

Records Management, Disposal and Retention

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Paper, paper, stacks of paper and files, what do we do with all of these records?

In recent years, businesses have become aware of the problems surrounding the information explosion. Strategies have been formulated to deal with the mass of accumulated records.

These strategies have taken the form of establishing records management programs to promote efficiency and economy in the creation, maintenance, use, retrieval and storage of records to ensure that information is safely and conveniently preserved for as long as it is needed.

Such programs have effectively consolidated information, prevented the creation of unnecessary records, facilitated the filing and retrieval of information, protected essential records, and determined the useful life of each type of record. The use of low-cost record centers or archival repositories provide for safe, economical and convenient storage of records which are no longer required for day-to-day office need.

Records management encompasses all record formats including machine-readable records, microforms, audio and video tapes, and paper records. This can provide comprehensive and systematic control of records creation, use and disposition.

The foundation of a good records management program is a records disposition schedule. This schedule, a company's guideline for the retention and disposition of its records, lists all records series created or received and indicates the length of time each series is to be retained. If consistently followed, a records disposition schedule is the most effective tool a company has to control its records and information. The process of developing a records disposition schedule and a records management program is not very complicated, but may take several months to complete. It involves inventorying, analyzing and finally writing the schedule. It requires personnel to look closely at the manner in which files are created, maintained and organized. Often, files have to be rearranged for records management practices to be put into effect.

The scheduling process serves as a management tool by showing activities that are duplicated, those that can be streamlined, and others that can possibly be eliminated. When the project is over and records management is operational, personnel will know who is responsible for maintaining which files, and a needless accumulation of duplicate files can be eliminated. A good records management program can save time, money and space.

The first step in establishing a records disposition schedule is an inventory of all company records to determine:

- purpose and function
- physical format



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- original record or a copy
- legal retention requirements including dates and quantity of current record
- organization (e.g., alphabetically, chronologically or by subject)
- availability of a filing key, index or other location aid

federal law requires that a record be retained for a minimum length of time after it has served the purpose for which it was created. Most records, however, have a predictable life expectancy and should be destroyed at the expiration of a specified retention period. Records are created to assist in carrying out spe-

requirements have been met. Certain financial records must be retained for one year after audits have been completed. Companies or agencies which operated, in whole or in part, with federal funds will have to satisfy both state and federal audit requirements before their financial records may be destroyed.

In some cases, state or federal law requires that a record be retained for a minimum length of time after it has served the purpose for which it was created.

Inventorying involves a systematic approach and is carried out using a *records inventory report*. Separate inventory sheets are completed for each record series and for those stored in two or more locations. A record series is defined as documents, in any format, that are arranged in a single filing system and relate to a particular subject or which have resulted from the same activity. Normally, records maintained in a company's offices are inventoried before those located in remote storage areas. The former are more accessible and company personnel are more familiar with their functions and contents. Once office records have been inventoried, records housed in other locations can be readily identified and inventoried. The forms compiled from inventorying each location are then filed. Although the introduction of new records series or changed formats may require schedule updating, an inventory will not need a major revision for many years, if ever.

A few records series have enduring administrative, legal, fiscal or research value and therefore must be kept permanently (appraisals, deeds, title information). Other records have continuing legal, fiscal, research, or evidential value because they document policy decisions or contractual agreements. In some cases, state or

cific functions or tasks, and once these have been completed, they cease to have administrative value.

Records pertaining to financial transactions must be retained in a company's custody until all audit

The most difficult determination to make when establishing retention periods is research value. A few record series, with relatively short administrative, legal or fiscal importance, may document or contain important information about historically significant events or about a company's organizational and functional development. Such information or evidence may serve as a guide for

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tion. When there is the slightest doubt, ask.

In summary, there is little reason for cultural resources to delay or impede projects provided adequate planning and decision-making is accomplished, and agreed to, before implementation. During implementation, the decisions already made must be adhered to as much as practical. The manner in which cultural resources were considered during this project is a case of a team, "risk management" and "project management."




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future decisions and can be of unique value to historians and students. These records need to be identified for permanent preservation. When records need to be maintained for longer periods of time or permanently preserved, microforms should be considered.

Microforms can save space and ensure the integrity of the records. When microforms are created in accordance with the required standards, the master negative is stored in a security vault. In case of disaster, a complete duplicate from the microform file can be created. Though microforms have many obvious advantages, their use should be carefully considered. The conversion of hard copy records to microform is costly. The costs and benefits of maintaining the records in hard copy should be weighed against the costs and benefits of converting to a microform before a decision is made to convert to microforms.

Now is the time for businesses that do not have a records management program in existence, to create and develop a program that meets their needs so they will be prepared for the accumulation of records. 

organizing for asset management. The asset management team will do many of the first steps in the asset management team. After all, the city knows the staff's backgrounds and has the best access to important documentation, such as tax assessor's records and deeds and titles to the property.

3. Developing a property information system. The asset management team should first do a preliminary evaluation of its real estate holdings and develop that into a property information system. Denver's city code has, for years, required the city to maintain an inventory of city-owned real estate. A simple list from the assessor's office has in the past served this purpose. However, a computer run of addresses, lots and blocks and schedule numbers tells little about improvements, current use, future opportunities or even market value.

Therefore, the asset management team should inspect any parcels whose location or use is not immediately apparent. Denver's asset management office began a physical site inspection on each of its 2,500 properties to develop a market-oriented, useful inventory. Two graduate school interns were hired to work on the project that is approximately 40 percent complete.

Uses for the inventory are numerous. The most immediate benefit is that the city is now able to respond rapidly to public inquiries regarding public real estate. From the portfolio manager's perspective, however, there are two primary uses—to identify opportunities and to determine excesses and needs. By sorting for key underdeveloped or highly marketable properties, the portfolio of 2,500 can be pared down to perhaps 200 properties requiring further evaluation. Mismatches of use and value then become the basis for a specific property strategy.

The inventory can also be used to determine excesses and needs. For example, Denver wants to encourage

downtown housing, but has little suitable surplus property available. Hence the city may need to acquire property. Conversely, there is an overabundance of city-owned industrial land in city fringe areas whose disposition could finance other projects.

4. Preparing Analyses and Planning. Once the priority sites have been identified, those having private development potential should be more carefully evaluated for their economic and physical development potential. The city should do a market analysis to determine the feasible uses for the site. This study should include land-use and environmental factors, as well as economic factors that affect the value of the site. A financial feasibility study (appraisal) should also be done to determine the highest and best use of the site, and the city should do a community impact analysis. At this stage, a phase one toxic analysis is also appropriate. A phase one analysis involves checking past uses of the property through a deed search for any indication of potential toxic problems.

Denver's Office of Asset Management provides the city with a centralized source for rigorous financial analysis and feasibility review on issues such as lease versus purchase decisions; sway versus sale decisions; renovation versus abandonment decisions; public-private project structure; reuse options; and financial alternatives.

Examples of projects handled by the office to date include: reuse plans for a surplus wastewater treatment plant, an airport, convention center, community theater and historic fire station; acquisition and remodeling of a new city administrative center acquisition and resale of an historic temple to avoid demolition; and development of a ten-year facility master plan for administrative space.

The office's planning function encompasses the evaluation of immediate-, medium- and long-range

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