



# Records Management Basic Principles For Maine State Employees

Records Management Training - March 2026

# Maine State Government Needs **All Staff** to Be a Part of Records Management

How records are managed by an agency can directly impact its ability to operate efficiently and effectively.



# Is Managing Records YOUR Responsibility?



All state employees are responsible for creating records needed to do the business of their agency, and documenting activities for which they are responsible. As a government employee, you are responsible for managing all public records (including email) for which you are the custodian.

# Why You Should Care About Records Management

Whether we realize it or not, we are all an integral part of the agency and how it conducts its business. Agency records are an asset which must be protected. They can help to ensure day-to-day business functions while also protecting the integrity and reputation of the agency.



# RM Law and Rules

[Maine Title 5, Chapter 6](#) specifically states what a record is and describes the responsibilities of agencies regarding Records Management.



[Maine State Archives Chapter Rules](#) 1, 2 and 3 give details on Records Management practices including retention schedules, the State Records Center and imaging records.

# **Managing Your Records**

In order to have the information you need (when it's required), there needs to be a way to identify, manage and retain records for the right amount of time.

This is done by creating Record Retention Schedules.

# Record Retention Schedules

Schedules are a necessary tool for effective and efficient recordkeeping

Schedules hold great importance, listing records created by agencies and serving as legal authority to retain and purge them.

Schedules identify record retention and disposition, whether they will be destroyed or retained permanently.

Schedules capture all record formats created and used by agencies.

Schedules ensure consistency so everyone in the agency is retaining records for the same amount of time!

Schedules also identify which records have archival/historical value. These records will be transferred to the Maine State Archives for permanent preservation when they are no longer needed by the creating agency for business purposes.

# Two Types of Retention Schedules

There are two types of Retention Schedules that must be followed by all agencies.

**General Schedules** – issued by the Maine State Archives to provide retention and disposition standards for records common to most State agencies.

**Agency Specific Schedules** – are those created because of unique programs or activities within the agency.

## Schedules cover all records in all formats including:



Paper  
Photographs  
Microfilm  
Email  
Digital Files



# Determining Retention

Retention periods for records depend on content and business process, not the format of the record. There is no single retention period for formats like email, text messages, web pages, and social media postings, just like there is no single retention period for paper. It is the content of the records which will determine retention.



# Determining Retention

## 4 Part Criteria

1. **Administrative use:** Records with administrative value are the ones that help your office do its day-to-day work. Typical retention is 5 years or less.
2. **Fiscal requirements:** These records document fiscal obligations and transactions and are often subject to audit. Typical retention is 6 or 7 years. Some Federal requirements may be 10 years.
3. **Legal requirements:** Records containing evidence of legally enforceable rights or obligations which can be subject to official actions such as investigations or lawsuits. Retentions are sometimes found in law or rule, unfortunately not often in Maine law.
4. **Historical or research purposes:** Historical or archival records document significant events, actions, and decisions. These are often unique records not found elsewhere and valuable for the government or its citizens for hundreds of years to come.

# What is a Record?

Record means all documentary material, regardless of media or characteristics and regardless of when it was created, made or received or maintained by an agency in accordance with law or rule or in the transaction of its official business. Record does not include extra copies of printed or processed material of which official or record copies have been retained, stocks of publications and processed documents intended for distribution or use or records relating to personal matters that may have been kept in an office for convenience.

State employees are responsible for retaining records which document decisions, activities and the services of their agency.

**Examples of potential records:**

Items created during daily business or to complete a business/financial transaction:

Examples: correspondence, agreements, contracts, grants

Items which document agency activities and actions:

Examples: meeting minutes, project reports, studies, case files

Executive or policy level items:

Examples: guidance documents, policies, procedures



## **The following materials in your office may be considered non-retention material (or non-records):**

### Reference materials:

Example: publications (magazines, books, reports, professional literature or brochures) from outside agencies kept for referral but not part of official study documentation; duplicate copies of other records retained for reference purposes only (never retain these longer than what is considered the “record” copy).

### Copies kept for convenience:

Example: distribution notices or information; email messages you are copied on where no action is required; paper copies of electronic records when electronic is the official record (see note above); data extracts and printouts from agency information systems.

### Items related to your personal affairs:

Example: personal messages or other similar items which do not document or are not related to work activities (“Can we do lunch?”)



# Other Record Types of Note

Drafts

Transitory Records

Temporary Records

Archival Records



## Are Drafts Considered Records?

Drafts or working documents are records but might only need to be retained for a brief time if they do not have significant administrative, legal, fiscal or historical value.

Examples of drafts that might be immediately discarded following the creation of a new draft are those which contain only minor non-substantive changes such as correction of grammar and/or spelling or minor “word-smithing.”

For more information on DRAFTS see the [RM Advice Bulletin](#) available on our website.

# Transitory Records

These can be public records which document work activity but typically have no value once the activity is complete. They document information of temporary, short-term value, provided the records are not needed as evidence of a more specific business transaction. Includes, but is not limited to:

- miscellaneous notices or memos not related to the functional responsibility of the agency
- voicemail to return a phone call
- letters of transmittal not adding any information to the transmitted materials
- email messages requesting office hours or directions

# Temporary Records

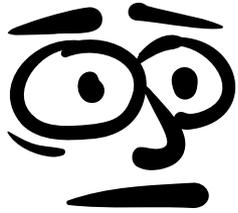
These can be records which will be destroyed once they have met their agreed to retention period. These can be short or long-term retention records so can encompass a wide range of records including transitory type records.

We might think of temporary records for things like general correspondence records, financial transactions or grant records. However, they can also be longer term records such as case files and personnel records.

# Archival Records

These are records required to be kept indefinitely because they have enduring or historical significance. Once business needs of the agency are met, archival records contain a secondary, research value.

Any records which are deemed archival per record retention schedules must be sent to the Maine State Archives.



The management of records (especially electronic records) can seem daunting, but on the plus side, most employees are only responsible for maintaining a few different types of records on a regular basis to support their job duties.



# 1. How Do You Manage Your Records?

Start by asking yourself: *What types of records you create?*

Examples could include client files, project documents or administrative type records such as invoices or agency general correspondence.

It's important to consider the aspects of your job and the types of records you might be creating.

## 2. What Type Of Records Do I Create?

Next Review: *Why are these records created and maintained?*

There are many valid reasons for creating files such as statute, policy, and program administration.

There are also less valid reasons such as reference or personal convenience.

Concentrate your attention on the files that directly support the agency's mission.

### 3. Who is Responsible for the Records?

Then Think About: *Who is responsible for these records?*

Generally, there should only be one “custodian” for each type of record.

All employees in your office should be following the same process and know what records they are responsible for, where records are located and how long records need to be retained.

# Need Help?

## Records Officers and Assistants

Your Records Officer should have a thorough knowledge of agency functions, the records created to fulfill those functions and the schedules which define the retention and disposition of the records. A list of all appointed Records Officers and Assistants can be found on our [website](#).



# Where Records Are Located

**Temporary** material is located at the **Maine State Records Center** in Hallowell. Most of this material has a destroy disposition (once retention has been met) and agencies will be notified when the material is eligible for destruction. Only the agency (authorized agency cardholders) have access to this material. (Note: any pre-archival records will be transferred to the State Archives once retention is met.)

**Archival** material is located at the **Maine State Archives**. As noted previously, once business needs of the agency are met, archival records contain a secondary, research value. When archival records have met any retention time, they will be transferred to the State Archives and be made available for public inspection.

# Electronic Recordkeeping

Many agencies have transitioned to electronic recordkeeping systems or are in the beginning stages of converting from paper to electronic formats.

We understand this is the direction of records and management.

However...



# When Scanning Records

- Contact the Maine State Archives prior to imaging any state government records.
- Comply with guidelines and standards in MSA [Chapter 3 Rule: IMAGING STATE RECORDS](#).
- Identify the appropriate retention schedules for the records involved.
- Consider whether the agency will be able to manage the imaged records for the duration of the retention period.
- Preserve original archival documents which are scanned. These records will be scanned for access only (not for “scan and toss”).

Electronic records are generally suitable for official copies that will be retained for 10 years or less. These records can be saved with reasonable assurance they will remain readable until they have fulfilled their retention periods.



Think beyond your working lifetime for those records being retained 25, 50 years or longer.

Additional action (such as migration plans) are required to ensure the continued readability of electronic records with longer retention periods.

When records are kept in more than one format, you should identify an **official “record copy”** to which the full retention period will be applied. When the record copy is electronic, it’s important to identify the storage location (directory and subdirectory) so that records are purged once they have met their retention.

# What About Email?



Because these are potential records and just like records in paper format, they must be managed so they can be retained, accessed and destroyed at the appropriate times.

- When a message is created or received, determine if it is part of agency business. Non-record materials should be deleted immediately. Examples may include: personal messages, spam, and unsolicited email.
- All email messages do not have the same value. Retention of email records are based on content and functions the messages perform. Just as it wouldn't make sense to retain all paper records under a single retention period (based on the fact they are paper), the same principle applies for email.
- Most employees will have email with short term value. However, email is also used to discuss program records, policy information and other records having significant administrative, legal, or research value requiring longer retentions.
- As public records, email messages must be retained and disposed of according to approved retention schedules.



## Good News

The Maine State Archives is aware of how difficult it is to manage email and has been working with Maine IT (as well as the Council of State Archivists) to create policies for employee email management.

What employees should be doing  
NOW...

# Organizing Email/Set Up Folders

It is best to set up folders in your Outlook mailbox that organize email messages according to your retention schedules, with sub-folders set up by year and month.

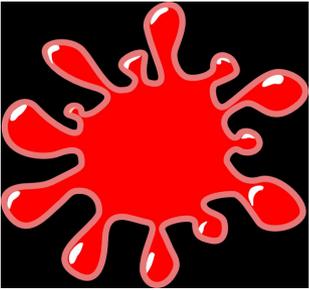


This will make it easy to delete messages that have fulfilled their retention periods, without having to look at individual messages again.

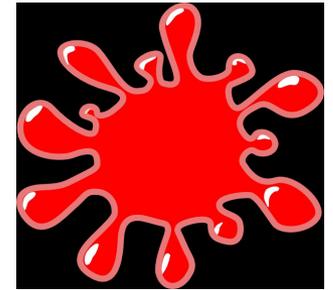
# Set Up Rules

Set up Rules for things like listserv items or other informational type materials you get on a regular basis that you may want to review periodically but don't need them cluttering up your inbox. These can be sent to named folders automatically with Rules and are much easier to manage (and delete).





# Get Rid of the ROT



Delete those emails which are **R**edundant, **O**utdated and **T**rivial information or the records past retention.

Search for common keywords for records that are incidental, transitory, junk or spam. Use the lowest “common denominator” types of terms you can think of such as: breakfast, lunch, dinner, birthday, congratulations, announcement, weather, traffic.

Note: You can also use key words to manage records that are needed as proof and evidence of business transactions and file them accordingly.

# Email Items to Consider



Non-retention material such as spam or personal messages should be deleted immediately; transitory messages should be deleted as soon as possible.

If emails are CC's or Forwards where no action is taken or required, they typically can be deleted.

Don't use personal email for professional business - Your personal email account could become subject to FOAA.

Limit the use of email in general. Because email is so convenient, we tend to overuse and misuse its intended state business purpose.

Fill in/use meaningful subject lines. This will help sort, organize, index and search for emails.

Plan daily email management times. Use 10-15 minutes first thing in the morning or at the end of the day to devote to email.

# Records Retention and FOAA

If you become aware of a lawsuit or other type of discovery proceedings, any relevant records cannot be destroyed until it is determined that the matter is resolved, or the legal hold is lifted.

Organizing and managing records (including electronic records) limits any liabilities and preserves the integrity of the agency. Remember, if public records exist (in any format) and someone asks to see them, the agency must produce them (provided there are no confidentiality restrictions).

For more information on Freedom of Access Act go to the FOAA website: [www.maine.gov/foaa/](http://www.maine.gov/foaa/)



# Record Maintenance

We recommend agency schedules are reviewed every 2 years. Schedules that are 40 years old are probably as inefficient as having no schedules at all. (Check with your Records Officer to see if your schedules are up to date.)

When cleaning up files, check applicable retention schedules to identify records that are eligible for transfer to the State Records Center or State Archives.

Systematically, clean out inactive records or those which have met their retention periods, including electronic records.

Destroying records which don't need to be retained makes it easier and faster to find what you need and ensures efficiency and accuracy.

# Records of Employees

When an employee leaves a position, computer files, including email, may NOT be automatically deleted!

Senior administrators should take action to ensure the electronic records of employees are maintained as required, especially if an employee leaves a position.

Maine State Archives must be notified when Commissioner/Executive level employees leave to ensure the preservation of archival records.



# How Long to Keep Files/Documents

## Checklist

- ✓ Determine if these are actual records
- ✓ Determine if you are the official record keeper
- ✓ Determine if records are kept in more than one format and what the official record format is
- ✓ Are these records on the State General Schedules
- ✓ Are these records on the Agency Schedules
- ✓ If not on a schedule, do you know who your Records Officer is
- ✓ Can you look at the 4-part criteria and make a retention recommendation to your RO

## Retention Schedule Process

If you have records you know need to be scheduled, talk to your Records Officer to see if they can write the schedule for you or help you to write a schedule for the records. They would submit an Application for Records Retention Schedule and Inventory Form ([available on our website](#)) with proper justifications for the chosen retention times. Samples of the records would also be included.

Retention Schedules are reviewed and approved by: Agency maintaining records, Records Management, State Archivist, and the Archives Advisory Board



# Maine State Archives Records Management



Our staff can assist with training, schedule or transfer questions or other record related questions.

- Records Management (schedule and retention):  
[recordsmanagement.archives@maine.gov](mailto:recordsmanagement.archives@maine.gov)
- Records Center/transfer of records:  
[recordscenter.archives@maine.gov](mailto:recordscenter.archives@maine.gov)
- Archives (archival records): [maine.archives@maine.gov](mailto:maine.archives@maine.gov)

Also, go to our [website](#) for schedule and records officer listings, training and resource information and records management forms.

# Final Words

Thank you for taking this Records Management Training. As a state employee, your involvement in Records Management is a daily responsibility and vital component for all of us working together towards an agency-wide comprehensive Records Management system.

We covered basic information, but you will need to review the latest versions of the General and Agency Schedules to know your specific responsibilities concerning records retention. [Contact our staff](#) or [visit our website](#) for further information.

