



CITY OF PROVIDENCE

3.2 CITY RECORDS MANAGEMENT POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a framework for effective management, preservation, and protection of municipal records.

Having a records management program ([R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-7](#)) at an agency (as defined in [R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-2\(1\)](#)) enhances the ability to efficiently perform the agency's core mission, effectively retrieve and dispose of records, ensure regulatory compliance with State Law (including the [Access to Public Records Act](#)), and safeguard important information to preserve departmental knowledge.

Scope

This policy applies to all departments, employees, contractors, and elected officials of the municipality who create, receive, maintain, or dispose of municipal records in any format, physical or digital.

Definitions

Record: Any document, file, form, or piece of information created or received by the HR department in the course of its operations, including but not limited to personnel files, applications, resumes, disciplinary records, benefits information, payroll records, and training materials.

Disposition: The process of either retaining, archiving, or destroying records when their retention period expires.

Policy

1. Maintenance and Access to Information and Records:

- A. Each department has different software(s), storage, file structures, etc. Departments should utilize the State's [records retention schedules](#) for all records that are generated and received within their office. For guidance on organizing, digitization, file naming, etc. can be found at https://sosri.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/SO_5b9d3c2c-f80a-45f8-a867-609932e1a33e/.
- B. The City is committed to transparency and open government. Pursuant to the Access to Public Records Act ("APRA"), R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-2-1, et. seq.
- C. All City employees are, to a certain extent, records managers, because they inevitably create, receive, and/or handle records of their departments as part of their responsibilities, so it is essential that employees are familiar with basic aspects of records management.

2. Records Management: Creation and Maintenance

- A. Records management is "the systematic and administrative control of records throughout their lifecycle to ensure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition" (Society of American Archivists).
- B. A "public record" is anything created or received by department, including documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, or other material regardless of format, physical or digital. The City generates and receives a multitude of records daily that can include, but is not limited to administrative documents, legal files, financial reports, permits, meeting minutes, public correspondence, etc.
- C. By practicing good records management, departments will be able to:
 1. Preserve agency knowledge;
 2. Properly perform their core mission;
 3. Effectively retrieve or dispose of records; and



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4. Ensure regulatory compliance.
- D. Without the daily practice of records management, agencies may:
 1. Incur legal penalties for failure to locate or produce records;
 2. Lose public trust due to the inability to produce requested records; and
 3. Incur remediation costs if records are damaged that have not yet met retention.
- DI. Departments are responsible for creating, receiving, and maintaining records that fully document all legally mandated activities, including policies, decisions, and transactions ([RI General Laws §§ 38-3-7](#) and [42-8.1-17](#)).
 1. To be able to maintain public records, departments must:
 1. Know what records they have and how to store them.
 2. Organize records efficiently for current and future accessibility; and
 3. Dispose of eligible records in accordance with the corresponding Records Retention Schedule.
 2. All city employees are responsible for the records they create and receive, and must be able to:
 1. Identify records upon request;
 2. Organize records in a consistent way across the agency; and
 3. Maintain records in good order and condition so they remain usable and readable for as long as they are required to be retained.

3. **Different Record Types:**

The City and Archives play a vital role in preserving documents and materials of local government while ensuring compliance with legal and administrative requirements. Effective records management hinges on understanding the nature, lifecycle, and legal status of various record types. Understanding record status helps streamline operations and optimize storage.

A. **Digital Records (Digital-Born and Scanned)**

Municipal records increasingly originate or exist in digital formats. These include:

1. **Digital-Born Records:** Created electronically from the outset (e.g., emails, Word documents, spreadsheets, GIS data).
2. **Scanned Records:** Paper documents digitized for improved access and preservation (e.g., historical maps, permits, handwritten correspondence).
3. **Priorities:**
 1. Ensure metadata integrity and use standardized formats.
 2. Apply digital preservation strategies to prevent data loss or obsolescence.
 3. Store in secure, searchable repositories that support long-term access.
 4. Departments should reach out to the Archives if they want to move forward with digitization options.

B. **Emails Are Public Records**

Emails generated or received in the course of municipal business are legally considered public records. They may document decisions, policies, or communications relevant to governance. These records must be retained in accordance with approved retention schedules, are subject to public records laws and FOIA requests, and require classification, and secure archiving.

C. **Permanent Records**

Permanent records have enduring value and must be preserved indefinitely. They serve as the backbone of municipal history and legal continuity.

1. Examples:

Mayoral executive records, City charters, ordinances, and resolutions, Council minutes and agendas, vital records and land deeds, historical photographs and maps.



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D. **Inactive vs. Active Records**

1. **Active Records:** Used regularly in current operations (e.g., open permits, current budgets).
2. **Inactive Records:** No longer needed for daily use but retained for legal, historical, or compliance reasons (e.g., closed case files, past fiscal reports).
3. **Management Strategies:**
 1. Active records remain in departmental systems for quick access.
 2. Inactive records are transferred to the archives or offsite storage.
 3. Appraisal determines whether inactive records are destroyed or preserved as permanent.

4. **Preservation and Archiving Records:**

Archiving and preservation of municipal records are essential for maintaining the integrity, accessibility, and historical continuity of local government operations. These records must be systematically stored and protected to ensure long-term usability, compliance with legal mandates, and transparency for public access and future research.

A. **Preservation and Archiving**

1. Use of archival-quality materials: Acid-free folders, boxes, and non-reactive fasteners prevent degradation.
2. Environmental controls: Maintain stable temperature and humidity to prevent mold, fading, or brittleness.
3. Conservation efforts: Repair and stabilize fragile documents using professional techniques.
4. Controlled access systems: Limit who can view or modify archived records.

B. **Social Media Archiving**

1. Municipal government is increasingly using social media to communicate with the public that share updates and engage with the community. As these platforms become integral to government transparency and outreach, it is essential to treat social media content as official public records. Archiving social media ensures compliance with public records laws, supports accountability, and preserves digital communications for future reference or legal discovery.
2. The Archives currently uses software called ArchiveSocial. This platform is automated archiving solutions that capture posts, comments, edits, and deletions in real time, ensuring the integrity and accessibility of these records over time.
3. Any department that has social media accounts that are not maintained by the Mayor's Office, or the City Council Office should reach out to the Archives to connect to this platform.

5. **Safeguarding from Damage or Loss:**

To protect the City's records from physical or digital threats, the City and Archives have implemented a range of strategies:

A. **Physical Protection**

1. Climate-controlled storage: Records are sent to Iron Mountain to prevent deterioration due to humidity, temperature, or pests.
2. Restricted access: Limits handling to authorized personnel to reduce risk of mishandling or theft.
3. On-site storage: Records are being processed and sent offsite when on-site conditions do not meet archival standards. Records that remain on-site are monitored and maintained by the Archives and respective departments.

B. **Digital Preservation**



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1. Digitization of paper records: Converts physical documents into searchable digital formats, when applicable.
2. Digital archiving: Store scanned copies in secure, searchable databases with metadata tagging.
3. Migration and format updates: Regularly update digital formats to prevent obsolescence.
4. Cloud-based backups: Ensures redundancy and recovery in case of local system failure.
5. Cybersecurity protocols: Protects digital records from unauthorized access, malware, and data breaches.

C. **Disaster Preparedness**

1. Emergency response plans: Includes procedures for salvaging records during floods, fires, or other disasters

6. **Records Retention and Destruction Policies:**

Retention and destruction of municipal records are governed by legal mandates to ensure accountability, transparency, and compliance with public records laws. Proper retention safeguards are essential for documentation of audits, litigation, and historical reference, while timely destruction of obsolete records helps mitigate legal risk and uphold data privacy regulations.

A. **Retention**

1. **Retention Schedules:** Records must be kept based on the State's retention schedules. Records must be maintained until they meet their retention, and/or have no legal holds.
 1. If a record does not seem to meet the criteria in any of the schedules, the department should reach out to the Archives.

B. **Damaged Records:** Permanent or long-term records that sustain damage—such as from water, fire, or mold—and pose preservation challenges must be retained until the Archives and appropriate state authorities have assessed potential remediation options.

1. Do NOT throw away any records, regardless of their condition. Use personal protective equipment to place the documents in a box until they can be reviewed.

C. **Destruction**

1. Each department shall contact the Archivist/Deputy Archivist to obtain the form and instructions on what must be retained for a particular amount of time and what can be destroyed. If documents are allowed to be destroyed, the Certificate of Destruction will be filled out with the appropriate information, signed by the department head/custodian. It is then forwarded to the Archivist who forwards to the State Archivist Administrator for signature. The Archivist will forward the fully executed Certification of Records Destruction and at which point the records can be destroyed.

7. **Communication and Training:**

- A. For further information regarding records management and training, departments should reach out to the Providence City Archives. The Deputy Archivist, Britni Gorman, oversees the records management program for the City, and she can be reached by her email: bgorman@providenceri.gov or by phone: 401-680-5595.
- B. Additional training modules from the R.I. Secretary of States office, are available to view at https://sosri.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/SO_8038c4c1-806e-4d0a-bbe7-87c71d2dcc63/.

Related Policies:

Public Records Policy and Procedure



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Open Government Policy
Employee Personnel Files

Other Related Information:

Local 1033 Collective Bargaining Agreement

R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-7

R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-3-2(1)

Access to Public Records Act

R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-8.1-17