How to Conduct a Records Inventory

1. Define the inventory's goals. While the main goal is gathering information for scheduling purposes, other goals may include preparing for conversion to other media, or identifying particular records management problems.
2. Define the scope of the inventory; the inventory scope may include records from your entire department or a specific subset.
3. Obtain top management's support, preferably in the form of a directive, and keep management and staff informed at every stage of the inventory.
4. Decide on the information to be collected (the elements of the inventory). Materials should be located, described, and evaluated in terms of use.
5. Prepare an inventory form, or use an existing one.
6. Decide who will conduct the inventory, and train them properly.
7. Learn where the agency's files are located, both physically and organizationally.
8. Conduct the inventory.
9. Verify and analyze the results.

What is a Records Inventory

A records inventory is compiling a descriptive list of each record series or system, including the location of the records and any other pertinent data. A records inventory is not a list of each document or each folder. When you conduct an inventory, you will locate, identify, describe, count, and measure all records in your office and storage areas — in all media formats (yes – this includes digital records). The information you gather will allow you to manage and dispose of your records systematically and can help you decide which records to reformat (such as digitizing paper records). The inventory will constitute the foundation of your entire records management program. Once you have obtained an accurate inventory, records retention schedules can be updated and created as needed, also giving you the necessary information for what records to destroy, which to store temporarily or which records are meant for archival/permanent storage.

Plan the Inventory

Inventory Team **-** The head of each agency should appoint a Records Officer who is has a thorough knowledge of their specific agency, its records and functions and be responsible for the efficient management of the agencies records. That records officer should supervise the inventory. In addition, staff should be appointed by either the Records Officer or director of the agency to either help with or conduct the inventory. Ideally, the individuals who conduct the inventory will have experience with the records, filing systems, and operations of the agency.

Training **-** Your inventory staff should attend a training session conducted by your records officer or Archives staff so the trainees can work with the records to be inventoried. Possible inventory supplies needed:

- organizational charts and any other material that describes the main functions of each office
- blank inventory forms
- a letter-sized lined pad
- a ball-point pen, a pencil, a felt-tip pen or marker
- adhesive labels to identify records and containers and to show the record has been inventoried
- a flashlight, gloves, and a dust mask for storage areas

Notify Staff - Since the success of an inventory project depends on the cooperation of the people involved with the records, your director should have involvement, inform staff of the upcoming inventory, and invite them to a meeting where the records officer will explain the process. Before the work begins, the records officer or a designee should visit office supervisors to discuss the project, enlist their cooperation, and make it clear that staff will be conducting a records inventory and will need access to records and/or people to conduct records interviews.

Option - Conduct a Preliminary survey of all office and storage areas before you begin the inventory to:

- identify the location of records
- estimate their total volume
- flag any hazards
- note any problems with space and storage

Conduct the Inventory

The records officer should work with the department heads to set up a schedule for inventorying each office and storage area. Make sure the schedule is flexible to accommodate the office needs/priorities.

The inventory should include all your records. Non-records (or non-retention material) is included only as needed for staff informational purposes (such as common reference materials) or for initial inventories to locate and remove unnecessary materials.

Records and Non-records

Records

"Record" means all documentary material (books, papers, photographs, maps or other documentation, including digital records such as email messages and attachments), made or received and maintained by an agency in accordance with law or rule or in the transaction of its official business; because they serve as evidence of the agency's functions, policies, decision, procedures, operations and other activities; or because of their informational value.

Non-records (Non-retention material)

- Reference materials - magazines, catalogues, trade journals, books, pamphlets
- Blank forms (until they are filled in, blank forms are supplies, not records)
- Copies of records retained elsewhere
- Personal Communications
- Employee non-work activities
- Meetings in which you participate, but are not assigned recordkeeping responsibility: convenience copies

Inventory Forms

You will inventory your records as series - a group of identical or related records (a group of records created by the same business process that document the same type of transaction). Series are kept together because they relate to the same topic, document the same type of transaction or are created by the same business process. It includes all formats – paper, electronic, etc. These groups of identical or related records are evaluated as a unit because they are normally filed, used, and disposed of together. Record the information you gather on an inventory form. To help locate specific records in a series at a later date, you may find it helpful to fill out a separate form — omitting recurring data about the series — for each of the locations where records in a series are filed or stored and to consolidate the information from these forms onto a "master" inventory afterwards. You will eventually use the information from the master inventory to develop your records schedules.

Where to Begin

Start by interviewing staff to identify the records series created and maintained by each office or begin with offices where records are easily accessible and well organized. Estimate the value of the records to be inventoried: Administrative, legal, and fiscal value to agency; Historical value to future researchers; Temporary and permanent status. Inspect all files and record all information by series. Include records in all media. Complete the inventory form.

Establish a System

No matter where you inventory, you should be systematic. Begin at a specific location in a room, proceed logically, tag or label each file drawer as it is inventoried, and flag those records that are vital or permanent. These precautions will spotlight valuable records and decrease the chance of overlooking or duplicating information, especially if you frequently stop and restart — a situation that often arises when staff who are taking the inventory are conducting regular office duties as well. Look at every record. Open each file drawer, each box, etc., and check the accuracy of each label — often old labels are not removed when the contents of files are changed.

Verify and Analyze the Results

Once you've completed the inventory, you will be faced with a pile of forms organized by the locations and custodians of the files. These forms are like pieces to a puzzle that need to be assembled to create a picture of your unit's documentation. Consolidate similar records into a single record series where the descriptions and necessary retention period are the same.

Match and Apply Records Retention Schedule - Match the records series inventoried with the records schedules. If a series of records cannot be "matched" with an existing schedule, complete an Application for Records Retention Schedule (RM22) to submit to the Maine State Archives for approval.

Evaluate the Unscheduled Records - Evaluate the unscheduled records series by determining the use made of the records and then analyze the values inherent in the records. Values are determined by considering the usefulness of records in documenting fiscal, legal, administrative, and historical purposes. The result of the evaluation process is to recommend the records as either archival or destroy (kept for some period of time).

Identify Non-record Material - Appropriate non-retention records are recorded so these records can 1) be recognized as such by all staff; 2) be destroyed as necessary with no additional authorization; and 3) noted for common reference purposes.

One More Step

Determine whether the records you have are the ones you need. Compare the records you have identified to your documentation strategy.

Do you keep records/files you don't need? Are you missing any you do need?
Does the current organization and retention meet your current needs?
If not, what should be changed so your needs are met?

Conclusion

Your records inventory will enable you to evaluate the content and function of your records and will give you data that will be crucial to your ability to make valid, justifiable decisions on the ultimate retention or destruction of those records. Conduct your inventory well, and you will build a solid foundation for a good records management program; conduct it poorly, and you will set the stage for continuing problems.

Record Series Inventory Form

A record series is a group of related documents that support a common activity and usually have a common name such as general correspondence, budget reports, purchase orders, and human resources files.

The following information is commonly collected:

- Date prepared
- Office maintaining the files
- Person conducting the inventory
- Series location
- Series title
- Inclusive dates
- Series description
- Record Format (medium)
- Arrangement (filing system)
- Volume (in cubic feet)
- Annual accumulation
- Reference activity (how often are records referenced)
- Vital records status (would these be needed in an emergency)
- Duplication (indicate copies in other formats)
- Finding aids
- Restrictions on access and use (confidentiality)
- Condition of permanent records (physical condition of records)
- Schedule (list schedule/series) or unscheduled

Descriptions from the Maine State Archives Inventory Form

Department: The name of the major agency
Bureau/Division: The unit name
Date: The date the inventory was prepared.
Contact person: The name of the person responsible for these records
Telephone No: Telephone number of the person responsible for these records
Location of Records: The precise location of the series (Room, Building) If in more than one location, indicate multiple locations
Contact person's mailing address: The mailing address for the person who maintains the records.
Series Title: The title given to each series for reference purposes.
Description of Records: A description of the information included in the records series. A clear description of the series is basic to the success of the inventory and the schedule.
Frequency of Use: When are files closed and no longer needed for day-to-day business of the agency, how often will they need to be accessed if transferred.
Arrangement and (year) Retained By: The arrangement or filing system used, e.g., subject classification systems and arrangements that are ordered alphabetically by subject, name, or

claimant; geographically by state; numerically by contract number; or chronologically by date or report.

Media Type: The form of the records (e.g., paper, microform, electronic, audiovisual, or a combination).

Date of Oldest File: This information is not vital. We ask this for storage purposes – planning – so we have an idea how many records you currently have, how many boxes we might expect, and the rate they would be coming in, etc.

Volume: Volume is measured in cubic feet because this figure represents height, width, and depth, and indicates the amount of space actually required to store the records. Also include the volume of older records, which may be wrapped in bundles or packages, and of oversized materials, which are too large to be stored in conventional filing equipment.

Estimate the volume of records in cubic feet using the conversion information below. Precise accuracy is not needed in gauging the volume of any series that is obviously large.

Cubic Footage Conversion Table
(1) One letter-size file drawer holds 1.5 cubic feet of records.
(2) One legal-size file drawer holds 2 cubic feet of records.
(3) Seven reels of standard digital computer tape (2,400 feet long. ½-inch wide) equal 1 cubic foot.
(4) One standard records center carton holds 1 cubic foot.
(5) Fifty 100-foot 35 mm microfilm reels equal 1 cubic foot.
(6) One hundred 100-foot 16 mm microfilm reels equal 1 cubic foot.
Document Conversion Table
(1) One cubic foot contains 2,000 sheets of paper.
(2) One compact disk contains about 2,000 sheets of paper.
(3) One gigabyte is equivalent to about a pick-up truck filled with paper

Annual Rate of Accumulation: This figure is estimated based on information obtained from the file administrator of each series if the records are current and continuing. If the records are no longer accumulating, indicate “none.”

Filing and Storage Equipment: How are the records stored

Can the same information be found in other records: Is this information found or kept anywhere else, within any other record files or agencies?

Are records confidential: If it important to know if the records are confidential and the statute that deems them as such.

Recommendations for Retention: What are the retention times you are recommending for your agency, the Records Center and what should be the final disposition of this material – destroy or archival?

Rationale: Policies, statutes/laws or specific information on how the retention period was determined.

Signature and Date: Must be signed and dated by Agency Records Officer or Head of the Agency who has authority to sign on behalf of the agency.

Maine State Archives

RECORD SERIES INVENTORY

Archives Use Only (applies to new schedules)		
Agency No.	Schedule No.	Series No.

Department	Bureau/Division	Date
Person to Contact	Telephone No.	Location of Records

Contact person's mailing address

Series title

Description of Records: Why does the agency keep these records—what program or programs do they support? How are the records used, and by whom? What might be found in a typical file? ***(Please include samples with inventory form; you may black out identifiable personal information if this raises confidentiality concerns. Also, please spell out all acronyms.)***

Frequency of Use: At what point does each file become "closed" as far as your business needs are concerned and how often do these files need to be accessed?

Arrangement: ☐ Alphabetically ☐ Chronologically ☐ Geographically ☐ Case number ☐ Other ____________________

These records are retained by: ☐ Calendar Year (1/1 – 12/31) ☐ State Fiscal Year (7/1 – 6/30) ☐ Federal Fiscal Year (10/1 – 9/30)

Media Type: ☐ Paper ☐ Microfilm ☐ Microfiche ☐ Audio Tape ☐ Digital File ☐ CD ☐ Photograph ☐ DVD/Video ☐ Other ___________________________________

Date of Oldest File	Volume in Cubic Feet if Applicable	Annual Rate of Accumulation if Applicable	Filing and Storage Equipment *(How are records stored)*

Can the same information be found in other records? *(If yes, please explain. We are asking this because it's important to know where the State would go to reconstruct the records, in case of disaster.)*

Are records confidential? ☐ no ☐ yes If yes, which statutes or regulations apply?

How long do you need to store these records (total for paper files should not exceed 20 years):

In Your Agency	In the Records Center	Archives or Destroy *(your recommendation)*

What Statutes, law, regulations or research information did you use to determine your retention periods?

Signature of Agency Records Officer (Other Agency Head – Please specify)	Date