



The National Archives Records Management Guides

1. What is Records Management?

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Introduction

This Records Management Guide has been produced by The National Archives as part of a series of brief explanatory guides which have been developed to help public authorities achieve compliance with the Code of Practice, issued by the Lord Chancellor, under Section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This Code provides guidance on good practice in records management to all authorities subject to either the Freedom of Information Act, or the Public Records Act 1958 or the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923. For the convenience of the reader this Code is hereafter referred to as the Records Management Code.

This Guide gives a definition of records management and sets out the benefits which can be secured by its adoption. This is followed by an explanation of some of the key terminology and concepts used in records management. It also provides an introduction to the five other guides in this series. Finally it explains the relationship between records management and the related discipline of archives management and why guidance on archives management is not included in the series.

Definition and benefits of records management

Records management is a function or set of tasks and activities, which authorities must carry out to some degree at least in order to operate effectively. Records are created not for the sake of it but to ensure information is available about what happened, what was decided, and how things have been done. An individual or group of individuals cannot be expected or relied upon to remember policy, actions and decisions accurately all of the time. Where records are being created and received it is necessary to have a system to keep them, to link them to related records, to find and refer to them again and to decide when and how to dispose of them when they are no longer needed. Records management is not an arcane art which requires years of study to practice, most people are already performing records management tasks in the workplace: records management is a practical and common-sense activity which supports the goals and functions of the organisation.

Organisations with good records management practices benefit in many ways, for example:

- Staff time is saved both in filing records and in retrieval when they are needed again
- Decision-making and operations are properly supported and informed by relevant records

- Record storage is more cost-effective because redundant records can be removed from filing and server space
- Records are created and managed in compliance with and as required by legislation, standards and regulations including (but not limited to):
 - Freedom of Information
 - Data Protection
 - The National Archives records management standards
 - ISO 15489 Records Management
 - BSI DISC PD 008 Code of Practice for Legal Admissibility and Evidential Weight of Information Stored on Electronic Document Management Systems
 - the Lord Chancellor’s Code of Practice on the Management of Records
- Accountability is demonstrated because the records provide reliable evidence of policy, decision making and actions/transactions
- Duplicates and versions are removed as soon as possible
- Records which the organisation judges to be no longer required are regularly and securely destroyed and the details documented

Terminology and concepts

Information

Definition: Information

Organised or manipulated data, which has theme and meaning but that is not necessarily evidence of an event or decision. Information includes published works, reference material, databases and other structured or indexed collections of information as well as records and archives.

Information is a broad amorphous concept, which covers knowledge and resources that inform the owner or user. The term information is not a synonym for records (defined below). Records are subset of information: all records are information but not all types of information are records. However, information is defined by the Freedom of Information Act is “information recorded in any form” so there is a close relationship between records and some kinds of information which are used to inform and support business. They are often kept and managed in the same system.

Records

Definition: Record

Recorded information, regardless of media or format, created or received in

the course of individual or organisational activity, which provides reliable evidence of policy, actions and decisions.

A record is information that documents an action, a policy or a decision: it “records” something. Good records give a clear account of actions, decisions and policies, are created at the same time as or soon after the event and indicate the actors, author(s), organisational context and date. Since individual records do not usually occur in isolation they also need to have some implicit or explicit link to related records. These characteristics contribute to a record’s authenticity and reliability, so that we can be sure the record is what it purports to be, created by the author(s) working in the organisational unit or authority, is accurate and complete and has not been changed or tampered with. Some records may have signatures or seals to authenticate them.

Records Management

Definition: Records Management¹

The function of creating, organising and maintaining records to ensure they provide evidence of activity, decision-making and policy. It includes the establishment of links between related records, swift and accurate filing and accessibility when required and scheduled destruction or transfer to an archives repository as appropriate in a timely fashion.

The term “recordkeeping” is often used interchangeably with records management.

The term records management is used for the range of activities, which surround the creation, maintenance and disposal of records. It includes setting up the infrastructure or system into which the records are created, received or added as well as the process of record creation itself. Another aspect of records management is organising the records so that related records are grouped together, usually according to a file plan or classification scheme. Managing groups of related records is more efficient than managing many individual records. More importantly it helps record users to see the record in context and to access the whole story. More complex or specialised records systems may have additional mechanisms to help access and classification such as indexes. The system can also include security provisions to protect records from unauthorised access. Similarly, the system may highlight vital records to ensure they are accessible in the event of an emergency. Finally, the records management system should provide for retention values to be assigned according to a range of legal, accountability and operational factors. The retention element includes disposal actions such as destruction or transfer to the archives at the appropriate time and procedures for documenting those actions. Documentation is implicit in a

¹ A formal definition for records management is provided by ISO 15489 Information and documentation – Records Management

records management system: authorities must know what records they have in order to manage them and control of the records depends on a range of carefully developed set procedures applied to them throughout their life from before conception to disposal.

Records Management Processes and Activities

This is the first of a set of six guides developed by The National Archives to support public bodies and authorities in managing their records in accordance with the recommendations on good practice set out in **Records Management Code** issued by the Lord Chancellor.

The titles of the remaining five guides published in this series are:

- ★ **The Records Management Policy Guide:** this covers what the purpose of a policy is and what it should cover and gives detailed advice on how to write and issue it.
- ★ **The Human Resources in Records Management Guide:** The people who create, use, maintain and control records play a crucial role in ensuring successful records management. This guide describes the different types of knowledge and training needed by all staff, however great or small their recordkeeping responsibilities.
- ★ **The Record Creation Guide:** This guide gives advice and instruction on how to create records that will meet the organisation's needs and how to set up and document a filing system or corporate record plan.
- ★ **The Recordkeeping and Record Maintenance Guide:** This covers how to maintain the active recordkeeping system once it has been set up. It includes developing and implementing filing and retrieval procedures, identifying and protecting vital records and carrying out surveys and audits.
- ★ **The Disposal Arrangements Guide:** When records become inactive they should be removed from current filing systems to free up space for new records and to prevent the system becoming unwieldy. This guide details the systems and tools needed to efficiently manage this process. It includes the development and use of retention or disposal schedules and how to ensure controlled transfer to archives facilities or to carry out authorised destruction.

For further advice on the complete range of records management activity see the documents and toolkits published by The National Archives at:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/electronicrecords/advice/> and

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/>

Archives Management

Term: Archives

Archives are those records, which have been selected for permanent preservation due to their continuing administrative, informational, legal and historical value as evidence of the work of the creating organisation. Archives are normally a small subset of an organisation's records.

The TNA Records Management Guides do not cover archives management, as this is not subject to the good practice recommendations in the Records Management Code. The guides cover the management of current records to the point they are either destroyed as part of a managed disposal process or selected for permanent preservation and transferred into the custody of an appropriate archives service or the organisation's own in-house archives. Where records subject to the Public Records Act 1958 are concerned, the appropriate archives service will be an approved place of deposit for public records appointed under that Act.,

The National Archives has published additional guidance and advice about archival management and standards at:

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/?source=ddmenu_services4

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