

Starting A Records Management Program

By Terry Baxter, CA

Records Management Technical Bulletins

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The International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) is devoted to advancing the professionalization of the Office of Municipal Clerk and improving the efficiency of municipal government. The IIMC provides its members with educational, conference, reference, research, and informational services designed to keep them informed of changes in the professional community.



The National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) is a professional association dedicated to the improvement of federal, state, and local government records and information management programs and the professional development of government records administrators and archivists.



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Preface

Like every organization, local governments create and maintain large quantities of records. Many of these records not only are of great value to the local government, but also are of concern and essential to the citizens of the community. Federal and state-mandated program requirements, changes in growth and development patterns, expanded service needs, the use of computers and other technologies for creating and using information, and the proliferation of copies in various formats, have all contributed to this enormous accumulation of records. Each publication is intended to make available to local governments the basic principles, policies, and guidelines that should be followed in establishing a sound records management program and in carrying out sound records management practices.

The series is intended for local officials, with limited resources, who lack formal records management or archival training but who have custodial responsibility for records. These local governments include townships, villages, cities, counties, school districts, and other local political subdivisions and special-purpose districts. Each of the following publications in the series includes a bibliography that refers to other reading for more detailed information and guidance.

Overview:

Starting a Records Management Program, The Daily Management of Records and Information, Making Your Records Management Program Successful, Managing Records on Limited Resources, Funding Your Records Management Project

Creation, Collection and Storage:

Identifying and Locating Your Records, Establishing Records Retention, The Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities, Developing a Records Storage System

Preservation, Promotion, Use and Access:

Archives for Local Governments, Protecting Records, Using and Storing Microfilm

Care, Management, and Preservation of Electronic Records:

E-Mail Management, Selecting and Using Document Imaging Systems, Managing Electronic Records, Preparing for E-Discovery

Copies of these bulletins are available on the IIMC and NAGARA websites.
IIMC at www.iimc.com • www.nagara.org

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Why Bother?

When people think about the needs of local government, especially in relation to how it serves the public, records rarely come to mind. But take a closer look. Public records are vital, both to the operation of government and to the lives of citizens that it serves. While there are a number of reasons to value public records, the following four are especially significant.

Transparency. Local governments build trust with their citizens by making as much of their decision-making process as possible open to public scrutiny. Even if citizens disagree with a decision, they will trust the governmental process if they can see how that decision was made and what evidence was used to support it.

Accountability. This builds on transparency. In a representative democracy, government actors make decisions that they believe are in our common best interests. When citizens disagree, they elect new actors to make decisions with which they agree. Public records show what decisions are made, how they are determined, and who made them.

Citizen rights. Public records document and guarantee citizen rights and privileges. When a person votes, drives a car, vacations abroad, receives social security checks, grants a sewer easement, pays taxes, or conducts any number of other interactions with government – records document these rights and responsibilities. Records also document the condition of a person. Birth and death records, marriage and divorce records, citizenship and residency records are all part of a documentary story. They tell, with support of the law, who we are.

History and culture. Records also exist to transmit the knowledge and stories of one generation to others. Many local government records, once their everyday use is past, are preserved as archives. These records connect people to both the past and the future.

It is clear that local government records are important. They need to be managed, for both the agencies that create them and the public that these

agencies serve. The following sections provide guidance in developing a Records Management Program.

Public Records Laws and Local Government Records

In most cases, local governments operate under state government laws and rules. Even in jurisdictions with home rule provisions, state laws apply. Public records laws, sometimes known as open records laws, should not be confused with the Freedom of Information Act (or FOIA). The latter is a federal law and primarily applies to federal records.

Public records laws are the basis for most public records policies at the local government level. They usually define a public record and records custodians, delineate access and privacy requirements, describe mandatory care and preservation responsibilities, proscribe the records retention process, and identify archival records as well as how they should be managed.

In addition, many states use the administrative rules process to authorize the state archives (or other state agency with authority to set rules related to recordkeeping) to administer the public records law in more detail.

When setting up a new records program, it is wise to familiarize yourself with the public records law for your jurisdiction, as well as any administrative rules that apply, when planning your program functions, facilities, and staff. Some states publish compilations of these laws and rules for easy reference.

Organizational Placement

Local government records programs operate under a number of organizational locations. Placement is an important consideration, whether you are creating a formal program from a set of existing responsibilities or are creating the program from scratch. Most locations have advantages and disadvantages that should be considered when structuring your program. The following are some common organizational locations and their advantages and disadvantages.

Clerk's Office. Municipal and county clerks' offices are probably the most common locations for local government records programs. In many cases, they are constitutional and elected offices that have a long and established responsibility for maintaining the jurisdiction's records. They are often the office of record for the main elected officials of municipal government and the place where recorded documents (like property filings, marriage licenses and ordinances) are filed.

The advantages to establishing a records management program in the clerk's office can include:

- the long tradition many of these offices have with preserving records. They may routinely perform many of the functions required in a records management program;
- an association with elected officials and other policymakers can boost program stability and funding;
- clerk's offices are often mandated by law to perform certain records management functions; and
- their physical and organizational placement often enhances their status as "official" recordskeepers in the public's eye.

Disadvantages to placement in the clerk's office can include:

- resistance to including areas of records management (like retention scheduling or archives management) that are unfamiliar to the office's established functions;
- the political nature of the office can reduce the appearance of neutrality that is useful to a records management program;
- records management functions can get lost among other functions required of the clerk's office. Example: can records management preempt court administration?

Auditor's Office. Another common location for records programs is in the auditor's office. Auditors are often elected officials, but can also be appointed. Auditor's Offices often enjoy independence from other organizational offices, and are accustomed to working across all organizational functions.

Advantages to programs in the Auditor's Office include:

- political independence of the office creates independence in key records functions;
- can create easier access to resistant programs;
- can create a better link between records functions and "good government" activities.

Disadvantages to working in the Auditor's Office

- can create distrust if programs see records as gathering information for audits;
- Auditor's Offices can be politicized and a records program can become embroiled;
- can be influence differential between audit functions/needs and records functions/needs

Administrative Services. Records programs can be located in local government departments that provide general administrative services. This is often the case for programs that have grown out of records centers or other large file storage and retrieval systems.

Advantages to programs in administrative services departments include:

- service orientation and strong cost-benefit justification for program;
- existing organization for providing enterprise solutions;
- non-political structure of department.

Disadvantages to programs in administrative services departments include:

- focus on bottom line only, without consideration of intangible benefits;
- lack of political support from elected officials;
- potential candidate for outsourcing.

Other potential placements are in legal departments or information technology departments. You may not have a choice as to where your program will be located. However, if you do, the key to determining proper placement of a program is to understand what functions you want it to perform and what service philosophy you want to use.

Program Philosophy

One key aspect of creating a records management program is the philosophy that underpins it. There are two basic philosophies for building a program (although there are certainly programs that combine these two approaches).

Some programs operate under a *regulatory philosophy*. This is usually used by programs that operate under a strong public records law, are organizationally placed with enough power to enforce compliance, and have enterprise support from top managers.

This program uses a high stick-to-carrot approach that tends to favor policies/administrative rules which prescribe desired behavior and consequences for non-compliance. It is especially useful when trying to implement a fully-featured records management program in a relatively short period of time. If this approach is employed, be sure authority exists to make programs comply. If even a few programs ignore you, it will seriously undermine your program's ability to function.

The other model is based on a service-oriented philosophy. This is common where programs do not operate from a strong power base, and must persuade others that their services are useful and necessary. This model tends to identify key user needs and provide high levels of service to meet those needs.

There are two key aspects to the service-oriented approach. One is that it is incremental. It often proceeds by doing a few key services (often operating a records center or providing retention scheduling), building a satisfied customer base, documenting activities in detail, and building a case for new services as customers demand them.

The other is that it is pragmatic. Some things, like minimum retentions or access to public records, are spelled out in public records laws. Other functions and activities are more discretionary. A service-oriented approach uses flexible responses to issues, both to get programs into a records system and then to persuade them to move towards a best practice.

It's the people!

Regardless of philosophy or organizational placement, the establishment and growth of a records management program is based in an understanding of the people in the organization and their relationship to records management needs. The following groups of people are key to a records program's long term success. How they are defined in different organizations may vary, but identifying them and understanding their importance to your program is crucial.

Elected officials. Elected officials generally set policy for your organization, as well as serve as a key point of contact for other jurisdictions (like state/federal agencies) and private organizations/citizens. Elected officials usually approve program budgets. If elected officials are hostile to the idea of a records management program, its success is improbable. If they are supportive, you can often build it relatively quickly. The most likely scenario is that they will be neutral. In this situation, rely on other actors in your organization, plus your own advocacy, to garner support for program activities.

Program managers. Program managers are among the best allies a records management program can have. They are often members of key decision-making committees in your organization. Your program manager will be responsible for making budget requests, but other managers will also have input into how well your records management program is supported. Making the case that records management functions improve their programs (more efficient, effective, accountable) is probably the best investment of your time possible.

Professionals. Many professionals rely on internal research. If your records management program has an archives, your services may be required on a regular basis. Building relationships with professionals has two principal benefits for your program. The first is that by providing quality reference service, you reinforce the need for continued funding for records programs that serve your organization directly. The second is that professionals often create a significant portion of an organization's archival records. Building trust with professionals makes it

far more likely to accession archival records and to get accurate information about them.

Clerical staff. For many records management programs, especially those relying on a records center as their key function, you interact most frequently with clerical staff. They are also the first line in retention scheduling projects. Many daily records management activities rely on successful interactions with clerical staff. This group can be transient. This makes it very important to have simple, but effective, procedures as well as ongoing training programs.

Facility maintenance. Functions of this group are often housed within a single program. They generally include building security, building maintenance, renovation/installation of storage/office spaces, environmental controls, and (if necessary) moving and/or new facility construction. In many organizations, programs are prohibited from doing much of this work on their own and must rely on building relationships with facilities programs to ensure that records are stored in adequate preservation environments and that facility security is maintained.

“The Public.” Local governments are largely supported by tax funds. Consequently, the public has a dual interest in a records management program. Its first interest is on the service side. Citizens are vitally interested in local government records. They use archives for research, but they are also concerned with current records and their relationship to accountable, transparent government decision-making. Public trust in government is currently low.¹ Records management programs can play a key role in rebuilding public trust by insuring that records are maintained and made available to the public as easily and as broadly as possible.

Colleagues. Local government records management programs are often staffed by a few people, sometimes even just one. While it might seem counter-intuitive to spend precious time networking with colleagues, the rewards often outweigh the time spent. Local records management and/or archives

groups not only provide camaraderie in a sometimes solitary profession, but they can be sources of assistance in all functions of records management programs. Records are also useful in joint advocacy efforts, plus they enable expert testimony during severe budget crises that many local governments currently face.

Functions of a Records Management Program

Records management programs vary significantly in scope. This section lays out program functions in two broad groupings – basic and expanded. Once a program has addressed these basics, it can expand to other functions as funding and staffing allow. Setting up simple procedures statements and training content for the following functions is key, for it ensures that your program is not overwhelmed by the need to correct inaccurate information.

Basic Functions

Retention scheduling. A key records management function is the creation of, or application of, retention schedules. Retention scheduling drives most records functions and allows local governments to operate within legal documentation parameters, efficiently disposing of records which are no longer needed.

Retention schedules identify records series and assign a period of time for retaining that record prior to destruction. Usually local government retentions schedules fall into two categories – general retention schedules and special retention schedules.

The former are often codified in state administrative rule and are issued for specific types of governmental bodies (i.e. municipal, county, or special district). They describe records that are commonly found and prescribe a minimum time that records must be maintained. General retention schedules are often arranged by program functions and are written broadly enough to allow the inclusion of different types of records performing that function.

¹Trust in government currently is 20% according to Pew Research. <http://people-press.org/2010/04/18/section-1-trust-in-government-1958-2010/> (accessed September 11, 2011).

Special schedules describe records not found in general schedules. They usually include the series title (name of the type of record), brief description, minimum retention, and justification for that retention. The analysis to determine that retention is based on the records series' fiscal, legal, operational, or historical value.

The development of retention schedules is central to most local government records program activities and should be one of the first functions performed. It provides three basic pieces of information that allow most other records management programs to succeed. First, it identifies records by type and function (records series) and allows them to be managed as a group instead of individually. Second, it attaches records to program functions, which allows for both access as well as archival appraisal. Third, it identifies the period of time for which the records must be kept, which affects everything from space planning to archival preservation needs. Without retention schedules, most aspects of a records management program grind to a halt.

Records storage. Records management programs often provide storage for semi-active and inactive records. This allows records to be moved from more expensive office space to less expensive warehouse space. Storage can be as simple as a room in your organization's building, or it can be as sophisticated as multiple storage locations with configurations based on access and preservation needs. In most modern records management programs, it also includes digital storage.

Records are generally brought into the custody of the local government records program through some sort of accessioning process. This allows your program to manage thousands of boxes and the files they contain. Accessioning processes vary, but usually capture the depositing program's organizational name, contact information, record series being transferred, number of boxes (or other units of storage), dates included in the accession, retention schedule number, and a contents listing for each box. This information is necessary to locate boxes and files in your storage area, identify records that

can be destroyed, and contact program staff with any questions. The other requirement of effective storage areas is that records be transferred in standard records center boxes and be labeled.



The City Clerk of Oceanside, California opened this records center in 1991. Note the use of standard records center boxes and labeling (above). The photo below shows flat file storage for large documents and the doorway to the City Archives, from the records storage area.



In some programs, there is no physical storage within the organization; it is outsourced to private records center companies. In these instances, the records management program should still maintain control over the management of that storage – the private company operates as merely another storage room. Storage facilities are discussed in more detail below.

Records retrieval/refile. When a records management program stores records for the organization, it is usually responsible for providing access to those records. Even records centers with low activity rates (see glossary) retrieve records for depositing programs. Generally, records retrieval means getting records stored in your records center back to a customer, refiling the record when the customer is finished using it, and tracking these transactions.

There are three major aspects to consider when designing procedures for retrieving and refiling records – custody, response time, and security.

In most records management programs, the depositing program still maintains custody over the records stored in a records center. That means they still “own” them and requests for access are made through the depositing program and not directly to the records management program. It also means the depositing program is responsible for the accuracy of the descriptions of the box contents. If your program has an archives (see page 7), you should create procedures that formally transfer custody of archival records to your program.

Response time is the time it will take to retrieve a record from storage and get it to a customer. This is a key metric for most programs that deposit records, because it often determines whether they feel comfortable not having the records in their direct control. Response time is based on a number of factors, but accurately calculating it and consistently meeting it builds trust in your system.

Security is a major records management responsibility. Both records centers and archives require a high level of physical security that includes access controls, alarm systems, and training. If you have records subject to the requirements of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), you must provide specialized training to anyone with access to records, as stipulated.² Facilities are discussed in more detail on page 8.

²The US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights provides a good overview of HIPAA privacy and security provisions at www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/index.html (accessed 13 June 2012)

Security of electronic records requires additional work. Access controls are the most common ways to secure electronic records. Information Technology programs create these as part of their job. You should build a relationship with them to insure records management concerns are addressed.

Records Destruction

Destruction of records is a crucial segment of records management. It reduces storage costs and increases process efficiency. It also limits the amount of time that must be spent on unwarranted requests for information.

A records management program must develop policies and procedures to insure that destruction is lawful, documented, and, if appropriate, confidential. Trust in a records management system – both by the programs that use it and by the public at large – relies on the understanding that destruction occurs in the regular course of business.

Complete and accurate retention schedules to determine when to destroy records is absolutely required. This can be done manually, but many programs automate the process of identifying records that are eligible for destruction. **No record in your organization should be destroyed without identifying it on an existing records retention schedule;** this includes electronic records. Any pending legal issues related to records should immediately put a hold on destruction until legal counsel approves.

A records management program destroys records in larger volumes than an individual program. When these destructions occur, you must document what was destroyed, under what authority, and when it occurred. You can either set up procedures that require the originating program to sign off on the destruction or you can set up a policy that gives your records management program that authority up front.

Many programs use an outside vendor to carry out destruction. The contract with the vendor should specify method of destruction, date of destruction, and vendor certification that the records were destroyed.



Many programs use an outside vendor to carry out destruction. The contract with the vendor should specify method of destruction, date of destruction, and vendor certification that the records were destroyed. (Photo courtesy of Oceanside, CA City Clerk's Office.)

Many public records laws specify the requirements for confidential destruction. If records are exempt from disclosure under a public records law, or otherwise confidential in nature, they must be destroyed in a way that insures the information is not retrievable. Internally, that can mean individual shredders. When using vendors – either mobile shredding companies or large document destruction vendors – contract language should specify, in addition to general destruction information, how confidential destruction will occur.

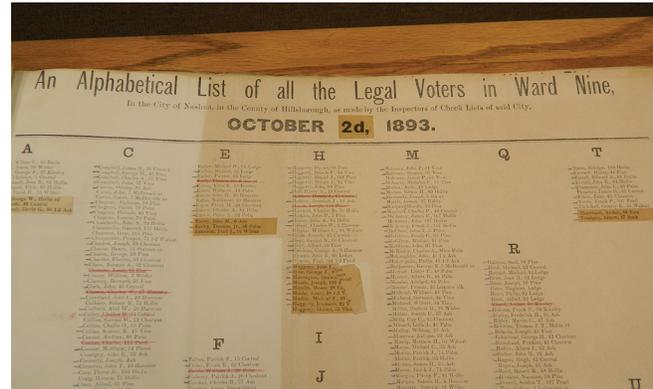
Finally, recycling is a great way to minimize the impact of recordkeeping on waste streams and it can reduce costs or even generate revenue. All steps should be carefully planned and executed.

Expanded functions

Archives management.

If your records management program stores records, it probably will provide basic archives services as a regular function. Archives are “materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator.”³

Even if you are starting a formal records management program, someone in your organization has been keeping “valuable” or “old” records. The key to adding archives management to your programs defined functions is to proceduralize it, so that it is both done according to recognized archival practice and can be performed by anyone in your program.



1893 Voter Checklist, Nashua, NH

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote, was adopted in 1920. This checklist is sometimes used by the City Clerk for classroom presentations on the history of voting rights in the United States, but is in serious need of restoration.

Archives management includes the identification of records with archival value, arrangement and description of those records to make research easier, making the records accessible to researchers, and records preservation to ensure their continued usability.

Identification and selection of archival records should start with a retention schedule. Usually, records that have permanent retention are archival records. Additionally, public records law may identify other records which must be preserved – often based on a cutoff date (i.e. “records created before 1920”) or inclusion in a listing of historic records. Finally, appraisal of records for archival value is an integral

³From the Society of American Archivists Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology: www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=156 (accessed 13 June 2012)

function of archives management. If professional archives staff are lacking in your program, obtain training and/or seek assistance from professional archivists to develop an appraisal methodology.

If your program does not store records, create an inventory of archival records, including their location and the person responsible for maintaining them. This can be a reference/research tool and a safeguard that archives are not inadvertently destroyed or misplaced.

If records are stored, a procedure should allow custody of the archival records. Custody is essentially “ownership” of the records. This transfer allows archives to maintain authenticity and researchers to trust that the record has not been tampered with through time.

Arrangement and description permits archivists to make records more useful to researchers by explaining the context within which they were created and providing broad information about the contents of the records. This process requires specific knowledge and training. **If you do not have a professional archivist on your program staff, do not disturb the physical arrangement of the records.** Resources are available to assist in learning proper arrangement and description (see annotated bibliography). Nonetheless, consult with a professional archivist before beginning this process.

You can, however, develop finding aids, or documents that allow researchers to use the records. A simple finding aid lists records series descriptions under an explanation of the creator of those records. Describe them as completely as possible (who created them, what dates are included, what is the volume, physical condition, and a clarification of the information they contain); the creator description should show how the records relate to its functions. This can be stated as simply as “printed in a notebook” or “relating to a variety of software systems.”

Archival preservation relies on several things, but the most important is management of a constant temperature and humidity. Paper degradation increases significantly outside a fairly narrow band of these conditions. Ideally you would have a sepa-

rate storage area for archival records maintained at $65\pm 3^{\circ}\text{F}$ and $50\pm 5\%$ relative humidity.⁴ This assumes that you have both paper and legacy microforms in storage. If significant amounts of specialized media (magnetic tape, motion picture film, silver gelatin microfilm, or photograph negatives) exist, consider outsourced storage that can provide more rigorous environmental controls.

Other practices that can increase the life expectancy of archives are reboxing and refolding records into acid free containers, copying (either photocopying or digitizing) fragile or heavily used items, and removing fasteners (like binder/paper clips), if they are damaging the records.

Finally, make archives accessible to researchers: have a place where people can review the records. This area should monitor the researcher, with access to power and a photocopier. For security purposes, each researcher should register his or her name, and what they are researching. A posted fee schedule should apprise researchers of what they will pay for copies. A policy on copying should be determined, and published.

The annotated bibliography includes several basic archives sources if archives management is incorporated in the records management program. These sources provide much more detail and will underpin a program that meets archival standards.

Training

Training requires a significant investment of resources, but pays rich dividends. A variety of training types extends from simple procedural handouts to interactive online programs to in-person sessions. Before starting, however, consider - -

The first and most important question: whether you have time and/or budget to create training resources. Good training makes a real difference. Poor training wastes time for you and the trainees. How should you spend available budget resources to develop training? If time is lacking to develop

⁴“Environmental Guidelines for the Storage of Paper Records,” NISO Guideline TR01-1995 provides advice regarding storage conditions. It can be accessed at <http://www.niso.org/publications/tr/tr01.pdf>.

resources and make presentations, consider purchasing training. A number of organizations provide training – sometimes for minimal cost – on any number of records management subjects.

While that sort of training is good for general subjects, training organization employees to perform basic records management activities may require specialized training. Your organization may have a training program that can assist, both in developing effective materials and in teaching ways to present that training.

Advocacy

Advocacy can have real and positive impact on your records management program. Like training, it requires a significant amount of time and may not be something you can devote much attention to, especially if you have a small staff. Advocacy is as simple as using persuasion to appeal to a person or group of people in order to promote your program and its functions. It may be internal – directed at your own organization’s leaders. It may be directed to the general public. It may be directed towards external groups – the media or the legislature, for instance.

Take advantage of electronic resources – social media, a program website, email lists – to maximize the impact of your advocacy efforts. Further, organizational public affairs offices can help promote your program and its activities.

Organizational advocates, like national or regional records management and archives associations are often willing to assist in advocacy efforts. You may wish to participate in advocacy efforts such as Records and Information Month or Archives Month. Follow organizations on a service like Twitter and you will be able to keep up with upcoming events easily.

Even without formal advocacy efforts, remember that you are an advocate for your records management program every time that you interact with others. Make sure that everyone knows what you do and its importance to both the organizational mission and to the public.

Electronic Records

A common mantra among records management professionals is that the medium of a record doesn’t matter; only the information it contains is important. In a strict sense this is true. While the status of many electronic documents as records may be up in the air in the early days of desktop computing, most public records laws explicitly include electronic records in their definitions. Retention periods apply to records regardless of their medium or format. Public access requirements apply to all records.

But practical realities of managing electronic records are often quite different from those for more traditional formats, like paper or microfilm. With the increased penetration of digital processes in local government recordkeeping, their management cannot be ignored.

Identify any laws or administrative rules that apply to local government records maintained in digital form. For instance, many jurisdictions prohibit the storage of records with permanent retentions in digital-only form. Some laws require records maintained digitally to be made available to researchers in digital form. Knowing what special rules apply to electronic records will allow you to craft a plan for their effective management.

Incorporate electronic records into retention schedules. Two approaches do this. The first, uses training to assist program staff to match existing retention schedules with records that they create electronically. This approach reinforces the concept that media does not matter regarding records, and keeps retention schedules concise. The second approach explicitly describes electronic records and includes specific instructions for both their retention and for making sure they will be accessible throughout that retention.

Finally, you consider methods for preserving electronic records, especially those with longer retention periods (10 years plus) as well as archival records. In addition to preservation issues inherent with various digital media, there are also concerns with format

longevity.⁵ How your program approaches the issue of digital preservation will depend on the composition of program staff. Unless there is strong technical expertise on the records management program staff, it might be wise to partner with your organization's information technology staff.

Pairing records management knowledge with information technology skills can be productive as long as both partners clearly understand each other's goals.

Staffing the Program

Records management program staff composition varies greatly, depending on the size/scope of the organization served and whether work is concentrated in a single program or distributed throughout the program.

Most programs do not have the full complement described below. In fact, some programs may not have any of the staff listed. As the program develops, however, think about what functions your records management program performs and how staffing could best meet them. The following general descriptions (actual position descriptions vary significantly) describe the kinds of employees often found in records management programs.

Records Manager. A records manager is usually responsible for professional duties related to active records in the organization. The most important of these is creating or maintaining retention schedules. Records analysts also often provide assistance with active filing systems, regardless of media. They provide a range of advice/assistance to organization staff on a range of subjects related to records and records systems. Records managers are certified by the Institute of Certified Records Managers.⁶

Archivist. Archivists are professionals who manage inactive records that have been identified as having value requiring continued preservation. Archivists usually identify records that need to be preserved, arrange and describe them, apply preservation measures to them, and make them accessible to researchers. Archivists usually have graduate degrees, are certified by the Academy of Certified Archivists⁷, or both.

Digital Specialist. This position can vary significantly, depending on a program's needs. In most small to medium-sized records management programs, it is a component of a records manager's or an archivist's duties. In general, it applies technological knowledge and skills to traditional records management issues. Some programs use information technology specialists, but most use records professionals with particular competences and training.

Para-professional positions. Many programs need both professional and para-professional workers. Most of these positions are flexible, intended to support professional activities performed by the records management program. Warehouse workers may retrieve and refile records, shelve new accessions, pull records for destruction, and execute other production-related tasks. Archives assistants often perform basic processing of records, digitize records, and assist in basic reference research.

Volunteers and interns. Volunteers and interns are often seen as a way to get free labor to perform records management program duties. While this can be true, there are caveats when employing these groups of people. The most important thing to remember is that for them to be effective, they need to be managed: this will take staff time. Your parent organization may have a volunteer program or coordinator, but individual volunteers and interns have to be managed in their actual work as well. Secondly, work must match the volunteer or intern. Their experience will be unproductive if they are not given work that is meaningful. And finally, there is a temptation to use "free" labor to replace professional staff. This practice undermines both credibility and quality of your programs. Volunteers and interns should augment professional staff, not replace them.

⁵There are a number of sources for information about digital preservation, Case Western has a useful and up to date compilation at <http://www.case.edu/its/archives/Records/digipres.htm>

⁶See www.icrm.org for information on certification requirements.

⁷See www.certifiedarchivists.org/ for information about certification requirements.

Facility needs

Most records management programs offer some sort of storage for records, whether it is a records center, an archives, a digital repository or specialized accommodation for certain records formats. In some organizations, storage space is outsourced and managed by the records management program. In others, storage needs are met by individual work units. In any case, you should be familiar with storage requirements for records so you can assist organization staff.

Records Centers are designed to provide high volume, low-cost storage of inactive or semi-active records. The intent is to reduce the need to store records in relatively expensive office space. If you are lucky, you may be in an organization willing to build a records center/and or archives from scratch. While uncommon in the early stages of a records management program's development, this allows you to build a storage center to meet specific organizational needs. Consider using a consultant to assist with incorporating records management needs into the new building. Any construction project is complex, and the special needs of a records facility just add to that.

More commonly, an existing building, or area in a building, is allocated for storing records. You are likely to be responsible for retrofitting space to meet records management needs.

Several things are crucial regarding storage space for records. Environmental control is notably important. Paper is highly susceptible to damage from temperature, humidity and light. Other records media are even more fragile.

This does not have to mean huge expense, though. Standard office environments of 70 degrees and 50% relative humidity are within the acceptable range for paper storage.⁸ This is especially true for records with short to medium retention periods. For archival records, digital media, and photographic

media (negatives, motion pictures, and microforms), specialized storage will preserve the records longer. The salient point is to choose environmental standards that can be maintained constantly.

Light, especially sunlight, is damaging to paper. Storage areas should have no windows but should offer some sort zonal motion sensitive lighting. Absent that, curtains should be used over windows and lighting should be as low as is comfortable to retrieve and use records.

For specialized records, you may use storage in your organization's data centers. They need the same type of environmental conditions for their equipment, as you need. If strict environmental controls are unavailable, consider using a commercial storage center.

Configuring the space is also essential to efficient operations. Shelving is a most obvious need. Metal shelving should have the lowest shelf at least four inches off the floor. Shelving configuration should compare maximizing storage volume versus maximizing ease of retrieval. In records management programs with small staffs and moderate to high activity, it may make sense to make most of the boxes accessible without the use of ladders.

Consulting with fellow professionals who have recently moved can be very helpful in determining how to organize your storage space best. A key planning metric is the relationship of available space versus net growth in accessioned records (records brought in minus records destroyed). Plan a space that can accept average growth for ten years.

Insure that fire suppression systems, alarm systems that notify staff when significant temperature and humidity changes occur, and intrusion alarms are in place. Most of these should be tied to staff contact information, so that after hours incidents are reported directly to your records management staff.

Finally, are security measures in place? Access to records storage areas should be restricted to records management program staff. If other organization or contractor personnel need to be in the storage areas, they should **always** be accompanied by a records program staff member. This is due both to the confi-

⁸Northeast Document Conservation Center Preservation Leaflet 2.1, "Temperature, Relative Humidity, Light, and Air Quality: Basic Guidelines for Preservation" located at http://www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets/2The_Environment/01BasicGuidelines.php (accessed 13 June 2012)

dential nature of many records in storage, but also to insure there is no question about records' integrity or authenticity. Digital records also need security measures, both physical and logical. Work with whomever provides storage for digital records your records management program maintains to insure that security is in place for all records.

Don't be afraid to ask!

One of the most important things to remember as you put together your local government records program is that there is a body of fellow professionals out there who are willing to assist you in making things work as well as possible. Tour some existing programs. Ask questions. Make friends. Not only will you build connections with others in a sometimes solitary profession, but you will get invaluable information about what has worked or not worked. From what boxes to buy/ to what software to use/ to what staff to hire – colleagues can be great resources.

The same goes for professional organizations. Members enjoy a wealth of information that applies to both theoretical concerns as well as day-to-day operations. Members of your parent organization also may have knowledge of organizational history, plus its previous recordkeeping practices.

Use these resources, employ your professional knowledge, keep learning, and continue to build your records management program and its value to your organization and to the public it serves.

An Annotated List of Resources

Glossaries. Both ARMA International and the Society of American Archivists (SAA) publish online glossaries of common records management and archives terms. These glossaries are invaluable for defining and understanding records concepts.

ARMA: www.arma.org/standards/glossary/

SAA: www.archivists.org/glossary/index.asp

Organizations. National and regional records organizations can be helpful, both in providing information and in assisting with professional development. Most offer publications, regular meetings, educational offerings, and member assistance. Some offer specific subunits devoted to government and local government records management.

ARMA, International: www.arma.org/index.cfm

-- Regional chapters: www.arma.org/about/chapters/chapters.aspx

Regional archives organizations: www.archivists.org/assoc-orgs/directory/index.asp#2

Society of American Archivists: www.archivists.org

Standards. A number of standards relate to records management. The following two are highlighted because they are integral to the development of a records management program.

International Standard ISO15489 (Geneva, 2001). This standard provides a widely accepted framework to help managers set up and maintain best practice recordkeeping systems. It comes in two pieces. Part one is the standard. Part two contains implementation guidelines. The standards can be purchased at: http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=31908

Department of Defense Standard DoD 5015.02 (2007) has become the de facto standard for electronic record-keeping systems. It also provides a useful, conceptual framework for electronic recordkeeping. The standard is located at: <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/501502std.pdf>

Written Sources. An extensive body of literature relates to records management. The following basic sources relate to starting a program. Once your program is up and going, specific topics can be researched in greater detail. A good source for detailed information is SAA's Records Management Roundtable, with its detailed subject bibliography of records management articles and books:

www.archivists.org/saagroups/recmgmt/resources/RMRTBibliography.pdf.

Ricks, Betty R., Ann J. Swafford and Kay F. Gow. *Information and Image Management: A Records Systems Approach*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Publishing Company, 1992. This is a standard text for records management theory/programs.

Stephens, David. *Records Management: Making the Transition from Paper to Electronic*. Lenexa, KS: ARMA International, 2007. Stephens incorporates traditional records management processes with the electronic systems that increasingly dominate records keeping in local governments.