

# **Managing Your Government Records: Guidelines for Minnesota Archives and Agencies**

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## Table of Contents

### Introduction

*Describes who will benefit from these guidelines, what these guidelines contain, and how to use them.*

### Chapter 1: What do you need to know about government records?

*Presents the definition of government records and summarizes the laws that govern them.*

### Chapter 2: How do you appraise government records?

*Presents the many values a government record can have and helps you get started appraising your own records.*

### Chapter 3: How do you describe government records?

*Discusses the practices of good documentation and record description and shows how these practices can help you manage your archives more effectively.*

### Chapter 4: What are the issues regarding information technology and electronic records?

*Presents a discussion on information technology and electronic records in various forms, and informs you on how advancing technology affects your archives-related work.*

### Chapter 5: How do you preserve and store government records?

*Gives you many preservation and storage tips that you can use to improve the lives of your paper and non-paper records.*

### Chapter 6: How do you provide access to government records?

*Discusses the importance of providing access to your records, as well as your responsibilities when complying with the statutes that govern record access.*

## Appendix A: Requirements for the Disposition/Transfer of Government Records to Other Repositories.

*These requirements are used by the Records Disposition Panel and the Minnesota Historical Society/Minnesota State Archives regarding the disposition of government records to other repositories pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.17, subd. 1; Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.20; and Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.21*

## Appendix B: Model Government Records Depository Agreement

*Copy of the agreement to be used between the local unit of government, local/county historical society, and the Minnesota Historical Society to approve the transfer of government records from the office of origin to a repository other than the State Archives.*

## Appendix C: Access to Local Government Records: A Short List

*A brief listing of local government records that are commonly used by researchers. The access policy for each is listed.*

## Appendix D: Version History and Acknowledgements

*Acknowledgements and information on the different versions of these guidelines.*

## Glossary

*Definitions of terms specific to these guidelines as well as links to other archive, library, and information science glossaries for assistance with terms about archives management and preservation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Managing and preserving government records are important and essential work. Not only are such records used for conducting the important business of government, but they also provide invaluable witness to our rich heritage. These guidelines are provided by the Minnesota State Archives as a trusted resource that can assist you in your archives-related work.

### Who can benefit from these guidelines and why?

If you are a state or local government official or entity, or a county or local historical society, you will find these guidelines very useful for they contain a wealth of information on a variety of topics related to the management of government records. They present many essential concepts and practices used every day in the management of archives, and contain information on the current legislation that affects your archives and your archives-related services. And because they serve as a practical, easy-to-read introduction to the subject of government records, these guidelines can easily be used as an integral part of your training program for new staff members.

Members of the general public will find these guidelines informative about the management of government records. These guidelines also help citizens of the state of Minnesota understand their rights to access government records, and give them the opportunity to become aware of the activities that state and local governments and historical societies undertake to preserve our heritage.

These guidelines have been written specifically for Minnesota agencies but the concepts addressed apply to similar organizations nationwide.

### What is in the guidelines?

These guidelines serve as an introduction to the most important topics related to government records, and provide you with the basic tools and knowledge that are required to manage and preserve your collections.

- Chapter one focuses on the definition of government records and the laws that govern them.
- Chapter two discusses the many values a government record can have, and helps you get started appraising your own records.
- Chapter three discusses the practices of good documentation and record description and shows how these practices can help you manage your archives more effectively.
- Chapter four presents a discussion on information technology and electronic records, and discusses how changes in technology affect your work managing archives.
- Chapter five gives you preservation and storage tips that you can use to improve the preservation of your paper and non-paper records.
- Chapter six discusses the importance of providing access to your records, as well as your responsibilities to comply with the statutes that govern record access.

- At the end of these guidelines are two appendices with information to review when considering the transfer of local government records to another repository. The third appendix is a list with information about access rights to common local government records. The fourth is the revision history for the guidelines.

At the end of each chapter, you will find a “*Where can you get more information on...*” section that provides additional recommended print and online resources. The glossary at the end of these guidelines can be used to clarify many of the records management and technical terms used in these guidelines.

## How can you use the guidelines?

Although these guidelines are a complete introduction to the subject of government records, there is a multitude of detailed information available on managing archives from many resources all around the United States. These guidelines are an excellent “jumping-off” point into the subject of government records preservation. You might want to bookmark this site for ready access to these guidelines and the numerous links to other helpful resources.

You can read these guidelines as an HTML-formatted document on this web site, or, you can easily download them, chapter by chapter, or in their entirety, in PDF format. Each chapter is self-contained; to understand the material presented in any chapter, you do not need to read all previous chapters (although reading these guidelines in their entirety would be most beneficial). Also in each chapter are occasional references to other chapters where you can find more detailed information on a related topic. If you are a manager, you might find it worthwhile to distribute this resource to your staff and volunteer members, or at least make it available to them in some way.

Unfortunately, Web page addresses do change and we therefore endeavor to periodically confirm all hyperlinks contained in the guidelines. If you find broken links or errors of any kind, please contact Shawn Rounds at the State Archives.<sup>1</sup> If you wish to comment on the guidelines, please contact Charles Rodgers at the State Archives.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of your level of expertise in managing and preserving government records, you will find the information in these guidelines informative and useful, and you will be able to put it to work in your archives immediately, leading to archives that are of greater use and value.

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## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GOVERNMENT RECORDS?

Government records are of great value to the State of Minnesota and its citizens—they are necessary for conducting government business; they help preserve our heritage by documenting our historical places, people, and events; and they are used frequently for research and investigations. As a government agency or historical society, you take on the many responsibilities that come with holding and managing these vital documents. You need to be able to recognize government records and to undertake all the activities—acquisition, appraisal, description, preservation, storage, and retrieval—required to maintain an archives.

In this chapter you will learn all about records: the definition of a government record, what laws pertain to government records, who creates and manages records, and what records have historical value. You will be introduced to the State Archives of the Minnesota Historical Society, and how it can assist you in managing your own records. The issue of storing your records locally or nonlocally will be discussed and resources to help you manage your government records will be presented. The appendices at the end of these guidelines contain *Requirements for the Disposition/Transfer of Government Records to Other Repositories* (Appendix A), and a model agreement entitled *Government Records Depository Agreement* (Appendix B).

### What is a government record?

Government records are defined as state and local records that are created in accordance with state law or in connection with public business transactions. Government records are created by officers or agencies of the state, counties, cities, towns, school districts, municipal subdivisions, organizations, or any other public authorities or political entities.

Examples of government records include correspondence, maps, memoranda, papers, photographs, reports, writings, recordings, e-mail, and other data, information, or documentary material. Records can be stored on various media such as paper, microform, audio and video tape, photographic materials, computer hard drives, or removable media. It is important to remember that government records refer to the recorded data or information regardless of the media it is recorded on or format it is in. For example, the information found on a birth certificate is considered the record, not the paper document or the microfilm it is recorded on.

For a more complete definition of Minnesota government records, see Chapter 138.17 of the Minnesota Statutes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 138.17 Government Records; Administration*. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.17>

## What laws pertain to the preservation and management of government records?

In Minnesota, government recordkeeping is governed by three statutes: the Official Records Act, the Records Management Act, and the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. These statutes directly affect you as a repository of government records.

### **Official Records Act, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 15.17<sup>4</sup>**

The Official Records Act (M.S. 15.17) mandates that “all officers and agencies,” at all levels of government, “shall make and preserve all records necessary to a full and accurate knowledge of their activities.” This act helps to ensure that Minnesota government is accountable to its citizens, administrations, courts, legislatures, financial auditors, and future generations of Minnesotans.

### **Records Management Act, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 138.17<sup>5</sup>**

The Records Management Act (M.S. 138.17) provides the mechanism for the orderly and accountable disposition of government records. This act defines the state Records Disposition Panel as well as the records retention schedules discussed later in this chapter.

### **Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 13<sup>6</sup>**

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) (M.S. 13) ensures that the general public maintains access to nonrestricted government records. More information on this act can be found in Chapter 6 of these guidelines (*How do you provide access to government records?*).

## Who is involved in record keeping?

Chief administrative officers of government offices and their staff, the Minnesota Department of Administration, and the Records Disposition Panel play major roles in the creation, management and access to government records.

### **Chief Administrative Officers and Their Staff**

According to Minnesota law, the chief administrative officers of government offices or agencies—city clerks, school district superintendents, township clerks, county officers, and state agency commissioners—are responsible for creating and preserving government records. And in the course of their normal work routines, all government staff members share this responsibility by following their agency’s policies and procedures.

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<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 15.17 Official Records*.  
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=15.17>

<sup>5</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 138.17 Government Records; Administration*. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.17>

<sup>6</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 13. Government Data Practices*.  
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=13>

### **Minnesota Department of Administration, Information Policy Analysis Division**

The Minnesota Department of Administration, Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD) provides technical assistance and consultation about Minnesota's data practices (M.S. 13) and other information policy laws. More information can be found on IPAD's website.<sup>7</sup>

### **Records Disposition Panel**

The state Records Disposition Panel, a statutory body defined by the Records Management Act (M.S. 138.17)<sup>8</sup>, also plays a very important role in the preservation and management of government records by ensuring that the disposition of such records is managed appropriately. In addition to maintaining the records retention schedules, this panel reviews, evaluates, and decides on requests to destroy or transfer records. The panel consists of the following individuals:

- Legislative Auditor (for state agency records)
- State Auditor (for local agency records)
- Attorney General
- Minnesota Historical Society Director

The members of this panel were specifically chosen for their special knowledge of records value: the Legislative and State Auditors understand the fiscal value of state and local records, the Attorney General understands the legal value of records, and the Minnesota Historical Society Director understands the historical value of records.

It is important to know that you are responsible for submitting requests to the panel if you want to change the record format of an official copy, transfer records to another organization, or dispose of records not listed on an approved records retention schedule. It is the responsibility of the panel, then, to ensure that all fiscal, legal, and historical concerns are addressed before changes are made.

## **What is the role of the Minnesota State Archives?**

The mission of the Minnesota State Archives is to document the history of Minnesota by identifying, preserving, and making accessible the evidential record of government activities and the historically valuable information created by government. This is accomplished through shared responsibility with the records creators. One of the State Archives' most important responsibilities is to assist you in determining the historical value of your records (roughly only 3-5% of government records have permanent historical value).

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<sup>7</sup>Minnesota Department of Administration. *Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD). Home Page.* <http://www.ipad.state.mn.us/>

<sup>8</sup>Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 138.17 Government Records; Administration.* <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.17>



In addition, the State Archives has produced a variety of resource guides covering legal and storage issues, disaster preparedness, digital imaging, and more. These guides are available on the State Archives' web site<sup>9</sup>.

## Why do government records have value?

Government records might have value for a variety of reasons—they might ensure accountability, provide proof of agreements or rights, be unique in nature, describe historically important events, and be useful for research or investigations.

For example, many records have historical value such as town board meeting minutes, accounting reports, civil and criminal court case files, annual reports, student censuses, and territorial documents. Records that offer genealogical information, such as birth and death certificates, are also of value as many archives users are researching family history.

For a complete discussion on the appraisal of government records, see Chapter 2 of these guidelines (*How do you appraise government records?*).

## Why is it important to document records?

Good documentation practice is essential to properly care for and protect your records of value, and it can also add to the value of your collection. Good documentation makes locating and retrieving your records easier, substantiates the trustworthiness of your collections, provides the means to manage and control your records more effectively, and helps justify your decisions and actions. Good documentation practice should apply to all your records whether they are paper or non-paper. For a complete discussion on documenting records, see Chapter 3 of these guidelines (*How do you describe government records?*).

## Where are your records best preserved, onsite or at another repository?

It is essential that you preserve and store your records with care. Eventually you will need to decide if you want to store records locally, either at a local government office or a local or regional historical society, or transfer them to the State Archives which may not be local. Each option has its own advantages and you will need to consider the tradeoffs when deciding what to store where.

Preserving and storing records locally provides a tremendous convenience for residents and others who are researching the local region. County historical societies and local governments focus on their regional history—their historical people, places, and events—demonstrating a

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<sup>9</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Home Page*. State Archives Department.  
<http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/index.html>

proud commitment and a strong desire to promote the local heritage. Records kept locally provide immediate access to local and regional history.

Transferring your records to nonlocal archives, on the other hand, can relieve you of the burdens and costs associated with preserving, storing, and managing records. Storing your records nonlocally will also lower your costs associated with archives-related services, such as photocopying and reference services. Other than those available through the Society's grant-in-aid program<sup>10</sup>, funds are not available from the state for local records management or archival programs. Contact the State Archives for advice on managing your government records.

Requirements for depositing records in a local repository (Appendix A), along with a model government records depository agreement (Appendix B), are provided at the end of these guidelines. Chapter 5 of these guidelines (*How do you preserve and store government records?*) provides valuable information on storage environments and storage techniques for all types of records media.

## **What resources are available to help manage government records?**

The State Archives' web site offers many resources to help you manage your government records including forms for transferring records to the State Archives, information on record retention schedule information, and the Application for Authority to Dispose of Record form. In addition, the State Archives and the Minnesota Government Records and Information Network (MNGRIN) have published a manual that offers guidance in preserving and disposing government records.

### **State Archives' Web Site**

The State Archives' web site<sup>11</sup> offers up-to-date information on preserving and managing historical records. This site also contains links to professional associations and other state agencies that provide valuable resources. If needing to transfer records to the State Archives, the *Transfer of Records to State Archives*<sup>12</sup> form can also be found here.

### **Records Retention Schedules (State Archives' Web Site)**

Records retention schedules are an essential tool for managing your government records. These schedules specify minimum retention periods for records based on the records' administrative, fiscal, legal, and historical value. It is important to remember that the retention period pertains to the content of the records, regardless of the records' media or format. For instance, city council minutes must be permanently retained. They are originally recorded on paper, but might eventually be microfilmed. As long as the minutes are permanently retained on microfilm, the minutes in paper form might be eligible for destruction, assuming the proper review and approval have taken place.

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<sup>10</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Local History: State Grants-in-Aid*. <http://www.mnhs.org/shpo/lhs/grants/>

<sup>11</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Home Page*. State Archives Department. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Transfer of Records to States Archives Form*. State Archives Department. May 2004. [http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/TransferForm.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/TransferForm.pdf)

All records retention schedules indicate what records have historical value and what records need to be retained permanently. Some are retained in the agency, while others may be transferred to a local or county historical society or the State Archives. In these guidelines the State Archives provides requirements (Appendix A) and a model agreement (Appendix B) that cover transferring local government records to a local or county historical society for long-term retention. For nonpermanent records, the retention schedules give the time period the records must be retained. For example:

- City personnel files must be retained at least five years.
- Contracts on county buildings must be retained at least ten years after the final payment.
- Township vouchers must be retained at least six years.
- School district accident or damage reports must be retained at least ten years.

State or local government agencies may create their own records retention schedules, but each schedule must have the proper review and approval prior to use. To create your own records retention schedule, you must first submit three signed copies of your proposed schedule to the State Archives of the Minnesota Historical Society<sup>13</sup>. The State Archives will review the schedule, and then submit it to the Records Disposition Panel for final review and approval. Once the schedule is approved, a copy will be returned to your agency. A blank records retention schedule form, with instructions, is available on the State Archives web site<sup>14</sup>.

The State Archives maintains a website of retention schedule information, including schedules for Minnesota counties, cities, townships, school districts, district courts, human resources schedules for state agencies, and financial schedules for state agencies. The schedules can also be found on the State Archives web site<sup>15</sup>.

### ***Application for Authority to Dispose of Records Form***

The *Application for Authority to Dispose of Records* form<sup>16</sup> is a means of disposing records that are not covered in any records retention schedule. It is your responsibility to fill out the form completely and submit it to the State Archives. The State Archives will then secure the signatures of the Records Disposition Panel members and return the form to you.

### ***Preserving and Disposing of Government Records Manual***

Originally published by the Minnesota Department of Administration's Information Policy Analysis Division in July 2000, the *Preserving and Disposing of Government Records* manual<sup>17</sup> was updated jointly by the Minnesota State Archives and the Minnesota Government Records and Information Network (MNGRIN) in 2008. This records management resource explains the

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<sup>13</sup> Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Boulevard West, Saint Paul, MN 55102-1906

<sup>14</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Record Services: Forms*. State Archives Department. September 2009. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/recser.html#forms>

<sup>15</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *General Records Retention Schedules Available Online*. State Archives Department. August 24, 2009. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/retentionsched.html>

<sup>16</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Application for Authority to Dispose of Records*. State Archives Department. June 1997. [http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/PR1form.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/PR1form.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Preserving and Disposing of Government Records*. May 2008. [http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/PandD\\_may2008.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/PandD_may2008.pdf)

responsibilities of government agencies, shows you how to set up a records storage area and take an inventory, discusses records disposal, and describes records retention schedules.

## Where can you get more information on government records?

### **Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives**<sup>18</sup>

The State Archives provides information on and assistance with historically valuable government records.

### **Minnesota Department of Administration, Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD)**<sup>19</sup>

IPAD provides technical assistance and consultation about Minnesota's data practices (M.S. 13) and records management acts (M.S. 15.7 and 138.17), and other information policy laws.

### **Minnesota Office of Enterprise Technology**<sup>20</sup>

This office provides assistance with information technology issues and concerns.

### **ARMA International**<sup>21</sup>

ARMA International provides resources on topics relating to the records and information management profession.

### **Council of State Archivists**<sup>22</sup>

The Council of State Archivists provides links to key documents such as manuals, forms, fee schedules, and other documents that can help you manage your archives.

### **National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators**<sup>23</sup>

This association provides useful information and reports from around the country on government records.

### **National Archives and Records Administration**<sup>24</sup>

This is a very informative web site that describes the activities, policies, procedures, and collections of the National Archives.

### **Society of American Archivists**<sup>25</sup>

The Society of American Archivists has a very comprehensive web site that provides manuals, books, guides, and other information about managing your archives. For persons new to the

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<sup>18</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Home Page*. State Archives Department.

<http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> Minnesota Department of Administration. *Home Page*. Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD).

<http://www.ipad.state.mn.us/>

<sup>20</sup> Office of Enterprise Technology. *Home Page*. <http://www.oet.state.mn.us/>

<sup>21</sup> ARMA International. *Home Page*. 2009. <http://www.arma.org/>

<sup>22</sup> Council of State Archivists (CoSA). *Home Page*. June 17, 2009. <http://www.statearchivists.org>

<sup>23</sup> National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA). *Home Page*.

<http://www.nagara.org>

<sup>24</sup> The National Archives. *Home Page*. <http://www.archives.gov/index.html>

<sup>25</sup> The Society of American Archivists. *Home Page*. <http://www.archivists.org/>

archival profession the Society has a web site, hosted by Yale University, titled *Resources for New Archivists*<sup>26</sup>, that provides links to information about the core archival functions. Topics include acquisitions, processing, preservation, description, reference, continuing education, sources for readings, and other resources.

### **Archives Association of British Columbia**<sup>27</sup>

The Archives Association of British Columbia hosts a web site called the "Archivist's Toolkit," which is an excellent resource for those working in small- and medium-sized archives. The web site has links to policies and procedures, guidelines, standards, case studies, publications, and other resources on the following topics: establishing an archives, appraisal and accessioning, arrangement and description, reference and access, automation and digitization, preservation, conservation, and emergency planning.

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<sup>26</sup> The Society of American Archivists. *Resources for New Archivists*. August 26, 2004.  
[http://www.library.yale.edu/%7Ekspicher/mssrepos/resources\\_gateway1.htm](http://www.library.yale.edu/%7Ekspicher/mssrepos/resources_gateway1.htm)

<sup>27</sup> Archives Association of British Columbia. *The Archivist's Toolkit*. July 2009.  
[http://aabc.ca/TK\\_00\\_main\\_page.html](http://aabc.ca/TK_00_main_page.html)

## HOW DO YOU APPRAISE GOVERNMENT RECORDS?

Appraising government records and artifacts is one of the toughest jobs in historic preservation, as perhaps only 3-5% of all government records have permanent historical value. As a staff member of a government agency or historical society, it is your job to preserve those records that have permanent historical value, and to do so you will need the tools that can help you separate the few records with permanent value from the many that have no permanent value.

In this chapter you will learn the meaning of appraisal and the types of values government records can have. Useful procedures and tools that can help you get started appraising your own collections, whether your collections consist of paper or non-paper records, or both will also be discussed.

Keep in mind that the term *record* refers to information and not a physical object such as a piece of paper, a photograph, or a CD. For example, the information found in a birth certificate is considered the record, whether the certificate is on paper or on microfilm. When appraising government records, your appraisal should be based on the record, regardless of the medium the information is on, or format it is in.

### What does appraisal mean?

When appraising government records, you are actually determining their value and eventual disposition. Should the records be destroyed immediately? Should they be retained? How long should they be retained? Should they be transferred to an archive? You might think that records are appraised only once: when you receive the records and need to decide whether or not to keep them. However, the values of records often change, and therefore, you need to appraise them more than once throughout their lifetimes. For example, before converting a paper record to an electronic record, you need to appraise the value of the record in both media formats to ensure that the record does not become less accessible, and therefore less valuable, after being converted to an electronic format.

As you appraise government records, you need to consider the many possible values records can have. Records are important for their administrative, fiscal, legal, and historical value. Records can also be important for their intrinsic value. With all these possible values, the necessary task of appraising records can sometimes be complex.

### Why are records valuable?

Records have four primary values—administrative, fiscal, legal, and historical—and it is important to remember that a record often has more than one of these values at any time. In addition, records can also have intrinsic value.

### **Administrative Value**

Records with administrative value typically pertain to the origin, development, activities, accomplishments, and functions of an agency. Examples of such records include:

- Annual reports from a county highway department
- Correspondence from a city clerk
- Minutes from a town board meeting
- Policy and procedures manuals for a school district

### **Fiscal Value**

Records with fiscal value are often needed for audit purposes. It is necessary to consider federal and state requirements when determining retention periods for records with fiscal value. In Minnesota, the State Auditor requires that you retain local government fiscal records for a minimum of six years, while the Legislative Auditor requires you retain state government fiscal records for a minimum of four years. Examples of records that have fiscal value include:

- Accounting records
- Audit reports
- Budgets
- Grant agreements
- Ledgers
- Payroll records
- Vouchers

### **Legal Value**

Legal value refers to the “usefulness or significance of records to document and protect the rights and interests of an individual or organization, to provide for defense in litigation, to demonstrate compliance with laws and regulations, or to meet other legal needs.”<sup>28</sup> Examples of such records include agreements, civil and criminal case files from district courts, contracts, leases, city ordinances, personnel records, land records from county recorders, township road records, and naturalization papers.

### **Historical Value**

Records with historical value are important as they provide information about our past and help guide us into the future. They document the development of government and its policies, provide unique evidence of the lives and activities of people, describe social and economic conditions, and record the development of community and business. They are important to students, researchers, historians, citizens, and local governments. Some historical records must be retained permanently. Examples of records that have historical value include:

- Annual reports
- Birth and death records
- Selected correspondence

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<sup>28</sup> Pearce-Moses, Richard. *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology: Legal Value*. Society of American Archivists. 2005. [http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term\\_details.asp?DefinitionKey=256](http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=256)

- Hearing transcripts
- Meeting minutes
- Photographs

As a records custodian, it is important for you to remember that the definition of a historically valuable record can change dramatically over time, and you therefore need to appraise records continually. For instance, interest in women's, ethnic, and labor history has grown tremendously, making records that pertain to these subjects far more valuable today than they were perceived half a century ago.

### **Intrinsic Value**

Records with intrinsic value have unique characteristics that make them interesting and worthy of retention. A record might have intrinsic value because of it's:

- Age or time period
- Association with a particular geographical location
- Association with famous people
- Unusual physical or aesthetic qualities
- Description of important or controversial issues
- Coverage of historical events
- Exhibit potential
- Unique or special content
- Creation under unusual circumstances
- Signatures or attached seals

Examples of such records include Minnesota territorial records, township citizen petitions, city council proclamations, school certificates, and hand-drawn maps from county surveyors.

## **What is the recommended appraisal process?**

Your organization's mission and collection policy define what records you are interested in collecting and retaining at your institution and identify priority subjects and the types of materials you believe are most likely to yield information of value for future use. Appraisal is guided by these policies and is the process by which selection is made.

At first, appraising your records might seem like an overwhelming task. For this reason, the Minnesota Historical Society has created a helpful tool that will make the appraisal job easier: the *Appraisal Checklist*<sup>29</sup>. This checklist can be used for any quantity of records, from just a handful of documents to a basement vault filled with many types of records. This checklist provides a systematic way to arrange and identify records, making a large project easier to manage.

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<sup>29</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Appraisal Checklist*. State Archives Department. March 19, 2003.  
[http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/recordservices/appchecklist.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/recordservices/appchecklist.pdf)



A summary of the appraisal process is provided here:

1. Separate records from nonrecords. When separating records you should keep track of records series, collect key record information, and weed out obvious duplicates. Records series refers to a group of records that were created, arranged, and maintained as a group because they relate to a particular subject or function. Examples of records series include:

- Town clerk record books
- Township invoices
- City council ordinances
- City manager correspondence
- County board minutes
- County auditor tax lists
- School superintendent correspondence
- School district permanent pupil cards

You should also collect key information as you separate records from nonrecords. Key information includes the:

- Department or office that created the records
- Arrangement of the records
- Physical condition of the records
- Media of the records (for example paper, microfilm, photographic, or electronic)
- Topics—especially those of special importance—covered in the records
- Date span of the records (earliest to most recent)
- Principal correspondents, if relevant
- Uniqueness of records

2. Group similar records together.
3. Create records retention schedules based on the value of the records.
4. Re-house the records. Use boxes and folders as necessary. Refer to Chapter 5 of these guidelines (*How do you preserve and store government records?*).
5. Compile a detailed inventory of the records. Refer to Chapter 5 of these guidelines (*How do you preserve and store government records?*).

## What other appraisal considerations are important?

When you start looking at records appraisal issues within your organization, begin by considering the broader issues, asking questions such as these:

- Do you have a collection policy that provides guidance for appraising records?
- Do the records fit into your collection scope?
- How much will it cost to process and preserve the records?
- Are the records in a physical condition that allows them to be used?

After dealing with the broader issues, spend time on more specific issues by asking questions such as these:

- Does an appropriate records retention schedule for the records exist?
- Is the information in the records available in another location or format?
- Will restrictions on use lessen the value of the records?
- Are you in compliance with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act? (See Chapter 6 of these guidelines [*How do you provide access to government records?*]).
- How may researchers use the records?

You should have an organizational mission statement and collections policy that specifies the nature of the records you wish to collect and preserve. Your collections policy should take into consideration the resources you have available for collecting and preserving records, such as staff, talent, available space, and funds. The Wisconsin State Historical Society has a practical and easy-to-follow manual<sup>30</sup> that will help you create a collection development policy for your historical records.

## How do you appraise non-paper records?

When appraising non-paper records, you need to understand and evaluate issues concerning technology. The two important steps in appraising non-paper records are:

1. Appraise the informational value of the records. It is important to remember that your appraisal should be based on records content, regardless of the media.
2. Analyze the technical nature of the records, including the cost of acquiring, processing, preserving, and servicing the records. Know if the records are dependent on particular technology, and determine if the records are best stored on their current media. Ask yourself such questions as these:
  - Are the records physically stable?

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<sup>30</sup> Wisconsin Historical Records Advisory Board Wisconsin Association of Public Librarians. *Creating a Collection Development Policy for Local Historical Records in Public Libraries*. April 1998.  
<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/whrab/wapl.pdf>

- What are the storage costs?
- Will you be able to migrate records information from one medium or format to another one?
- Will the technology become obsolete making the record inaccessible?

For more information please review *Challenges in Managing Records in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*<sup>31</sup> produced by the National Electronic Commerce Coordinating Council (NECCC) Analysis of State Records Laws Work Group.

## **What factors should you consider when appraising certain types of non-paper records?**

All types of records have their own specific appraisal issues that you need to be aware of. Here we discuss specific appraisal issues associated with audio and video tapes, electronic records, microform, motion picture film, oversized documents, and photographic materials.

### **Audio tapes**

Audio tapes often have unique value because of the informational, artistic, and cultural nature of their content. You might find that selecting the tapes you want to retain is a difficult and time-consuming task.

### **Video Tapes**

Video tapes often have value because of the informational, artistic, and cultural nature of their content. You might find that selecting the tapes you want to retain is a difficult and time-consuming task.

### **Electronic Records**

When appraising electronic records, you need to consider the information system that created, stores, displays, and processes the record. Also, be aware that the cost of preserving electronic records can be high because of the need to migrate data and to periodically upgrade hardware and software. You will need to decide who will manage the records and where you will store the official copies. Documentation, such as computer system manuals, metadata, and in-house procedures, must be kept to assist in reading and using the electronic records. You will also need to determine the format of the official record copy.

### **Microfilm and Microfiche**

The cost of preserving and storing microfilm and microfiche can be high, and if you wish to do so, you will need to purchase and maintain an appropriate microfilm reader. When appraising this type of record, you will need to consider the readability of and any damage to the microfilm.

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<sup>31</sup> National Electronic Commerce Coordinating Council (NECCC). *Challenges in Managing Records in the 21st Century*. NECCC Analysis of State Records Laws Work Group. 2004.  
[http://rpm.lib.az.us/papers/Challenges\\_in\\_El\\_Records.pdf](http://rpm.lib.az.us/papers/Challenges_in_El_Records.pdf)

### **Motion Picture Films**

Motion picture films often have unique value because of the informational, artistic, and cultural nature of their content. Reviewing and selecting films for retention might be difficult and time-consuming.

### **Oversized Documents**

Oversized documents, such as maps and architectural drawings, can be inconvenient to preserve and store. They have more value when they provide unique information and when they are accompanied by related documents such as correspondence, reports, and specifications. Final drawings are preferred over preliminary drawings.

### **Photographic Material**

Photographs and negatives often have more informational than evidential value. Proper exposure, clear focus, good composition, and complete identifying information (such as subject, photographer, date, and location) have an important impact on your appraisal. Refer to your collections policy to help you decide what photographic materials to keep. It is important to remember that photographic materials will disintegrate over time, and camera negatives and first-generation prints are always preferred.

## **What tools can I use to appraise government records?**

The State Archives has several tools readily available to help you appraise government records including worksheets, forms, and information leaflets. A select few are discussed below.

### **Appraisal Checklist<sup>32</sup>**

As described earlier, a practical and an easy-to-use tool is the *Appraisal Checklist* available from the State Archives.

### **Electronic Records Inventory Worksheet<sup>33</sup>**

A tool to help gather and identify general information about electronic records as well as information surrounding records management concerns and hardware, software and media information of the record set in question.

### **Records Retention Schedules and Forms<sup>34</sup>**

Records retention schedules provide you with a plan for managing government records. General records retention schedules give you minimum retention periods for records based on the records' administrative, fiscal, legal, and historical value. It is important to remember that the retention period pertains to the content of the records, regardless of the records' media or format.

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<sup>32</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Appraisal Checklist*. State Archives Department. March 19, 2003.  
[http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/recordservices/appchecklist.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/recordservices/appchecklist.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Electronic Records Inventory Sheet*. State Archives Department. June 10, 2004.  
[http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/ErecsInventory.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/ErecsInventory.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *General Records Retention Schedules Available Online*. State Archives Department. August 24, 2009. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/retentionsched.html>

The State Archives maintains a website<sup>35</sup> of retention schedule information, including schedules for Minnesota counties, cities, townships, school districts, district courts, human resources schedules for state agencies, and financial schedules for state agencies. Following these schedules can help you dispose of records according to state law. (Review the records management statute M.S. 138.17<sup>36</sup>.)

State or local government agencies may create their own records retention schedules, but each schedule must be reviewed and approved prior to use. To create your own records retention schedule, you must first submit three signed copies of your proposed schedule to the State Archives of the Minnesota Historical Society<sup>37</sup>. The State Archives will review the schedule, and then submit it to the Records Disposition Panel for final review and approval. Once the schedule is approved, a copy will be returned to your agency. A blank records retention schedule form, with instructions, is available on the State Archives web site<sup>38</sup>.

### ***Application for Authority to Dispose of Records Form***

The *Application for Authority to Dispose of Records*<sup>39</sup> form is a means of disposing records that are not covered in any records retention schedule. It is your responsibility to fill out the form completely and submit it to the State Archives. The State Archives will then secure the signatures of the Records Disposition Panel members and return the form to you.

### **Government Records Information Leaflets**

The State Archives provides government records information leaflets that identify the most historically valuable records created or preserved by local government units. The following leaflets are available on the State Archives web site.<sup>40</sup>

1. *Township Records*
2. *School District Records*
3. *Records of the County Superintendent of Schools*
4. *Municipal Records*
5. *Law Enforcement Records*
6. *County Auditor Records*
7. *Public Library Records*
8. *Records of Public Health Care Facilities*
9. *Records of Heritage Preservation Commissions*
10. *Watershed District and Soil and Water Conservation District Records*

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<sup>35</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *General Records Retention Schedules Available Online*. State Archives Department. August 24, 2009. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/retentionsched.html>

<sup>36</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 138.17 Government Records; Administration*. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.17>

<sup>37</sup> Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Boulevard West, Saint Paul, MN 55102-1906

<sup>38</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Record Services: Forms*. State Archives Department. September 2009. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/recser.html#forms>

<sup>39</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Application for Authority to Dispose of Records*. State Archives Department. June 1997. [http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/PR1form.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/PR1form.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Record Services: Related Links*. State Archives Department. March 10, 2009. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/recser.html#info>

## Where can you get more information on appraising government records?

### **Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives, Appraisal Checklist**<sup>41</sup>

The State Archives developed an *Appraisal Checklist*, which should be used to make the appraisal process easier.

### **Council of State Archivists (COA). Archives Resource Center.**<sup>42</sup>

COA maintains a website devoted to providing archivists with information on useful information about state archives and record management programs.

### **National Association of Government Archives and Record Administrators (NAGARA)**<sup>43</sup>

NAGARA provides a searchable library on various topics related to records management in the government setting including appraisal.

### **National Archives and Records Administration**<sup>44</sup>

This web site has useful information about all aspects of government archives, and includes T.R. Schellenberg's book, *The Appraisal of Modern Records*<sup>45</sup>, which provides an excellent foundation for appraising modern American government records.

### **Society of American Archivists (SAA)**<sup>46</sup>

The following resources as well as others are available in print from the SAA bookstore:

Boles, Frank. *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*. Archival Fundamentals Series II. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005.

Cox, Richard J. *No Innocent Deposits: Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal*. Scarecrow Press, 2004.

Craig, Barbara L. *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice*. KG Saur, 2004.

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<sup>41</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Appraisal Checklist*. State Archives Department. March 19, 2003.  
[http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/recordservices/appchecklist.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/recordservices/appchecklist.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Council of State Archivists (CoSA). *ARC: Archives Resource Center*. May 30, 2009.  
<http://www.statearchivists.org/arc/index.htm>

<sup>43</sup> National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA). Resources Home.  
<http://www.nagaresources.org/>

<sup>44</sup> The National Archives. *Home Page*. <http://www.archives.gov/index.html>

<sup>45</sup> The National Archives. *The Appraisal of Modern Records*. Archives Library and Information Center (ALIC). 1999. (Based on Schellenberg, T.R. *The Appraisal of Modern Records*. October 1956.)  
<http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/archives-resources/appraisal-of-records.html>

<sup>46</sup> The Society of American Archivists. *Home Page*. <http://www.archivists.org/>

## HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE GOVERNMENT RECORDS?

Documentation and description are two very important activities you need to understand and practice when managing your government records. Both apply to cataloging individual records and records series, as well as your mission, policies, and procedures. Following good documentation and description practices is important throughout all aspects of records management—from initial contact with the donor to the eventual disposition of your records—and when applied, can be a tremendous help in improving the quality of your collections and your services.

In this chapter you will learn what documentation and records description are and how they can help you manage your collections. This chapter also discusses the importance of description standards and presents some of the more commonly used standards that you should be familiar with.

### What is meant by documentation and why is it important?

Documentation has several meanings in the archival setting. First, it can refer to a process that results in greater accessibility to records, substantiates the authenticity of records, and provides the means of managing and controlling records more effectively. Second, documentation can refer to the products of this process—finding aids, such as catalog records, inventories, registers, and indexes. Lastly, documentation can refer to the records themselves. Good documentation adds substantial value to your collections:

#### **Good documentation makes locating and retrieving your records easier.**

When you document your collections, you are using description standards and creating finding aids that help you locate and retrieve records more easily. Standards and finding aids are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

#### **Good documentation substantiates the trustworthiness of your collections.**

As an archivist, you need to be collecting information on the origin, ownership, and completeness of your collections. When you do so, you are substantiating the reliability and authenticity—the trustworthiness—of your collections. Deeds of gift and certificates of authenticity are examples of documentation that you need to collect and retain, as they prove legal ownership and authenticity.

#### **Good documentation provides the means to manage and control your records more effectively.**

In the course of managing your collections, you are constantly involved in many archives-related activities: acquiring, processing, conserving, storing, exhibiting, and loaning to name a few. Your collections are important assets, and good documentation is essential for tracking and controlling these valuable collections. Good documentation practice is also

essential for minimizing the legal risks associated with managing your collections. To assess your legal risk, use the State Archives' *Legal Risk Analysis Tool*<sup>47</sup>.

## What is records description and why is it important?

Records description is the means of providing useful information on the content and organizational structure of archival holdings. It identifies the type of information needed by staff and researchers, and is compiled from the record itself or from an external source. Records description results in the creation of finding aids such as catalog records, inventories, registers, and indexes. These finding aids provide a convenient way to scan through large quantities of records to locate desired information, some of which are described below.

### Catalog Records

A catalog record is a descriptive summary of a set of records and commonly contains information such as records storage location, author, title, history, and contents summary. In addition to being used as a finding aid itself, catalog records can be used to generate other helpful finding aids such as an author index or collection title inventory. Catalog records are easily incorporated into electronic systems for online access and remote searching.

### Inventories and Registers

Inventories and registers are similar to catalog records in that they contain summary information about a set of records. But unlike catalog records, they add detailed information about the location, structure, and contents of the records series (detailed information such as box number, folder number, volume number, and detailed descriptions of contents). Presenting such detailed information makes it easier and quicker to locate and retrieve specific information. Compared to catalog records, inventories and registers can be narrative in nature, allowing you to easily create and manage them using commercial word processing software and a personal computer.

### Indexes

An index is a listing of all information held in a collection and guides you to the finding aid that is most suitable for your search. Indexes function much the same as card catalogs found in public libraries.

## Why are standards so important in record description?

Just as the standard conventions provided by a common language enhance everyday communication, description standards enhance the sharing of collection-related information. The use of broad standards encourages the sharing of information among people, departments, and organizations, and makes your collections and the collections of others more accessible and, therefore, more valuable.

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<sup>47</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook: Appendix G, Legal Risk Analysis*. State Archives Department. July 2002. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/tis/Legalrisk.html>



Many different description standards are available covering data value, data structure, data content, and data interchange. Standards also exist for inventories and registers. For an introduction to archival organization and description, review the resource with the same title, *Introduction to Archival Organization and Description*<sup>48</sup>, by Michael J. Fox and Peter L. Wilkerson.

## What are some of the standards used in record description?

As previously mentioned, there are many description standards available to help you manage your collections. The Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, controlled vocabularies and thesauri, Encoded Archival Description, the General International Standard Archival Description, and Machine Readable Cataloging are some standards that you should be aware of.

### Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR2)

AACR2 is a set of cataloging rules used in the library profession and is jointly published by the American Library Association, Canadian Library Association, and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (UK). The rules assist with description and access of cataloged materials. Information about the standards can be found online<sup>49</sup>. A new version, AACR3 or RDA is currently being developed and tested.<sup>50</sup>

### Controlled Vocabularies and Thesauri

Controlled vocabularies and thesauri are data value standards that control the terminology used for describing information. Controlled terminology is beneficial because it allows related or similar information to be included in the results of information searches. For instance, if you search for information on Paul Joseph Smith, controlled terminology will also return information on Paul J. Smith, Paul Joe Smith, and Paul Joseph Smith Jr.

### Encoded Archival Description

Encoded Archival Description (EAD) is a data structure and data interchange standard that applies to inventories and registers. Since this standard is compliant with Extensible Markup Language (XML), EAD-formatted inventories can be opened and viewed by web page browsers. The standard is available online.<sup>51</sup>

### ISAD (G): General International Standard Archival Description

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<sup>48</sup> Fox, Michael J. and Peter L. Wilkerson. *Introduction to Archival Organization and Description*. J. Paul Getty Trust. 1998. [http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting\\_research/standards/introarchives/](http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/standards/introarchives/)

<sup>49</sup> American Library Associations. *ALA Editions*.  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/publishing/editions/editions.cfm>

<sup>50</sup> RDA: Resource Description Access. *Home Page*. <http://www.rdaonline.org/>; Library of Congress. *Testing Resource Description and Access (RDA)*. <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/rda/>

<sup>51</sup> Library of Congress. <EAD> Encoded Archival Description: Version 2002 Official Site. July 10, 2009.  
<http://www.loc.gov/ead/>

A set broad and general rules to be used when describing archival materials that developed twenty-six elements for description. These elements provide a structure to the description of the records as well as serving as access points into the records. The standard is available online<sup>52</sup>.

### **Machine Readable Cataloging**<sup>53</sup>

Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) is a well-known data interchange standard that defines catalog information fields and field data type for all types of records, whether the records are books, films, or artifacts. For example, this standard specifies that the field designated as 655 contains only information on the physical form or genre of a record or group of records, and that this information be in accordance with a particular protocol.

## **Where can you get more information on government record description?**

### ***Introduction to Archival Organization and Description***<sup>54</sup>

This web site contains introductory information about organizing and describing collections of personal papers and organizational records that make up the fabric of archival collections.

Hensen, Steven. *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990.

The following resources are standards used in description:

International Council on Archives. *General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD-G)*. Stockholm: International Council on Archives, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1999. Available online<sup>55</sup>.

Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR. Edited by Michael Gorman and Paul W. Winkler. *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*. 2<sup>d</sup> ed., 1998 revision. Chicago: American Library Association, 1998. Available online<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup>International Council on Archives. *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*. 1994.

[http://www.mclink.it/personal/MD1431/sito/isaargrp/isad\(ge\).html](http://www.mclink.it/personal/MD1431/sito/isaargrp/isad(ge).html)

<sup>53</sup>Library of Congress. *MARC Standards*. June 23, 2009. <http://www.loc.gov/marc/>

<sup>54</sup>Fox, Michael J. and Peter L. Wilkerson. *Introduction to Archival Organization and Description*. J. Paul Getty Trust. 1998. [http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting\\_research/standards/introarchives/](http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/standards/introarchives/)

<sup>55</sup>International Council on Archives. *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*. 1994.

[http://www.mclink.it/personal/MD1431/sito/isaargrp/isad\(ge\).html](http://www.mclink.it/personal/MD1431/sito/isaargrp/isad(ge).html)

<sup>56</sup>American Library Associations. *ALA Editions*.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/publishing/editions/editions.cfm>

## **WHAT ARE THE ISSUES REGARDING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONIC RECORDS?**

Over the past several decades, information technology has dramatically changed the way you conduct your business as a government agency or historical society. Records and information that once existed only on paper now often appear in electronic form, requiring you to learn how to manage, store, and preserve electronic records. And while electronic records can have tremendous advantages over paper-based records, they do bring their own specific—and sometimes more complex—issues that you need to consider.

In this chapter you will learn about the issues surrounding information technology and electronic records, and how preserving electronic records compares to preserving more traditional paper ones. This chapter also offers advice on some tools and methods to help you, as well as discussion of three common types of electronic records: digital images, e-mail, and web pages.

### **Why should you be concerned about information technology and electronic records?**

The creation and use of electronic records is commonplace in daily life from home to business to government. Electronic records exist in a variety of forms and formats, such as digital images, email, web pages, databases, spreadsheets, and word-processing documents, and can be stored in a variety of ways ranging from personal pocket-sized flash drives to networked servers.

As discussed in Chapter 1 of these guidelines (*What do you need to know about government records?*), the definition of a government record in Minnesota is not dependent upon its physical format or storage media. Content determines whether or not something is a record. It does not matter, for instance, if your correspondence is in paper form or in an e-mail system—both the paper letter and the e-mail can be an official record and need to be managed as such.

Two laws discuss the use of electronic records: the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA), passed during the Minnesota 2000 legislative session; and the federal Electronic Signatures in National and Global E-Commerce Act (E-Sign). These acts are important because they place electronic documents and digital signatures on the same legal footing as their paper counterparts.

### **What are the benefits of electronic records?**

Depending on how you make use of them, electronic information systems and electronic records may reduce your operating costs and can greatly improve access for users where appropriate. For example:

- Electronic records can often be accessed from a central storage location by more than one person and from multiple locations. Such a system can produce savings in terms of distribution costs, storage, and staff time.
- Metadata (descriptive information about records) can often be captured automatically by an electronic information system, reducing the need for arduous and error-prone manual data entry.
- Electronic information systems can facilitate the management of electronic records, reducing storage and management costs, and ensuring compliance with applicable laws. For example, such a system may be able to automatically locate records that are at the end of their retention period and prompt staff as to appropriate disposal actions.

## What are the legal issues associated with electronic records?

Although electronic records are now commonly accepted in court, care must be taken to ensure that they are authentic and reliable. The fact that electronic records can be easily manipulated often raises doubts about their trustworthiness. Has the record been changed since its creation? If so, by whom and when? During legal actions, the burden of proving the authenticity and reliability of electronic records is yours.

Fortunately, the tools mentioned in Chapter 3 of these guidelines (*How do you describe government records?*) offer you assistance. Metadata can help you track changes to records, and your documented policies and procedures can demonstrate the trustworthiness of your electronic records. Moreover, using standards and metadata can save you considerable expense and hardship should your records ever be required for litigation. Not only do you pay the expense of producing records, but also you could face monetary damages and unfavorable court actions if you have not properly managed your records. For more guidance on establishing the trustworthiness of your records, refer to the Minnesota State Archives' *Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook*<sup>57</sup> and *Electronic Records Management Guidelines*<sup>58</sup>. In addition, the 2006 Amendments to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure<sup>59</sup> concerning the discovery of "electronically stored information" offer practical guidance applicable to any litigation.

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<sup>57</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Trustworthy Information Systems Project*. State Archives Department. July 2002. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/tis/tis.html>

<sup>58</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Electronic Records Management Guidelines*. State Archives Department. March 2004. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/electronicrecords/erguidelines.html>

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Courts. *Federal Rulemaking. Amendments to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedures* [including rules 16, 26, 33, 34, 37, 45 and Form 35]. [http://www.uscourts.gov/rules/EDiscovery\\_w\\_Notes.pdf](http://www.uscourts.gov/rules/EDiscovery_w_Notes.pdf)

## How does managing and preserving electronic records compare to that of paper records?

Electronic records have certain characteristics that can make them more complex to manage and preserve. Some of these issues are listed below.

### **Tracking electronic records is more difficult.**

Unlike paper records, electronic records may be more difficult to browse through as you search for the file you need. Certain practices such as naming conventions, filing system schemes, metadata, and indexing can give you greater access to your electronic records, and make tracking and retrieving them more accurate and efficient.

### **Identifying and tracking official copies of electronic records is more difficult.**

Because they are less tangible than paper records, it is difficult to indicate official copies of electronic records. Moreover, electronic records are easily distributed and convenience copies can proliferate, raising storage costs and creating confusion. Metadata can be used to indicate whether a record is an official or convenience copy, both for daily business purposes as well as to facilitate records management.

### **Information technology keeps changing.**

Unlike paper records, which are intelligible to the human eye, electronic records require both hardware and software to be usable. But as technology and technical standards continue to advance at an increasing rate, equipment and applications can become outdated and replaced very quickly. Records created with older technology might not be compatible with newer versions, making your records inaccessible. When upgrading your information system, be sure that the content of your records remains unchanged and accessible before you dispose of your old system. You might need to convert your records to a new or different software version or hardware platform to keep them accessible for as long as required by your retention schedules. Your budget should reflect the need for such periodic migration and conversion.

### **Electronic storage media have short life spans.**

Electronic storage media have relatively short life spans. This requires you to periodically migrate your records to new media. Such action will help ensure that your records are accessible for as long as required.

### **Disposal of electronic records is more complex.**

When you delete files they might not necessarily be removed completely—the files are typically only removed from the storage media's directory or table of contents. The complete record, or portions of it, might still be retrievable even if it has been overwritten with new information several times.

Commercial software packages can assist in this disposal process, but they might not be able to guarantee complete erasure. In the case of magnetic storage media, such as tapes, you can degauss, or demagnetize, the media to completely and permanently remove files, a procedure which has the added benefit of allowing you to reuse the media. Of course, the best way to

ensure complete and permanent electronic record disposal is to destroy the storage media itself. You need to decide which record disposal method is best for you based on the sensitivity of the information in the record. You might want to consider using a private company that can guarantee the disposal of records of all types.

**Staff training on electronic information systems is more costly and time-consuming.**

The training required for a paper-records system may be minimal and can often be easily accomplished on the job. However, to manage electronic records you will need to train your staff on the technical systems used for their manipulation and storage (e.g., computer hardware, software applications, operating systems), as well as on any applicable laws, policies, and procedures. This training is more costly than that for paper-based systems; you may have to use outside training organizations such as a local community college or private company. Normal staff turnover and the frequent replacement of electronic information systems as technology improves will require an on-going training program.

## **What tools can you use to help manage electronic records?**

The necessary task of managing your electronic records can seem intimidating, but fortunately there are several tools you can use to simplify this task and make your recordkeeping system more efficient and reliable: standards and guidelines, metadata, and documentation.

### **Standards and Guidelines**

Following written standards and guidelines for record creation, content, structure, storage, and disposal will result in a records system that is more efficient to manage and use. For example, a standard that instructs you to use a particular online form to record business transactions or which specifies that addresses can only include certain abbreviations will help to ensure that information is recorded consistently. Or perhaps a guideline will instruct you to store records that relate to a particular project all in the same location, making it easier to locate and retrieve the records. The consistency and uniformity that standards and guidelines bring will benefit not only your records management program, but also your daily business functions.

### **Metadata**

Metadata is descriptive information that facilitates management of, and access to, other information. Although optimal metadata varies between different record sets, it commonly includes information such as the name of the record creator, the date and time of creation, a record identifier, key words, the record location, and a description of the record content. A traditional example of metadata would be the bibliographic information found in card catalogs.

Properly designed and implemented metadata can help locate an electronic record; locate the official copy of an electronic record; determine whether a record has been modified; determine who has access to a record; and ensure proper record disposition is performed at the end of a retention period. While inconsistent, inaccurate, and inadequate metadata can give rise to a number of records management problems.

## Documentation

Be sure to carefully and thoroughly document your standards, guidelines, policies, procedures, and systems, and make this information conveniently available to all staff members as appropriate. Having your documentation current and kept in one location is especially useful in times of audits, disaster recovery, and litigation.

It is easiest to document a system when it is first installed. If a shortage of time and resources keeps you from documenting those that have been in use for some time, you might want to focus on the systems that contain:

- Records vital to your operation
- Unique and valuable records that are not duplicated elsewhere
- Records that are used frequently
- Records that have a high public profile

The State Archives' *Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook*<sup>60</sup> shows you how to document your information systems and assess the risk associated with your recordkeeping practices.

## What should you know about digital imaging?

When you scan paper records, you are creating digital image files that can be displayed, manipulated, and stored electronically—in other words, electronic records.

Before converting paper records to electronic format, you should compare the costs and benefits of your current system to those of an electronic information system. Be sure to consider the additional costs of record tracking and disposal, changing technology, documentation, metadata, and standards and guidelines development. Implementing an electronic solution might be expensive up-front, but may lead to great savings and improvement in productivity and efficiency in the long run.

Digital imaging may be beneficial if you have a large backlog of paper records or if your paper records are used heavily. On the other hand, automating a current system might only lead to marginal savings. For instance, spending an enormous amount of time digitizing canceled checks may relieve you of having to store large quantities of paper, but the time taken by the process might not actually be well-spent since checks typically have a relatively short retention period and might be accessed only occasionally by few people.

If you do decided to digitize your paper records try to use non-proprietary or open source technology and formats and choose your hardware and software, and vendors carefully. Consult with other state agencies that are familiar with the technology and use of digital imaging, and

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<sup>60</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook*. State Archives Department. July 2002. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/tis/tis.html>

learn from their experiences. For more information on digital imaging, refer to the State Archives' *Digital Imaging Guidelines*<sup>61</sup>.

## How should you manage e-mail?

E-mail is relied upon as a convenient means of communication. Like paper correspondence, e-mail messages can qualify as government records, depending on the content. Given that e-mail is generally informal and can be easily created, manipulated, and deleted, you should have an organizational policy that governs its use. Your policy should answer questions such: What e-mail content constitutes a record? When and how should e-mail be saved? In your retention schedules, you should treat e-mail as you would any other type of correspondence, and specify the medium of the official copies (paper or electronic). Be sure your staff becomes familiar with your policy to help ensure that e-mail is handled properly and consistently.

Like other government records, e-mail may need to be stored long-term. If you retain e-mail in its electronic form, store it outside the e-mail system (a particularly important step if messages in your e-mail system are purged automatically at certain intervals) and in a way that it can be easily retrieved. Make use of indexing and standardized methods of storing e-mail so you can easily locate individual e-mails by author, topic, or subject. You also need procedures for retaining e-mail attachments. Do not rely on backup tapes for keeping e-mail long-term since files stored on such tapes are difficult to locate and are often overwritten. Furthermore, backup tapes are not commonly included in retention schedules (in fact, backup tapes often contain a variety of record types with varying retention periods).

If you store e-mail in paper form, be sure to print the "To", "From", "CC", "BCC", "Date", and "Subject" header fields as well as the message content. E-mail attachments should also be printed and retained with their associated message.

## How should you manage web pages?

The Internet can make the distribution of information easier and less expensive, and, as a result, many government entities offer information online. If you do provide information through a web site, there are two important issues concerning the site content that you need to consider.

First, you might need to manage the content of the web site as if it were a government record. Do you offer certain information through your web site only? Will viewers act on the information offered through your web site? If the answer to any one of these questions is yes, then your web pages themselves might be government records and you may need to manage them as such. As part of your web page retention plan, consider questions such as these: How will you store previous versions of your web site content? Is the appearance of the information

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<sup>61</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Electronic Records Management Guidelines: Digital Imaging*. State Archives Department. March 2004. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/electronicrecords/erdigitalimaging.html>



on the web site important? How will you provide access to old versions of web pages? How long should old web page content be retained?

Second, you should place metadata (such as the page creation date, page revision date, and names of those responsible for page content) on each page. The metadata can be displayed along with the information on the web page, or it can be included in the page source code, which can also be viewed using the browser. The Minnesota Office of Enterprise Technology has endorsed a Web Metadata Standard<sup>62</sup> applicable to web pages developed by all government web pages.

## Where can you get more information on information technology and electronic records?

### Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives<sup>63</sup>

This web site offers the *Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook*, which describes methods for establishing the trustworthiness of information systems at any stage of the system development lifecycle. The tools in this handbook will also assist you in determining the level of risk associated with your current records management practices. The State Archives' web site also offers several annotated lists of online resources covering topics such as the UETA, metadata, data warehousing, Extensible Markup Language (XML), data modeling, imaging, and search engines. As well, you will find guidelines and FAQs offering advice on imaging, legal, and storage issues.

### Minnesota Office of Enterprise Technology<sup>64</sup>

The Minnesota Office of Enterprise Technology offers guidelines and standards on topics such as data models, data administration, digital signatures, Internet use, and telecommuting. These guidelines and standards provide valuable models for similar work found at all levels of government.

### Council of State Archivists, Archives Resource Center<sup>65</sup>

Valuable information on programs and activities in other state and local governments can be found at this web site.

### Society of American Archivists (SAA)<sup>66</sup>

There are many resources available through the SAA bookstore on electronic records.

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<sup>62</sup> Office of Enterprise Technology; IRM 21 Web Metadata Standard. June 19, 2002. <http://tiny.cc/1hP2f>

<sup>63</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Home Page*. State Archives Department.

<http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/index.html>

<sup>64</sup> Office of Enterprise Technology. *Home Page*. <http://www.oet.state.mn.us>

<sup>65</sup> Council of State Archivists (CoSA). *ARC: Archives Resource Center*. May 30, 2009.

<http://www.statearchivists.org/arc/index.htm>

<sup>66</sup> The Society of American Archivists. *Home Page*. <http://www.archivists.org/>

## HOW DO YOU PRESERVE AND STORE GOVERNMENT RECORDS?

Preserving and storing your records properly will not only add value to your collections, but will also allow you to better serve those who request access to your holdings. Good preservation and storage practices should be based on common sense, and you should use the best resources available to you. The Minnesota State Archives as well as many other archives around the country follow the practices described in this chapter.

In this chapter you will learn the important basics of storage environment and location, offsite storage, storage supplies, records retrieval, and the proper management of restricted records. You will also be presented with valuable information on preserving and storing all forms of records media, including paper, magnetic, photographic, and electronic media.

### What are the preservation and storage issues common to all types of government records?

The most important issues you need to consider when preserving and storing your collections have to do with the quality of the storage environment and location. Other issues you should consider relate to use of offsite storage space, storage and handling supplies, ease of records retrieval, and access to restricted records.

#### Storage Environment

One of the most important issues you need to address when storing your government records is the stability of your storage environment. Maintaining a stable temperature and relative humidity, as well as protecting your collections from water and direct light, will greatly increase the quality and life of your collections. Use the State Archives' *Storage Checklist*<sup>67</sup> to help evaluate the storage conditions at your facility.

The ideal storage area has an environment that is maintained at a constant 65-70°F and 45-50% relative humidity. If you are unable to maintain such an environment, however, try to keep the temperature and relative humidity as constant as possible. Maintaining a constant temperature of 75°F and a constant relative humidity of 60% is better than allowing the storage environment to vary. Because of Minnesota's seasonal changes, you should have adequate control over the storage environment to avoid a storage area that is cold and dry in the winter and hot and humid in the summer.

Water poses a threat to the stability of your collections, for not only can water directly damage your collections, but it can also create a moist environment that promotes the growth of mold. In general, avoid storing your collections near water pipes. Arrange storage shelves and aisles so

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<sup>67</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Storage Checklist*. State Archives Department. March 19, 2003.  
[http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/recordservices/stgchecklist.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/recordservices/stgchecklist.pdf)

that any water pipes are located over the aisles, not the shelves. Also, try to avoid storing your collections in rooms that are below other rooms containing water pipes.

Try not to store your collections in basements and attics, as these areas are often poorly insulated, and are, therefore, very susceptible to water and weather-related damage. Avoid storing your collections directly on the storage room floor. This will help prevent collections from being damaged by any water that pools or floods. Keep your collections off the floor by storing them on shelves or on pallets if space permits. You can create simple and inexpensive shelving by using bricks and boards.

Properly maintaining the roof, windows, and foundation of your storage building is another means of maintaining a stable storage environment. This will minimize the possibility of weather-related damage to your collections.

Direct light, natural and artificial, can have an impact on the stability of your collections. Not only can direct light fade documents and artifacts, but it can also increase the temperature of your storage room. To reduce the amount of direct light in your storage areas, you can:

- Store collections in rooms that have no windows.
- Cover windows with shades or blinds.
- Turn the lights off when the room is not in use.

### **Storage Location**

Another important consideration when storing your collections is the location of your storage areas. When evaluating building space for storage, you need to consider these issues.

**Ease of Records Retrieval.** The best location for storing your collections will allow you to easily retrieve records when they are needed. See the section entitled *Records Retrieval* later in this chapter.

**Adequate Structural Support.** Your storage area should be able to structurally support large quantities of boxes and artifacts. Items can be very heavy, and by locating them on weight-bearing floors, you can ensure that structural damage to the building, such as sagging floors, does not occur.

**Available Space.** When selecting a storage location for your collections, you should consider future storage space needs as well as current needs. It is best to use one large room for your collections, and the room should provide plenty of open area for future storage. As your collections grow, it will be much easier to maintain one storage environment rather than the environments of several closets or smaller rooms.

**Ease of Maintenance.** Select a location that is easy to maintain and clean. Limit non-collection items, such as trash and food, in the storage area to help prevent clutter and pests. A clean and open space will also make record retrieval easier. Limiting dust will protect your collections from damage caused by dust accumulation and small insects.

**Effective Security.** Keep building security in mind when selecting a storage area for your collections. You should also consider the security of your records by monitoring their use. The following tips provide guidance on keeping your collections secure:

- **Follow local fire and building codes.**
- **Perform routine maintenance and keep your building in good repair.**
- **Keep your storage areas separate from public areas.**  
You can use controlled entrances, “Restricted” or “Staff Only” signs, or areas that are separate from public areas to keep your collections secure. Also, use staff and volunteers to monitor access to restricted areas.
- **Allow only staff or volunteers to retrieve records, and monitor the use of records.**  
Allowing only staff members to retrieve records gives you greater control over the use of your collections. Your staff should also supervise researchers as they use the records they have requested. Some historical societies monitor the use of records, providing valuable information on future research needs.

### **Offsite Storage**

Many organizations turn to offsite storage when space in their main storage facility becomes limited. Although you might feel reluctant to use offsite storage, it is an excellent option for storing certain types of records. You might want to consider offsite storage for records such as master copies, copies of inventories and collection locators, disaster plans. Offsite storage can keep your most important records safe in case your main storage facility is damaged. Infrequently used collections and records can also be kept offsite as the need for access is limited.

You should keep in mind that the records and collections you store offsite are as important as those stored in your main facilities. Therefore, all storage recommendations discussed in this chapter, particularly those having to do with storage environment, location, and security, apply to offsite storage areas as well. If you are thinking of using offsite storage, it is important to consider these questions:

- How far away is the offsite storage location?
- How will you record and inventory the offsite records?
- Who will keep the offsite storage area clean and secure?
- Who will retrieve the records?
- What means of transportation will you use to retrieve offsite records?
- How long will researchers have to wait for records?
- How often will you need to visit the offsite storage area?
- How secure is your offsite storage area?

## Storage and Handling Supplies

Certain supplies can make record preservation, storage, and handling more convenient and can improve the life of your collections. We suggest using these supplies:

<b>Boxes</b>	Use boxes for preventing light and dust from damaging records. Box sizes should be limited to one or two for space economy. Try to limit the filled box weight to a maximum of 40 pounds to avoid personal injury when handling them.
<b>Folders</b>	Use folders for organizing records and making record retrieval easier. Folders are available in letter and legal size.
<b>Pencils (not pens)</b>	Use pencils for labeling and documenting. Pens should be avoided since ink can fade, bleed, and cause unwanted marks on valuable records.
<b>White gloves</b>	Use white gloves for protecting you and your collections. Use them for handling film, photographs, negatives, and dirty items.
<b>Shelves</b>	Use shelves to protect and provide easy access to records. They should be tall and deep enough to accommodate the box sizes you use. Metal shelves are preferred over wood shelves since the pitch, resin, acids, and gasses in wood can leach out and damage your collections. If you use wood shelving, be sure to seal the wood thoroughly. You might need to purchase access equipment such as stepstools, ladders, and forklifts to reach items on upper shelves.

You can purchase archival supplies from a number of suppliers in the United States. (The Minnesota Historical Society does not endorse any particular supplier.) Here are a few suppliers you can contact for more information:

- Conservation Resources International, LLC<sup>68</sup>
- Gaylord<sup>69</sup>
- Hollinger Metal Edge<sup>70</sup>
- University Products, Inc.<sup>71</sup>

## Record Retrieval

It is essential to be able to retrieve records accurately and efficiently. A well-designed retrieval system can help you accomplish this, and can pay for itself in a very short period of time by

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<sup>68</sup> Conservation Resources International, LLC. *Home Page*. <http://www.conservationresources.com>

<sup>69</sup> Gaylord. *Home Page*. <http://www.gaylord.com>

<sup>70</sup> Hollinger Metal Edge. *Home Page*. <http://www.hollingermetaledge.com/>

<sup>71</sup> University Products. *Home Page*. <http://www.universityproducts.com>

freeing up your staff for other duties. First, store your records in an accessible storage area and in a manner that they can be easily reached. Second, maintain a well-designed retrieval system that uses box labeling and location inventories to help you locate boxes and know their contents. You can label your boxes in a couple of ways:

1. Label boxes with numbers and maintain a separate, corresponding content inventory, or
2. Include pertinent information about the box contents on the box label itself.

The information you record on the box or in the inventory might include the title or type of records or contents; date span or date of creation; records creator; records or collection source (donor); destruction date, if applicable; and access restrictions (public or private). For example, a box of birth records might be labeled like this:

Birth Records, 1875-1925  
Department of Health  
Permanent  
Private

Or, a box of city council minutes might be labeled like this:

St. Paul City Council Minutes, 1998-2000  
St. Paul City Council  
Permanent  
Public

Keeping a location inventory in the form of a map, index, or shelf list will allow you to locate boxes easily.

### **Restricted Records**

Being a good public servant means providing users with the information they request as quickly and as efficiently as possible. It is equally important, however, to avoid possible legal problems and embarrassment by preventing access to restricted records. For this reason, it is important for you to clearly note access restrictions on your storage boxes, making it easy for you and your staff to follow the policies regarding restricted records. The policy on restricted records has been established by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 13<sup>72</sup>.

## **How should you preserve and store volumes and oversized documents?**

In general, paper records are best stored in boxes. However, some paper-based materials might be of a size or packaged in such a way that makes box storage impractical. For this reason, you need to specifically address issues regarding volumes and oversized paper documents.

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<sup>72</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 13. Government Data Practices*. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=13>

For example, you may need to store oversized documents such as maps, blueprints, posters, and architectural drawings, and they can be very inconvenient to store. These can be stored flat in large boxes, drawers, or on shelves in oversized folders (try not to make the folders too full or they might become too awkward to handle). Other options include using special containers if you need to store rare, valuable, and damaged volumes. These containers can be obtained from a number of suppliers such as those listed above or made in-house.

Documents can also be rolled. When using this method be sure to sandwich the documents between protective inner and outer layers, keeping the documents from resting directly on the tube and protecting them from the storage environment. Use fabric ties or string rather than rubber bands to hold the roll together (rubber bands can cause the documents to wrinkle and tear). Store rolls side-by-side rather than by stacking, as the weight of the rolls can easily crush the documents you are trying to protect. If you use a storage tube for housing documents, use a tube that is longer than the documents to keep the ends of the documents from wrinkling or tearing.

## **How should you preserve and store non-paper records?**

The preservation and storage issues discussed so far apply to all types of records, whether they are paper or non-paper records. Certain record types such as microfilm, audio/visual, and electronic records (all referred to as *records media*), however, have special storage issues that you need to consider. And given their high susceptibility to damage, it is very important that you adopt special storage practices when storing records media. Some of the storage issues that all records media have in common are listed below.

### **You will need specialized equipment for records media.**

Equipment, such as playback machines, computers, and headphones, can be space consuming, and might require a separate area for use by staff and researchers.

### **You will need to maintain your records media equipment.**

Records media are particularly susceptible to dust, dirt, and scratches, and you will need to regularly clean and maintain the equipment and equipment rooms. Overtime, equipment may also become obsolete.

### **You will need to inspect your records media regularly.**

Inspect samples of the media (audio and video cassettes, microfilm, and electronic records) annually for damage to records and machines and to make sure the media continues to work properly. If you find damaged media, you should migrate the record data to a new copy immediately. If you have recently upgraded a machine, be sure to test a sample of the medium on the new machine to be sure you can still read the old data.

### **Make copies of records media for regular use.**

Store masters of records media in a safe location and make copies for everyday use. Someday you might need to make new copies or migrate data, in which case a reliable master is essential.

**You should periodically migrate records media data.**

To ensure that you can access old data, migrate records media to new media every five to ten years, depending on the media's expected lifespan. This also keeps you up to date with the latest standards in hardware and software.

**You might need to adjust your storage environment for records media.**

To increase the life expectancy and color stability of microfilm and audio/visual records media, consider lowering the storage environment temperature and relative humidity an additional 10°F and 10%, respectively.

**You will need to budget for additional costs.**

If you expect to use and acquire records media, be sure that your budget includes costs for equipment purchase and maintenance, data migration, new media, and environmental controls.

In addition to the common issues just discussed, specific types of records media have their own unique storage requirements.

**Microfilm**

Microfilm is commonly used in government offices and historical societies. When storing microfilm, mount it on stable reels and cores, and check the reels regularly to ensure that they are not falling apart and damaging the film. Store the film upright in storage containers such as boxes, cabinets, or drawers that protect the film from light and dust, and label the containers as you would storage containers for other media. Always rewind microfilm before you store it.

**Audio/Visual Materials**

Audio/visual materials include audio tapes, video tapes, film, photographs, and negatives. Because these records provide a unique witness to government activities by allowing us to see and hear government in action, it is important to know how to preserve these records properly.

In most instances audio/visual materials are protected in cases or on reels. Despite their protective casings, it is still possible to directly contact these media, and oils and dirt transmitted from human contact can add to their deterioration. Therefore, it is wise to wear gloves when handling this type of media, especially when working with film, photographs, and tape when they are out of their casings or off their reels. Keep these materials out of light to avoid heat damage and image fading.

Label all audio tapes, video tapes, and reel film with a date, title, length, creator, type of film or hardware brand, and location. It is best to store audio tapes, video tapes, and reel film vertically so that the tape in the cassette is resting suspended on its spool. Storing these records media horizontally causes the tape or film to rest on its edge, and might bend or warp the tape or film. You might want to consider removing the safety tabs on the cassettes to prevent accidental erasure of data. Be sure to rewind tapes before storing them.



Photographic materials have their own special storage requirements. When storing these media, store them individually in folders or envelopes. To help preserve the image, label the storage envelope rather than the photograph or negative itself. If possible, keep the original photograph in a safe storage area and use a copy of the photograph for exhibit displays.

Use as much identifying information as possible for labeling. Images that are identified are far more valuable than those that are not. Determine as much information as possible from the photograph or negative and include this information on the label. Label information might include photographer, subject, date, names, location, and donor.

Use special folders and storage support if required. Damaged or disintegrating photographs and negatives, as well as glass plate negatives, daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes might require special storage folders and support. Evidence of photograph and negative disintegration includes cracking, breaking, buckling, shrinking, changing colors, and odors. You should use separate, nonplastic enclosures for each photograph or negative that is flaking or disintegrating (deteriorating photographic materials can stick to plastic enclosures). Store glass plate negatives upright and in individual enclosures; label the enclosures *Heavy* and *Fragile*.

The Minnesota Historical Society has more information on preserving and storing photographic material:

- “Basic Care of Photographic Materials, Part I”<sup>73</sup>
- “Care of Photographic Materials, Part II”<sup>74</sup>
- “Storage of Glass Plate Negatives”<sup>75</sup>

Additional resources:

- Caring for Your Family Archives Frequently Asked Questions, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)<sup>76</sup>
- The Rochester Institute of Technology, Image Permanence Institute<sup>77</sup>: A university-based, nonprofit research laboratory devoted to scientific research in the preservation of visual and other forms of recorded information. The web site offers publications covering the storage, care, and identification of photographic materials. The IPI also provides guidelines for film preservation.

## Electronic Records

Government agencies and historical societies are constantly creating, using, and storing electronic records. While the best place to store your electronic records is on a backed-up hard

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<sup>73</sup> Wilson, Bonnie. *Tech Talk: Part One: Basic Care of Photographic Materials*. Minnesota Historical Society *Interpreter*. May 1998. <http://www.mnhs.org/about/publications/techtalk/TechTalkMay1998.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Wilson, Bonnie. *Tech Talk: Part Two: Care of Photographic Materials*. Minnesota Historical Society *Interpreter*. July 1998. <http://www.mnhs.org/about/publications/techtalk/TechTalkJuly1998.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Herskovitz, Robert. *Tech Talk: Storage of Glass Plate Negatives*. Minnesota Historical Society *Interpreter* July 1999. <http://www.mnhs.org/about/publications/techtalk/TechTalkJuly1999.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> The National Archives. *Caring for Your Family Archives*. <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives/>

<sup>77</sup> Image Permanence Institute. *Home Page*. Rochester Institute of Technology. <http://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/>

drive or a network server, if you choose to use removable media such as CDs, DVDs, or magnetic tape, physical storage conditions become very important.

To avoid warping, store disks vertically in boxes or cases, and do not subject disks to pressure. Store compact discs in their jewel cases to prevent scratching and breaking.

Be sure to document the records adequately. When documenting the contents of electronic media, include information such as the system, hardware, and software used for creating the record; the date created and date modified; the name of the creator and the modifier; and any access restrictions.

For more information on electronic records, see *Chapter 4* of these guidelines (*What are the issues regarding information technology and electronic records?*). The Minnesota State Archive's *Electronic Records Management Guidelines*<sup>78</sup> is also very helpful.

## Where can you get more information on preserving and storing government records?

### **Minnesota Historical Society, Conservation Department**<sup>79</sup>

This web page provides information on book repair, photograph preservation, and caring for water-damaged items.

### **Minnesota Historical Society, Conservation Department, Lending Library**<sup>80</sup>

This web page contains the bibliography of the Conservation Lending Library. This library is maintained by the Conservation Department, and library items are available for loan to cultural organizations free of charge. The books, articles, and videotapes contained in this library cover topics such as general preservation, environment, storage, disaster preparedness/recovery, security, pest management, and the conservation of specific records such as paper, photographs, and books.

### **Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives**<sup>81</sup>

This web page contains information on disaster preparedness including prevention, plans, recovery, and links to resources with more information.

### **Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives, Storage Checklist**<sup>82</sup>

This checklist is a tool to evaluate the storage conditions of your facility.

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<sup>78</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Electronic Records Management Guidelines*. State Archives Department. March 2004. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/electronicrecords/erguidelines.html>

<sup>79</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Conservation Home Page*. Conservation Department. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/index.html>

<sup>80</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Conservation Lending Library*. Conservation Department. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/library.html>

<sup>81</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Disaster Preparedness*. State Archives Department. <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/disaster.html>

<sup>82</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Storage Checklist*. State Archives Department. March 19, 2003. [http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/recordservices/stgchecklist.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/recordservices/stgchecklist.pdf)

### **Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives, *Preserving and Disposing of Government Records*<sup>83</sup>**

Developed for Minnesota government agencies, this overview of the basic principles of records management includes chapters on preserving archival records, defining a government record, taking inventory of your records, developing records retention schedules, disposing of records, and setting up a records storage area. A list of resources for more information is included, as well as information about applicable state law regarding electronic records management. Originally published by the Minnesota Department of Administration in July 2000, the guide was updated jointly by the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Government Records and Information Network (MNGRIN) in 2008.

### **National Archives and Records Administration<sup>84</sup>**

This site offers technical information, answers to FAQs, and provides many valuable links related to preservation, paper records, and records media.

### **Conservation OnLine (CoOL)<sup>85</sup>**

CoOL specializes in the preservation and conservation of paper-based materials and records media, and offers numerous resources on and links to related topics.

### **Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC)<sup>86</sup>**

The NEDCC specializes in the preservation and conservation of paper-based materials and records media, and offers numerous resources on and links to related topics.

### **Ogden, Sherelyn, ed. *Preservation of Library & Archival Materials: A Manual*. 3d ed. 1999<sup>87</sup>**

This manual contains information on the preservation and conservation of paper-based materials and records media. It is available in print as well as online. The online version is on the Northeast Document Conservation Center webpage and is organized by topic as Preservation Leaflets. These leaflets have been updated as recently as March 2007.

### **Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA)<sup>88</sup>**

Association of Moving Image Archivists is a non-profit professional association established to advance the field of moving image archiving by fostering cooperation among individuals and organizations concerned with the collection, preservation, exhibition, and use of moving-image materials.

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<sup>83</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Preserving and Disposing of Government Records*. May 2008.

[http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/PandD\\_may2008.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/PandD_may2008.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> The National Archives. *Preservation an Archives Professionals*.

<http://www.archives.gov/preservation/index.html>

<sup>85</sup> Conservation Online (CoOL). *Resources for Conservation Professionals, Home Page*. August 14, 2009.

<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/>

<sup>86</sup> Northeast Document Conservation Center. *Home Page*. <http://www.nedcc.org/home.php>

<sup>87</sup> Northeast Document Conservation Center. *Preservation Leaflets*.

<http://www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets.list.php>

<sup>88</sup> AMIA The Association of Moving Image Archivists. *Home Page*. <http://www.amianet.org/>

### **Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA)<sup>89</sup>**

The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts is a non-profit regional conservation laboratory specializing in the treatment of art and historic artifacts on paper. The CCAHA web site offers treatment services, information on surveys and consultation, publications, and disaster services.

### **Library of Congress, Caring for Your Collections<sup>90</sup>**

Caring for Your Collections, a link from the Library of Congress Preservation web page, provides information on the preservation of several media, disaster recovery guidelines, and links to other preservation web resources. Also available are Frequently Asked Questions, publications, and workshop information.

### **Preservation and Storage, State Library of Victoria, Australia<sup>91</sup>**

The State Library of Victoria offers information sheets on the following topics: packing and storing books, pest control, dealing with mould, storing paper and newspapers.

### **Society of American Archivists (SAA)<sup>92</sup>**

The following resources as well as others are available in print from the SAA bookstore:

Forde, Helen. *Preserving Archives*. UK, Facet Publishing, 2007.

Gorman, G. E., and Sydney J Shep. *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*. UK, Facet Publishing, 2006.

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<sup>89</sup> Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts. *Home Page*. <http://www.ccaha.org/>

<sup>90</sup> Library of Congress. *Preservation*. April 30, 2009. <http://www.loc.gov/preserv/>

<sup>91</sup> State Library of Victoria. *Information Guides*.  
<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/services/conservation/guides/index.html>

<sup>92</sup> The Society of American Archivists. *Home Page*. <http://www.archivists.org/>

## How do you provide access to government records?

Granting access to government records is one of the most important services you provide as you fulfill your mission as a government agency or historical society. Since Minnesota statutes govern access to government records, it is necessary to be familiar with these statutes, and that you grant access to records in accordance with them. The statutes that govern access apply not only to those records that remain in their local jurisdiction, but also to those that are moved to another location or another repository.

In this chapter you will learn about the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) and your responsibilities as a government entity or repository for being in compliance with its requirements. You will also be exposed to a sampling of how government records are classified to ensure proper accessibility to the public. This chapter also contains a discussion on the importance of reference policies and procedures for ensuring equal and easy access to your government records. Finally, Appendix C contains a list of commonly used local government records with information on their access rights.

## Why should you be concerned about access to government records?

Access to government records is governed by federal and state laws, and government agencies and repositories that acquire records need to abide by these laws. In addition to the MGDPA<sup>93</sup>, other laws govern the access to government records, particularly adoption records. Entities that hold and manage government records can be sued for disseminating information protected under the MGDPA. In fact, some entities have been successfully sued for improperly handling protected records and significant monetary awards have resulted. Furthermore, withholding records that are open to the public or releasing information that is protected can lead to substantial embarrassment for your agency or historical society.

## What laws govern access to government records?

Access to Minnesota government records is guaranteed and regulated by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA)<sup>94</sup>, Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13<sup>95</sup>, and Minnesota Rules Chapter 1205<sup>96</sup>. The MGDPA applies to all state and local jurisdictions, excepting the court system (which is governed by its own access rules) and townships (which are exempted by statute). Effective August 1, 2001, any township in the Twin Cities metropolitan area that is

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<sup>93</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 13.01 Government Data*.  
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=13.01>

<sup>94</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 13.01 Government Data*.  
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=13.01>

<sup>95</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 13. Government Data Practices*.  
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=13>

<sup>96</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *Minnesota Administrative Rules. Chapter 1205, Data Practices*.  
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/rules/?id=1205>

exercising powers under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 368<sup>97</sup> will be covered by the MGDPA. Though this statute is long and complex, its basic tenet is clear: government records are presumed to be public and open to everyone unless the data in the records are classified as not public. This statute clearly states that:

- Citizens and researchers do not need to identify themselves or give reasons for viewing public records
- Government agencies must allow public records to be viewed for free and photocopied
- Government agencies may charge reasonable fees for photocopying public records that recover the actual cost of making the photocopies

## According to the MGDPA, what is the responsibility of local government entities?

As a government entity, you must be in compliance with the MGDPA. This means you need to designate a responsible authority and a data practices compliance official, and establish your own specific data practices policies and procedures. To assist you, the Minnesota Department of Administration, Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD) has made available on its website several data practices education resources<sup>98</sup>.

## How does the MGDPA classify information?

The MGDPA recognizes that not all government records should be open to everyone and therefore classifies government data into varying levels of access restrictions. The classifications of data are provided below and demonstrate the complexity of protecting the privacy of Minnesota individuals and organizations.

### Data on Individuals

This classification includes government data on individuals who are living and are clearly identified as the subject of the data (unless the appearance of the name is clearly incidental to the government data, or the government data are not accessed by the name or identifying data of the individual).

**Public Data on Individuals.** This subclassification includes data that are open without restrictions to the public (examples include birth records not relating to births to unwed mothers).

**Private Data on Individuals.** This subclassification includes data that are open only to the individual concerned and the creating agency (examples include most student records, most

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<sup>97</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 368.Towns; Special Provisions.* <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=368>

<sup>98</sup> Minnesota Department of Administration. *Data Practices Education for Government.* Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD). <http://www.ipad.state.mn.us/dpgoveducation.html>

medical case files, public library loan information, and correspondence with elected officials).

**Confidential Data on Individuals.** This subclassification includes data that are not open to the individual concerned (examples include adoption records and certain prison inmate files).

### **Data on Decedents**

This classification includes government data on deceased individuals.

**Public Data on Decedents.** This subclassification includes data that were accessible without restrictions to the public prior to the death of the decedent. Vital records, including death certificates, are considered public data.

**Private Data on Decedents.** This subclassification includes data that were open only to the decedent and the creating agency prior to the death of the decedent (examples include school records, certain criminal justice data and certain parts of prison inmate case files).

**Confidential Data on Decedents.** This subclassification includes data that were not accessible to the decedent prior to death (for example, certain psychological reports from prison inmate case files).

### **Data Not on Individuals**

This classification includes government data not on individuals, such as data on organizations and agencies.

**Public Data Not on Individuals.** This subclassification includes data that are open without restrictions to the public (examples include minutes of public meetings and annual reports).

**Nonpublic Data Not on Individuals.** This subclassification includes data accessible only to the subject of the data and the creating agency (examples include certain labor relations and trade secrets data).

**Protected Nonpublic Data Not on Individuals.** This subclassification includes data not accessible to the public nor the subject of the data (for example, certain investigation data).

## **Is confidential or protected data ever open to the public?**

In certain cases certain confidential information will be opened, as determined in the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act<sup>99</sup>.

You can find more information on the Information Policy Analysis Division website<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 13.01 Government Data*.  
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=13.01>

<sup>100</sup> Minnesota Department of Administration. *Home Page*. Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD).  
<http://www.ipad.state.mn.us/>



## **What access policies and procedures should you use when providing reference services?**

Reference policies and procedures will help you provide equal and easy access to your holdings. No one particular set of policy and procedures works for all agencies and repositories, so you will need to design your own using common sense. Your policies and procedures should be designed to keep in mind the accessibility and security of your collections, the services you intend to provide archives researchers, and statutory requirements.

### **Services You Provide to Researchers**

You should keep a written policy on the services you provide and have it available for review by researchers. This policy statement should include a description of your photocopying services (such as hours, cost, response time, and what can and cannot be copied) and staff services (such as staff hours, availability for assistance, research fees, and acceptable request formats). In determining costs, those entities governed by the MGDPA should consult Minnesota Rules, section 1205.0300, subpart 4 for additional information on how to calculate costs.

### **Easy Access to Your Holdings**

Written lists or inventories are necessary for describing records you are holding. By having such inventories available, you provide researchers the ability to narrow the scope of records that might be useful for their needs. The following is an example of an inventory for School District No. 101/274 (Lake Johanna Township) in Pope County:

1. Clerk's books, 1927-1938. 2 volumes.  
    1927-1932  
    1932-1938
2. Treasurer's books, 1943-1952. 2 volumes.  
    1943-1949  
    1949-1952
3. Classification registers, 1926-1933. 2 volumes.  
    1926-1932  
    1932-1933
4. All in one record, 1933-1937. 1 folder.  
    Includes censuses and teachers' reports to the county superintendent.
5. Attendance registers, 1930-1933. 1 folder.
6. Consolidation order, 1960. 1 folder.

These inventories can appear in many forms; lists, finding aids, card catalogs, online catalogs, and online databases; although the form is less important than having the information available.

As an agency or repository, you have the professional and legal responsibility to ensure that all researchers have appropriate access to the information in your holdings; you should not grant special privileges or exclusivity to any one particular group or individual.



### **Available Space for Viewing Your Records**

You should maintain a work space where researchers can view your records. This space can be a counter, table, or even a separate viewing area or room, and it should make researchers feel welcome and comfortable. It is also important for you to have the necessary playback equipment available if you hold microform, audio or video tape, or electronic records.

### **Security of Your Records**

As a government agency or repository, you need to ensure the safety and integrity of your holdings. In general, government agencies cannot require researchers to identify themselves. On the other hand, historical repositories can, and should, ask researchers to read and acknowledge, by signature, the rules of the repository.

Although we do not like to think so, researchers do occasionally try to take records home with them. You can guard against this by:

- Monitoring researchers when they view records
- Limiting the quantity of records given to a researcher at any one time
- Following a record check in/out procedure
- Discouraging parcels, bags, and topcoats in the record viewing area

Researchers can also feel compelled to “correct” or alter records. For example, a researcher might change the date of birth or marriage, alter a tax record to enhance personal status, or change the spelling of a name. Monitoring the viewing area will help you discourage these possibilities.

### **Where can you get more information on access to government records?**

**Minnesota Department of Administration, Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD)**<sup>101</sup>  
Visit this site for assistance with interpreting and understanding the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA).

**Society of American Archivists, Professional Resources Catalog**<sup>102</sup>  
Mary Jo Pugh’s 1992 manual, *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts*, presents useful reference services for all archives and can be ordered through this web site.

**Ellis, Judith, ed. *Keeping Archives*. 2<sup>d</sup> ed. Melbourne: Thorpe in association with the Australian Society of Archivists, 1993.**

This resource is an excellent and easy-to-read book on archival theory and practice, and contains a chapter on access and reference services.

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<sup>101</sup> Minnesota Department of Administration. *Home Page*. Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD). <http://www.ipad.state.mn.us/>

<sup>102</sup> The Society of American Archivist. *SAA Publications and Products Catalog*. <http://www.archivists.org/catalog/>

## APPENDIX A:

### Requirements for the Disposition/Transfer of Government Records to Repositories other than the Minnesota Historical Society

These requirements are used by the Records Disposition Panel and the Minnesota Historical Society/Minnesota State Archives regarding the disposition of government records to other repositories pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.17<sup>103</sup>, subd. 1; Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.20<sup>104</sup>; and Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.21<sup>105</sup>.

#### I. Records designated as archival by the Records Disposition Panel

It is the intent of the panel that records designated as archival, or the reproduction of archival records that serve as substitutes for the original record, remain in the custody of the agency that created them or the successor agency (pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 15.17<sup>106</sup>, subd. 3) or that they be transferred to the Minnesota Historical Society.

In some cases, another institution may be a more appropriate repository for the preservation, storage, and use of certain series of records. In these instances, the Minnesota Historical Society may enter into an agreement with the repository specifying the conditions of storage and use.

#### II. Records designated as not archival by the Records Disposition Panel

It is the intent of the panel that records designated as not archival be appropriately destroyed in accordance with approved records retention schedules or approved applications for authority to dispose of records (Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.17<sup>107</sup>, subd. 1). The panel may order the method of destruction to be used. These methods may be shredding, incinerating, recycling, or placing in landfills, depending on the privacy status of the records and on local disposition alternatives and requirements.

If an organization other than the creating or successor agency requests custody of such records, the records disposition panel may approve transfer, subject to specifications of conditions of storage and use. The panel will consider requests on a case-by-case basis.

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<sup>103</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2009 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 138.17 Government Records; Administration*. 2009. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.17>

<sup>104</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2009 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 138.20 Record of Proceedings*. 2009. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.20>

<sup>105</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2009 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 138.21 Storage Space Designated by Pane*. 2009. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.21>

<sup>106</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2009 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 15.17: Official Records*. 2009. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=15.17>

<sup>107</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2009 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 138.17 Government Records; Administration*. 2009. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.17>

III. Transfers agreements between a local/county historical society and a repository other than the Minnesota Historical Society/Minnesota State Archives

Transfer agreements must clearly identify the records in question; the manner in which the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] will comply with Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13 (Minnesota Government Data Practices Act); and which copyrights are pertinent. A copy of this agreement shall be filed with the Minnesota Historical Society pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.20<sup>108</sup>. The “Application for Authority to Dispose of Records” (PR-1 Form<sup>109</sup>) may be used to approve such transfers.

When an agency retains reproductions of the records and transfers the originals to another repository, the reproduction becomes the official record. In these cases, the agency must mark on each volume or each sheet of loose paper that it is no longer the official record.

The panel reserves the right to set conditions on these transfers. Such conditions may be dependent upon legal distinctions between, and access requirements for, private and government repositories. No transfers to individuals will be approved.

The model agreement in *Appendix B* of these guidelines is used to approve the transfer of government records from the office of origin to repositories other than the State Archives.

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<sup>108</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. 2009 *Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 138.20 Record of Proceedings*. 2009. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.20>

<sup>109</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. *Application for Authority to Dispose of Records Form*. State Archives. [http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs\\_pdfs/PR1form.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/docs_pdfs/PR1form.pdf)

## APPENDIX B: Government Records Depository Agreement

Use this model agreement to create an agreement between a government agency and a repository other than the State Archives. Refer to *Appendix A* in these guidelines for requirements and instructions of such a transfer.

### GOVERNMENT RECORDS DEPOSITORY AGREEMENT

This **AGREEMENT** is entered on the last day of execution below between the [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT], the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY], and the Minnesota Historical Society, and is made for the purpose of the transfer of [NAME OF RECORDS].

#### RECITALS

Whereas, the following facts support this Agreement:

- A. The government officials of [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] have prepared and maintained [NAME OF RECORDS], dated [DATE RANGE OF RECORDS] as official records, as required by Minnesota Statutes Chapter 15.17.
- B. Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.161 through 138.25, the Minnesota Historical Society administers the State Archives and may accept government records as a gift.
- C. The [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] is prepared to take custody of the [NAME OF RECORDS], dated [DATE RANGE OF RECORDS], to preserve and maintain them for future research.
- D. All parties desire to preserve the [NAME OF RECORDS], dated [DATE RANGE OF RECORDS], for future research and their historical value.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, it is hereby agreed by and between the parties:

- A. That [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] will donate the [NAME OF RECORDS], dated [DATE RANGE OF RECORDS], as a gift to the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY].
- B. It is further agreed that the [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] shall transfer custody of the [NAME OF RECORDS], dated [DATE RANGE OF RECORDS], to the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] to be kept and managed in accordance with the requirements of law and subject to the following conditions:

1. **CUSTODY.** Custody of the records will be transferred to the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY].
2. **REVERSION OF CUSTODY.** The records will not be transferred to the custody of another institution without authorization from [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] and

from the Minnesota Historical Society. If the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] seeks to relinquish custody of the records and its depository rights, it will notify the [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] and the Minnesota Historical Society, in writing, of its intent to destroy or otherwise dispose of the records. Within 90 days of receiving such a notice, the [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] and the Minnesota Historical Society shall advise the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] in writing as to whether or not the records may be destroyed or otherwise disposed of.

3. PUBLIC USE. The records will be available for public use during normal business hours, and access to the records will be provided subject to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 138.17, and Chapter 13 (Minnesota Government Data Practices Act).
4. STORAGE. The records will be placed in a storage area that meets archival storage guidelines as recommended by the Minnesota Historical Society.
5. DISPLAY. The records may be used by the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] or Minnesota Historical Society for display purposes, provided that standard security precautions are followed in regard to the display.
6. RELEASE OF INTEREST. The undersigned do mutually agree and acknowledge that [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] shall release all interests therein and shall give over to the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] the [NAME OF RECORDS], dated [DATE RANGE OF RECORDS], for the purpose of research.
7. REPRODUCTION OF RECORDS. The [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] agrees that the records or any part thereof may be reproduced by the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] at any time without compensation to the [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT].
8. COSTS. The [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] shall pay no costs associated with the maintenance, retrieval, or storage of the records. The [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY], in accepting custody, care, and control of said records, accepts no liability related to the condition, completeness, maintenance, and use of the records; the [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] accepts only the costs related to the physical storage of the records as an archival repository.
9. GUIDELINES. The [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY] and the [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT] agree to follow all guidelines issued by the state Records Disposition Panel and the Minnesota Historical Society governing the disposition of government records to other repositories (*Appendix A*).

C. It is further agreed that each party shall work cooperatively to assure the continued preservation of the [NAME OF RECORDS] as official records.

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_ [LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT]

By \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_ [LOCAL/COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY]

By \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_ MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

By \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C:

### ACCESS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS: A SHORT LIST

Often researchers ask about access to Minnesota local government records, and while most records are open to the public, a few records have restricted access because of state and federal laws. Below is a brief listing of local government records that are popular with researchers, especially for family history research. The list indicates whether or not specific records are open to the public, and the Minnesota local government office of origin. Some, but not all, of the below listed records may be available in the office of origin and/or the State Archives of the Minnesota Historical Society.

**Adoption Files.** These files are closed for 100 years from the date of the granting of the adoption decree. Files over 100 years old are open. Those wishing to see adoption records less than 100 years old must first obtain a court order from the jurisdiction in which the adoption was filed. These files are often kept with the civil case files of the District Court. Office of origin: District Court. (Legal citation: M.S. 259.79<sup>110</sup>).

**Birth Records.** These records are generally closed unless they are over 100 years old or do not pertain to adoptions and out-of-wedlock births. Office of origin: City and township until 1953; and County Vital Statistics Registrar. (Legal citation: M.S. 144.225<sup>111</sup>).

**Civil Case Files.** These files are open except for those pertaining to adoptions (see above). Office of origin: District Court.

**Criminal Case Files.** These files are open except for those cases that have been closed by the District Court. Office of origin: District Court.

**Death Records.** These records are open. Office of origin: City and township until 1953; and County Vital Statistics Registrar.

**Divorce Records.** These records are open and are often filed with the civil case files of the District Court. Office of origin: District Court.

**Insanity Records.** Records that are less than 75 years old contain non-public data. Office of origin: District Court.

**Land Records.** All land records are open. Office of origin: County Recorder.

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<sup>110</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2009 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 259.79 Adoption Records*. 2009. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=259.79>

<sup>111</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2009 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 144.225: Disclosure of Information from Vital Records*. 2009. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=144.225>

**Jail Registers.** These registers are open. Office of origin: County Sheriff or Municipal Police Department.

**Juvenile Records.** These records are closed to the public. Those wishing to see juvenile records must obtain a court order from the jurisdiction in which the juvenile action was filed. Office of origin: District Court. (Legal citation: M.S. 260B.171<sup>112</sup>).

**Marriage Records.** All marriage records are open. Office of origin: County Vital Statistics Registrar.

**Naturalization Records.** All naturalization records are open. Office of origin: District Court.

**Probate Case Files.** All probate case files are open except for those cases that have been closed by the District Court. Office of origin: District Court.

**School Records.** All student record cards or records of individual grades are restricted. They are open to the student with proof of identification, such as a driver's license or identification card. These records are open to all others 30 years after their creation *and* 10 years after the student's death (the death must be proven). Office of origin: Elementary and secondary schools.

**Tax Records.** All tax records, such as tax lists and assessment rolls, are open. Office of origin: County Auditor and County Assessor.

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<sup>112</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2009 Minnesota Statutes: Chapter 260B.171: Records*. 2009  
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=260B.171>



## **APPENDIX D: Version History and Acknowledgements**

### **V3: September 2009**

Updated and edited by Carol Kussmann.

### **V2. December 2003**

Updated and edited by Charles Rodgers and Shawn Rounds.

### **V1. June 2001**

Charles Rodgers, project editor  
Benjamin Bloom  
Michael Ehlert  
Robert Horton  
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Shawn Rounds  
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The authors would like to acknowledge Kurt Swanson, State Archives volunteer, who edited the guidelines.

## GLOSSARY

### General Glossaries

The following resources are glossaries that focus on archival, library, and information science terms. Use these resources to learn more about general archival terminology used in these guidelines.

- A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology.<sup>113</sup> (Hosted by the Society of American Archivists.)
- Glossary of Recordkeeping Terms<sup>114</sup> (Hosted by the United Nations Archives and Records Management Section.)
- Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science (ODLIS)<sup>115</sup>

### Minnesota Specific Terms

**Collection Policy.** A written statement that defines a repository’s collection scope and specifies the subject and format of materials to be collected. Collection policies guide the process of appraisal.

**Federal Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (E-Sign).** Passed by the federal government in June of 2000, E-Sign confirms that electronic signatures and electronic records generally satisfy legal requirements for written signatures and paper records. E-Sign is similar but less comprehensive than the Uniform Electronic Records Act (UETA). See also *Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA)*.

**Government Records.** Defined as state and local records that are created in accordance with state law or in connection with public business transactions. 2008 Minnesota Statute 138.17 defines government records as “state and local records, including all cards, correspondence, discs, maps, memoranda, microfilms, papers, photographs, recordings, reports, tapes, writings, optical disks, and other data, information, or documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, storage media or conditions of use, made or received by an officer or agency of the state and an officer or agency of a county, city, town, school district, municipal subdivision or corporation or other public authority or political entity within the state pursuant to state law or in connection with the transaction of public business by an officer or agency”<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> Pearce-Moses, Richard. *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*. The Society of American Archivists. 2005. <http://www.archivists.org/glossary/index.asp>

<sup>114</sup> United Nations Archives and Records Management Section. (ARMS) *Glossary of Recordkeeping Terms*. <http://archives.un.org/unarms/en/unrecordsmgmt/unrecordsresources/glossaryofrecordkp.html>

<sup>115</sup> Reitz, Joan M. *ODLIS – Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science*. April 3, 2006. <http://lu.com/odlis/about.cfm>

<sup>116</sup> Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes. *2008 Minnesota Statutes: 138.17 Government Records; Administration*. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=138.17>

**Minnesota Department of Administration, Information Policy Analysis Division (IPAD).** A Minnesota government agency that assists other government agencies and private organizations in understanding and complying with a variety of laws that constitute policy decisions about data practices, and access to government data and to other types of data and information. IPAD also provides assistance to the legislature in the development of statutes relating to data access and disposition.

**Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA).** Governs access to government records and is found in Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 13. The basic tenet of this act is that government records are presumed public and open to everyone unless the data in the records are classified as not public.

**Minnesota Office of Enterprise Technology (MN OET).** Agency whose “mission is to provide leadership and services that improve government through the effective use of information technology.”

**Records Disposition Panel.** Established by the Records Management Act, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 138.17, this panel reviews and approves proposed records retention schedules and applications for authority to dispose of records for the state of Minnesota. It is composed of the State and Legislative Auditors, the Attorney General, and the Director of the Minnesota Historical Society.

**State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society (Minnesota State Archives).** A unit of the Minnesota Historical Society, established by Minnesota Statute 138.161 that documents the history of Minnesota by identifying, preserving, and making accessible the evidential record of government activities and the historically valuable information created by government.

**Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA).** An act that supports the use of electronic commerce by establishing that the electronic record of a transaction is as legally valid as that of a paper record. States that have not passed UETA are bound by the Federal Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (E-Sign). See also *Federal Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (E-Sign)*.