager?

All State and municipal employees are, to a certain extent, records managers, because they are inevitably going to create, receive, and/or handle records of their employing agency as part of their responsibilities, so it is essential that employees are familiar with basic aspects of records management.

### What are public records?

Public records are any documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, or other material, regardless of format (paper, digital, etc.), that are created or received in connection with the transaction of official business of any agency as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the government.



**Email and social media are public records which must be preserved based on their scheduled retention.**

## **How do I learn about records at my agency?**

Review the applicable [agency records retention schedule](#) and familiarize yourself with which records you will create, receive, or handle in your day-to-day work.

If an agency does not have an approved agency specific schedule that applies to unique records created by that agency, additional common records are covered in the [General Retention Schedules](#) (GRS) that apply to all agencies.

## **How do I find and use retention schedules?**

All up-to-date retention schedules published by the Public Records Administration are [available online](#), with additional information and instructions available [here](#), and a quick guide on how to read and use a schedule [here](#).

If a record is not scheduled, it cannot be destroyed (as it is considered permanent) until it is scheduled on an agency specific or general retention schedule. Contact the Public Records Administration to identify the best course of action until the record is eligible via schedule amendment.

## **What is a record series?**

Records retention schedules are made up of specific record series based on a group of records that have the same function and document the same activity and are assigned a distinct retention period. Record series apply to physical and digital records.

## **Are there rules for destroying records?**

Yes. Records created or received by an agency or agency employee cannot be destroyed until they have met retention and have been approved for destruction via the Certification of Records Destruction (CRD) form, which is available for download with instructions [online](#).

Only after the approved CRD is counter-signed by the State Archivist and Public Records Administrator and returned to the agency can records be destroyed.

## **How do I contact the State Archives and Public Records Administration?**

Contact the State Archives and Public Records Administration with questions about how to manage your records at [records@sos.ri.gov](mailto:records@sos.ri.gov) or [localgov@sos.ri.gov](mailto:localgov@sos.ri.gov) for municipalities.

## Before Starting

- Identify established agency organizational systems to arrange and file day-to-day records that are created or received, based on records retention schedules.
  - If additional organizational systems are necessary, consult with those familiar with the records at the agency to establish new structures.
- Make records management part of your daily routine to prevent unnecessary, and sometimes costly, records identification and clean up in the future.
- Name files based on Records Retention Schedules to facilitate access and to make the process of disposing records at the end of their lifecycle easier. For digital files, refer to the [Guide to File Naming](#) for additional information.



**You can't destroy what you can't identify. If records are not scheduled, they cannot be destroyed.**

## Getting Started

### Organize and Protect Your Records

Records must be protected from damage and/or loss to ensure records are accessible for their entire lifecycle and retention period.

#### Paper Records

1. Keep records in safe storage when not in use, protected from exposure to water from below and above, excess heat, or humidity;
2. Do not store records directly on the floor. Use shelving at least 4" off the floor, when possible, to protect records and make use of vertical space;
3. File all records in folders with clear and consistent labels;
4. Box records when they become inactive annually using standard size records boxes (1.2 CF), not bankers or copy paper boxes; and
5. Organize records by records series and retention periods when boxing records. Do not mix records series or retention periods in a single box.



**Mixing records series in the same box complicates future destruction and impedes locating records when needed for agency operations.**

## Digital Records

1. Use short, meaningful, consistent file names;
2. Use alphanumeric characters only, separated by underscores, not spaces;
3. Include creation dates and version numbers;
4. Use leading zeros for sequential numbers (i.e., "05");
5. Do not overwrite file extensions;
6. Prevent unauthorized access by locking your computer when stepping away; and
7. Store on designated shared drives, OneDrive, or other backed up hard drive.



**Do not save digital records on private storage, a computer's desktop, or portable disks (i.e., CDs, flash drives, etc.), which are not backed up and risk record loss or deterioration.**

## Email Records

1. Use folders to separate emails by records series and retention periods;
2. Use rules to sort emails automatically (i.e., by sender, by keywords, etc.); and
3. Retain all emails sent and received until they have met their retention.



**Maintain working/access copies of digital and email records and save preservation or permanent copies in a separate location than access copies.**

## Going Forward

### Storing Inactive State Records

The State Records Center (SRC) is the approved offsite storage facility for State agency records that are no longer needed for day-to-day work.

#### **Step 1:** Establish or confirm SRC agency account

- Email [records@sos.ri.gov](mailto:records@sos.ri.gov) to request a SRC agency account number.
- If needed, complete the required forms to establish a SRC agency account.

### **Step 2:** Identify inactive records for storage

- Records that have not yet met their retention and are not needed on a daily basis are eligible to be sent to the SRC.

### **Step 3:** Submit transmittal forms

- Only records that have been fully described can be sent into storage.
- An approved [new box transmittal form and cover sheet](#) are required before records can be picked up for offsite storage.
- Review § 1.7 of the [PRA State Agency Manual](#), a [video screen recording walkthrough](#), and the [transmittal checklist](#) for complete instructions.

### **Step 4:** Store inactive records

- Records are eligible for pickup once approved transmittal forms have been returned to the agency.
- The Public Records Administration assists in inventory control and annual destruction of eligible records stored at the SRC.

## For the Future

### Access to Public Records Act (APRA)

An APRA ([RI General Law 38-2](#)) request is a way to formally request open public records that are not readily available that can be submitted directly to the agency or department that created the document. Agencies may need to consult with legal counsel for any records part of an APRA request.

Successful records management will ensure that records can be easily identified and located for all records requests, whether records are stored onsite or offsite.

### Records Destruction

Records can be destroyed after they have met their minimum retention, as established in the records retention schedule, and a [Certification of Records Destruction](#) (CRD) has been submitted and approved by the Public Records Administration.



**Destroy records annually (CY or FY) to ensure intellectual integrity over agency records.**

## What information is required in the CRD?

- Agency/Department name;
- Division/Unit name, *if applicable*;
- Date of submission;
- Record series number and title;
- Date span of records;
- Volume of records to be destroyed;
- **STATE AGENCIES ONLY:** Certification whether records have been to the State Records Center or not (*if yes, a .csv list of SKP Box Numbers/barcodes is required*);
- Certification that records have been reviewed, all retention conditions have been met, and records are authorized for destruction; and
- Signature from the Department Head or Records Custodian.

For additional information, refer to the [Certification of Records Destruction Instructions](#).

## Helpful Resources

- [Public Records Administration Regulations](#)
- [Public Records, RI General Law 38](#)
- [Additional Guidance Documents](#)

*Including the following common guides:*

- Digitizing Public Records
- Guide to Managing Email
- Avoiding Disaster: Emergency Preparedness Guide
- [Records Retention Schedules](#)
- [Digitizing Public Records Resources](#)
- [Public Records Administration State Agency Manual](#)
- [Transmittal Forms and SRC Resources](#)
- [Past Webinars](#)