Basics of Records Management:
Four Steps to Better File Management

Purpose: Provide guidance to state government agencies on four simple steps to assist with better file management.

There are a number of valid reasons for creating files, such as statutory requirements, regulation, management reporting, and program administration. It is important to concentrate on the files that directly support your agency's mission.

Four Steps to Better Files

Understand the Scope – It is important to consider the aspects of your job and the types of records you might be creating. Take this information and develop a matrix that lists all the types of records, the person responsible for each type of record, and the location of the records. This matrix provides you with a framework for understanding and controlling your files.

Conduct a Records Inventory - Physically inspect all your files and record essential information. This is the most time-consuming step. Look for records in all media types including paper, audio/visual, and electronic. Match the files to existing records schedules. Contact your Records Officer for assistance in identifying schedules for all your files and for creating schedules for any files without schedules.

Evaluate the unscheduled records series by determining their value to the agency. Values are determined by considering the usefulness of records in documenting administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical purposes. The result of the evaluation process is to recommend that records be deemed archival or destroy (marked to be destroyed after a defined period of time).

Develop a File Plan - A file plan is a tool for you and others in your office to manage records, listing different types of records maintained by a particular office, where and how those records are stored and how long they are to be kept. A file plan is like a smaller, specific version of agency records schedules. Understanding the file plan helps users know where to file their records and helps others know where to find them.

Develop Recordkeeping Requirements - Establishing recordkeeping requirements helps ensure that you create and maintain adequate and proper documentation of program activities. Some recordkeeping requirements come from legislation. Some are less well-defined.

Development of agency recordkeeping requirements is best accomplished by work groups comprised of staff familiar with the administrative, legal, fiscal (audit), and overall program management of the agency.

Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available at
http://www.maine.gov/sos/arc/records/state/statetraining.html

"The right record, to the right person, at the right time, at the lowest possible cost"