



***Basic Records Management  
Practices for  
Saskatchewan Government\****

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## 1. Introduction

An efficient records management program is essential for all government offices. Recorded information, in any format, provides the basis for **ALL** government activities. Records are an "institutional memory" and are necessary for decision making and policy development. They are also required for legislative compliance, for meeting fiscal and legal requirements, for program implementation, and for almost every aspect of day-to-day office work.

In order to comply with the requirements of *The Archives and Public Records Management Act*, government institutions must establish a records management program.

An effective records management program must include the establishment of institution-wide records management policies and procedures and a reliable accountability structure.

Dedicated staff positions must be assigned to oversee the RM program, including a Records Management Coordinator/Records Manager and a Designated Records Officer to sign off on disposal requests.

## 2. Basic Definitions

**Record:** Recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristics. A record can refer to a single document or a group of documents in a file folder. Most commonly a record refers to a file folder (paper or electronic) which may contain a single document or many documents

**Records Management:** The systematic control of records from their creation, or receipt, through their processing, distribution, organization, storage, and retrieval, to their disposition

**Public Record:** all recorded information that relates to the transaction of government business, regardless of physical form, which are created, received, deposited or held by an office of the Government of Saskatchewan.

**Official Record:** the official copy of a record that is retained within a government institution for legal, fiscal, operational or historical purposes. It exists to fulfill long-term financial, legal and/or audit requirements. It can be the original and only copy of the record or a replacement copy that is designated as official. Only the official copy of a public record must be classified, retained and disposed of as per the terms of the applicable records retention schedule.

**Records Schedule:** An official policy document that incorporates a classification system with a retention schedule and arranges records into logical groupings (generally referred to as records series) based on business functions.

**Disposition:** Either the destruction of records by an Institution or the transfer of records to the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan.

### **3. Records Management Accountability Structure**

Each government institution addresses its records management requirements in different ways and, therefore, each must implement an accountability structure that meets their particular needs.

A successful records management accountability structure offers clear statements for the management of records and establishes policies and procedures for coordinating records management within the institution. It includes the appointment of a records manager/coordinator and clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of staff (including executive management, program managers, program staff, support staff, network administrators, technical staff and records management staff) and provides necessary training.

For an example, please see the [Records Management Policy Model](#). This model can be customized according to the needs of individual Government Institutions.

### **4. Records Classification and Retention Schedules**

Records schedules are tools that assist government institutions in classifying, managing and disposing of their records. Schedules are function-based, meaning that they group together records related to the same business processes or activities.

*The Archives and Public Records Management Act* defines a records schedule as a “formal plan that identifies the public (government) records that are subject to the plan, establishes a classification system and retention periods for those records and provides for their disposition.”

*The Act* further prohibits the destruction of public records except pursuant to an approved records schedule”.

Schedules consist of a classification system to facilitate the systematic organization of records and a retention portion which establishes time periods for which records must

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be kept to meet all requirements. The retention portion also facilitates the disposition process.

There are two types of public records that are classified using records schedules:

**Administrative Records:** records pertaining to administrative or "housekeeping" activities of an organization not central to its mandate. For most government institutions, administrative records may include the management of facilities, property, material, finances, human resources, and information systems.

**Operational Records:** records which relate to the operations and services provided by an institution in carrying out the functions for which it is responsible according to statute, mandate or policy. These records are unique to each government institution.

There are three types of records schedules that are used to manage public records in Saskatchewan:

**Administrative Records Management System 2014 (ARMS2014):** ARMS2014, developed and maintained by the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, is designed to accommodate **all administrative** records created or received by government ministries, agencies, boards, commissions, etc. The system is not applicable to most Crown Corporations.

**Operational Records Systems (ORS):** ORS are designed by each government institution to classify and manage their operational records. Government institutions develop ORS on an institution-wide basis, facilitated by a records management coordinator in consultation with the Archives. An ORS is unique and relevant only to the government institution that developed the system and is responsible for functions covered in therein.

**Comprehensive, Corporate-wide Records Retention and Classification Systems:** These schedules are designed by CIC Crown Corporations and most Treasury Crown Corporations to classify and manage both their administrative and operational records. They are developed on a corporate-wide basis in consultation with the Archives.

For further information, please see the [Saskatchewan Operational Records Development Guide](#).

## **5. Transitory and Non-Public (non-government) Records**

There are two types of records that **do not** require classification, retention and authorization from the Provincial Archivist before their destruction:

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**Transitory records** are records of temporary usefulness that are needed only for a limited period of time, to complete a routine task, or to prepare an ongoing document. Exact copies of official records made for convenience of reference that are not required to meet statutory obligations or to sustain administrative or operational functions are also considered to be transitory records..

**Records Managers should be aware that Transitory Records are subject to FOIPP and legal proceedings.** Therefore, it is strongly recommended that transitory records be destroyed in accordance with the Saskatchewan Transitory Records Guidelines once they have served their purpose.

**Non-public (non-government) records** are records that do not pertain to any aspect of Government business. These include records such as external publications and non work related records (personal e-mails or letters, memberships in associations or groups, etc. which do not relate to the employees position within the organization).

For further information, please see the [Saskatchewan Transitory Records Guidelines](#).

## **6. Electronic Records Management**

An electronic or digital record is any item of information that is created, recorded or stored on any medium in or by a computer system or other similar device. **These records must be managed in the same manner as records in other formats.** Electronic records that are subject to records management requirements include e-mail and other electronic messages, social media and websites and cloud computing.

**As *The Archives and Public Records Management Act* is media neutral, the management of electronic records (including e-mail) should be integrated with other records management practices for records in the custody or under the control of each institution.**

Electronic records are produced and used for the same purposes as traditional hardcopy records. Therefore, it is essential that they are securely created, stored, accessed and managed to ensure and preserve their documentary and evidentiary value, as well as to protect personal and personal health information.

Electronic records management is a framework of policies, procedures and processes established for electronic records as official records.

For further information, please contact the Information Management Unit at [recordhelp@archives.gov.sk.ca](mailto:recordhelp@archives.gov.sk.ca) or 306-787-0734.

## **7. Records Disposition**

Disposition includes the destruction of records or their transfer to the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan. This process is applicable to public records in **ALL FORMATS**, including electronic records.

All official public records must be retained by the responsible government institution for the length of time designated in an applicable records schedule. Once the retention periods established in these schedules are met, official records must be disposed of using the procedures set out by the Archives.

For further information, please see the [Saskatchewan Records Disposal System](#).

### **7.1 Accreditation**

Accreditation is a process overseen by the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan that allows government institutions, which meet established criteria, to destroy or request an appraisal review of certain administrative and operational records based on information included in an applicable retention schedule without submitting a request for disposal of the records to the Archives.

For further information, please see the [Accreditation Procedures for Government Institutions](#) or the [Accreditation Procedures for Crown Corporations](#).

### **7.2 Disposal of Imaged Source Records**

Imaged Source Records refer to the original form of a record in cases where the format of the official record has been changed (i.e. scanning a paper document to create an electronic version which will then be designated the official record). A source record may be disposed of once it has been converted to its new format and the accuracy of the new record has been verified. Source records may be disposed of without the permission of the Provincial Archivist; however, for legal purposes, the process of converting formats, verifying the accuracy of the newly converted record and disposing of the source record must be documented. This process must be defined by a government institution's source records policy.

For further information, please see the [Saskatchewan Imaging and Source Records Disposal Guidelines](#).

## **8. Best Practices**

Efficient storage and retrieval of records depends on effective records management policies and procedures. While these policies and procedures may vary considerably from institution to institution, there are some best practices which help to assist with effective records management.

- Written policies and procedures relating to the classification and filing of records should be in place, available to all staff, and reviewed and updated on a regular basis. The policies and procedures should be based on approved retention schedules and the organization's records management policy and should include, but are not limited to, naming conventions, version controls, year-end file maintenance, security procedures and procedures for the management of digital records.
- All staff must be aware of the records schedules applicable to their unit and understand their responsibilities in correctly classifying the records they create or collect. This includes an understanding that not all records need to be filed and that records identified as transitory records and non-public records should not be filed along with government records.
- Ensure that the information management policies and procedures are applied uniformly. Establish rules that specify how and where active records will be maintained. Identify filing locations (file rooms, drive name, etc.) and instruct staff on how records will be filed within these locations. Files may be centralized or decentralized, at head office, or in the regions, what is important is that staff are aware of where official records are kept, who is responsible for maintaining the records and where they are filed. Staff also has to be aware of how to manage transitory records and non-government records.
- Remember that records management, including classification, retention and disposal, applies to **all** records, including those produced and maintained electronically. Electronic records that are official records must be classified and retained according to approved records schedules, and filing systems for electronic records should be constructed to correspond with the system in place for physical records.
- If there are files being kept in an individual's office or on their desktop, ensure that the records are being classified using ARMS2014 or an appropriate ORS and that they are entered into a central file registry or key. The use of parallel or "shadow" files, outside of the central filing system, is not recommended as these can compromise the maintenance of a complete official record and may present a liability if not disposed of along with the official record.

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- If there is no central position(s) to maintain a filing system, and all staff are responsible for day- to- day filing, designate a position within each unit that is responsible for maintaining the central file registry and conducting regular year end maintenance of the filing system in consultation with the Records Manager.
- Establish classification procedures, naming conventions, version controls, etc. for files in all formats and ensure that they are applied consistently. For information on naming conventions see the Archives [Naming Conventions Guidelines](#).
- Establish controls relating to the retrieval or “checking out” of files. This is especially important if filing is carried out at the individual level and there is no staff member directly responsible for filing and retrieval.
- Close and inventory files at the end of each year. When closing paper files, box those with similar retentions together in order to facilitate disposal. Semi or inactive closed files can be moved to off-site storage until they have met the retention requirements outlined in an approved schedule. Be certain to retain information relevant to the transfer of records to off-site storage (i.e. inventories, transfer sheets/numbers, etc.).
- Dispose of public records regularly in compliance with *The Archives and Public Records Management Act*.
- Regularly dispose of transitory and non-public records in accordance with approved internal policies and procedures. In the case of electronic transitory and non-public records, be sure that all copies existing in the “deleted items” folder and the “recycle bin” are deleted.
- Ensure that records containing personal, personal health or any sensitive or confidential information are destroyed in a secure manner in accordance with *The Archives and Public Records Management Act* and the Saskatchewan Records Disposal System Guidelines.

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