

Making Your Records Management Program Successful

IIMC RECORDS MANAGEMENT TECHNICAL BULLETIN No. 6



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MUNICIPAL CLERKS

NAGARA
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENT
ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATORS

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Introduction

Establishing a viable records management program in a municipal environment can be a daunting task. A workable plan must be formulated and support generated. This *Technical Bulletin* discusses how to make your records management program a vital component of your government operations.

Program Elements

Regardless of size or resources, the ultimate objective of a records management program is to be considered indispensable to municipal operations. The successful municipal records management program will have most of the following active elements:

- A *Records Management Manual* that describes the municipality's policies and procedures for caring for its records throughout their life cycle.
- A person designated as the **records officer** to lead the city's records management program—usually the city clerk.
- **Records retention and disposition schedules** that cover all the municipality's records. They should be reviewed and updated at least annually.
- A **records storage program** that removes inactive records from valuable office areas and secures them in economical, off-site areas.
- A procedure that **documents the destruction of public records** that complies with state laws and guidelines. Records and information in all formats, including paper, microfilm, optical disk and electronic records, must be destroyed in compliance with this procedure.

- A plan for **training and educating staff** on records management policies and procedures, as well as publicizing services available through newsletters and other materials.
- A plan to identify, protect and duplicate your organization's **vital records**.
- A **disaster plan** that will help protect the organization's records as well as assist in their recovery in the event of an incident.
- **Records management forms** to document records and information created, received and maintained by the organization, and the transfer or termination of custody of the records.
- Regular contact with the **state's records management / archives agency** to keep abreast of state assistance and requirements.

Performance Checklist

Realistic, service-based goals will buy acceptance for your records management program. Without acceptance and cooperation, the program cannot survive, let alone flourish. Using an informal performance checklist, you can identify program strengths and weaknesses. Sample checklist questions include:

- Have all departments been notified about records management policies and procedures?
- Are retention schedules reviewed annually and inventories or surveys conducted for new records series?
- Are records that are eligible for destruction destroyed on a timely basis and their destruction documented?
- Are all departments complying with records retention and transfer guidelines?
- Are records requests handled in a timely and efficient manner?
- Are records management forms being completed accurately?
- Have all obsolete records been identified and removed from current storage sites?
- Is records management training for staff available informally or formally?
- Have records eligible for microfilming or optical imaging been identified?
- Are storage space and personnel adequate for the current level of activity?

Building Support

Records management programs usually do not attain high profile status (except in a crisis!). A program known for the superior quality of its operations is difficult to eliminate, even during tight budget times. Some simple ways of promoting your records management program include:

Brochures and press releases. Promote your program to get internal and external support for its mission. Materials should contain a description of program services, procedures and contact information. Disseminate throughout the organization. If appropriate, distribute to libraries, courthouses, schools, historical societies, and other local government offices.

Videos. There are a number of excellent, commercial videos on various aspects of records management. These are good for building awareness of the program's importance and for training staff.

Newsletters. Issuing a newsletter once or twice a year is an effective method of disseminating information and maintaining visibility. It can dispense records management advice, provide updates, explain procedures, announce staff or operational changes, and quantify performance (i.e., volume of records transferred to storage facility, volume of obsolete records destroyed, etc.).

Awards. Validation of a records management program's performance is excellent for garnering positive publicity. Recognition from a state or national professional organization is a great kudo.

Grants. State and national grants are available for reformatting records, adding personnel, conducting records surveys, publishing technical manuals, and sponsoring workshops. A program that can subsidize its operations and special projects will always be ahead.

Technology Initiatives

Technological advancements are playing a growing and important role in records management. Many see optical imaging and converting records to an electronic format as a cure-all for information management and storage problems. While these options often are appropriate, they also can be expensive, short-term solutions when a system-wide approach really is needed.

- Get professional advice from a colleague municipality or organization such as IIMC, NAGARA or ARMA when considering a systems conversion. The expense of converting to an optical imaging system often outweighs benefits in storage space

reduction or file accessibility that will be achieved. Careful planning is needed before committing to such systems.

- Microfilm records qualifying for long term retention and destroy the original documents in order to conserve space. Microfilm is both durable and legally admissible in court. Paper copies can still be produced via a reader/printer.

Resources

State Records Management / State Archives Program

Most municipalities can receive expert guidance by contacting their state's agency that is statutorily charged with oversight of the public records management program and / or the state archives.

International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC)

(909) 592-4462; www.iimc.org/

National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators (NAGARA)

(513) 225-4284; www.nagara.org/

Association for Information and Image Managers (AIIM)

(301) 587-8202, www.aiim.org/

Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA)

(800) 422-2762, www.arma.org/



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*This **Records Management Technical Bulletin** is one of a series, and was compiled by Steve Mull, Rome/Floyd (GA) Records Program. The Bulletin was edited by IIMC members and staff, and Grace Lessner and Pete Schinkel of the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators.*

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