



Archives for Local Governments

By Kaye Lanning Minchew

Records Management Technical Bulletins

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The Municipal Clerks Education Foundation (MCEF), established in 1984, is a tax-exempt, nonprofit foundation under Section 501 (C)(3) created to raise funds for its partner, the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. IIMC uses these funds to promote, train and educate Municipal Clerks, making them proficient in the services they provide for the citizens of their community. MCEF is a diverse team of volunteers who are passionately committed to helping IIMC pursue its educational objectives.



The International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) is devoted to advancing the professionalization of the Office of Municipal Clerk and improving the efficiency of municipal government. The IIMC provides its members with educational, conference, reference, research, and informational services designed to keep them informed of changes in the professional community.



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The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), a statutory body affiliated with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), supports a wide range of activities to preserve, publish, and encourage the use of documentary sources, created in every medium ranging from quill pen to computer, relating to the history of the United States.

Preface

Like every organization, local governments create and maintain large quantities of records. Many of these records not only are of great value to the local government, but also are of concern and essential to the citizens of the community. Federal and state-mandated program requirements, changes in growth and development patterns, expanded service needs, the use of computers and other technologies for creating and using information, and the proliferation of copies in various formats, have all contributed to this enormous accumulation of records. Each publication is intended to make available to local governments the basic principles, policies, and guidelines that should be followed in establishing a sound records management program and in carrying out sound records management practices.

The series is intended for local officials, with limited resources, who lack formal records management or archival training but who have custodial responsibility for records. These local governments include townships, villages, cities, counties, school districts, and other local political subdivisions and special-purpose districts. Each of the following publications in the series includes a bibliography that refers to other reading for more detailed information and guidance.

Overview:

Starting a Records Management Program, The Daily Management of Records and Information, Making Your Records Management Program Successful, Managing Records on Limited Resources, Funding Your Records Management Project

Creation, Collection and Storage:

Identifying and Locating Your Records, Establishing Records Retention, The Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities, Developing a Records Storage System

Preservation, Promotion, Use and Access:

Archives for Local Governments, Protecting Records, Using and Storing Microfilm

Care, Management, and Preservation of Electronic Records:

E-Mail Management, Selecting and Using Document Imaging Systems, Managing Electronic Records, Preparing for E-Discovery

Copies of these bulletins are available on the IIMC and NAGARA websites.
IIMC at www.iimc.com • www.nagara.org

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Local Government Records: “Closest to Home”

Archival records created by local governments touch the lives of the country’s citizens more directly and frequently than any other kind of record. Local records are the records “closest to home.” If preserved over time, local government records document a government from its creation to current times while serving as the official memory of the government and its people. Equally important, these records document the lives of citizens through civil and criminal court records, deeds, marriage, estate, and tax materials that offer further details about individuals. Changing government policies, and the enforcement of these policies, mirror shifting societal values and help document an area’s rich heritage. Local governments include cities, counties, townships, school boards and other local authorities, such as water districts or industrial development boards. The records they create contain a wealth of information needed by local residents, historians, genealogists, government officials, attorneys, surveyors, legal researchers, and others.

Over time, local governments across the nation allowed records to accumulate with little thought to their preservation or long-term care; improvement is warranted. **Local records, despite significance, are typically among the most neglected records in the nation.** Historians and archivists lament the lack of adequate care given to these records; yet, the huge number of local governments, massive quantities of records produced, and the pressure of day-to-day work, records storage deficiencies continue. Governments store valuable one-of-a-kind documents



in basements next to water pipes, in hot attics with little ventilation or stuffed in file drawers and boxes. Rushed staff members, who may not appreciate the historical nature of records, mislabel and misfile valuable materials, making them inaccessible to both local citizens and researchers.

Archival records comprise only a small percentage of the total volume of records created by a local government; however, they are usually among the most important files created for citizens, researchers and government staff members. Archival records may consist of handwritten leather-bound volumes of minutes dating from the early days of the government or may be accounts of last week’s council meeting on paper and computer drives.

Simple steps can be taken to improve accessibility and preservation of archival local government records. Organizing a storage room, disposing of inactive records in accordance with state laws and designating a staff member with designated responsibility to oversee care of archival records can make a significant difference.

Records Care Benefits Governments and Its Citizens

- Preserving records makes administrative, legal and fiscal sense, and helps preserve historical materials for future generations.

Having access to older files can help governments meet their own administrative and legal needs. Government officials will generally agree that records need to be cared for, but it is only by actually establishing an archival program that records will receive the care they merit. For example, a well-functioning government of a thriving community needs access to deeds showing legal rights of way and blueprints or maps of its community water system, yet maps are often rolled up and forgotten at the end of prolonged construction projects. These same maps can save governments thousands of dollars in excavation costs when trying years later to determine the location of a water main break. Similarly, legal documentation of rights of way can help governments avoid lengthy and costly negotiations when beginning new projects, such as widening a road or putting utilities underground.

The records must be accessible to both the originating government body and its citizens. County commissioners, city councils and school boards need to refer to minutes, files, and budgets to understand why earlier decisions were made. They also need records to meet legal and fiscal requirements of state and federal governments. Records access is a savings easily offsetting records maintenance cost.

Just as archival records protect the legal rights of governments; they also protect the legal rights of citizens. Without land records maintained by each county, rights of property ownership would be impossible to enforce and protect. Additionally, local records are important to descendants of earlier residents. Wills, estate and marriage records, and death certificates found in probate courts and health departments along with deed records prove family relationships and activities. Immigration records provide vital clues to the journeys and lives of ancestors. School records from the 1920s and 1930s prove, or correct, birthdates for Social Security purposes. Deeds revealing the sale of a woman and her son speak from slavery times. Tax digests, birth, death, marriage, divorce, school and court records define citizens' lives. Local and national history is built upon government records.

Records Must Be Cared for and Accessible

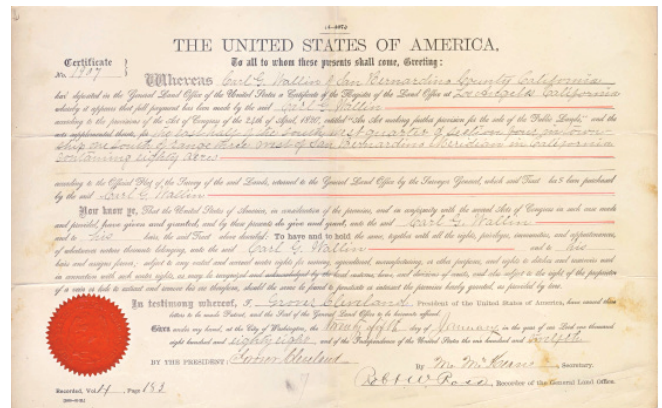
■ The reason to save records is to be able to use them.

Local government records often contain valuable and interesting information, but simply preserving the records identified as having archival value is



San Bernardino, California, County Recorder's Office, 1950 (above).

not enough. Having files locked away in fire proof vaults where no one is allowed to look or touch them because they are “important to our history” and no copies are available does no one any good. Democratic governments are created by and for the people; records document their policies and their service to the people. A government that does not make these materials accessible to its citizens, whether intentionally or by neglecting to care for its records, commits a major disservice to its citizens.



Above is an 1888 land purchase record for 80 acres in San Bernardino, California.

Governments seldom give consideration to the long-term care of records they are creating. The demands of daily work mean that “old records” gradually get pushed further back into the corner and then into storage rooms. Soon “out of sight, out of mind” takes over as records become virtually lost to researchers both within and outside the government. Proper care of records requires a concerted on-going effort; commitment, not just good intentions. This responsibility needs both records management and archives staff members who will care for the records and assist in their research.

The commitment to good records care does not automatically require the expenditure of large sums of money. Proper storage of local government archival records can be as simple as good records management, including disposing unneeded records in an orderly and routine manner and operating a secure records area with environmental controls. This area can be staffed by someone who may have additional job responsibilities but who understands basic care of records and the importance of archival materials. A more elaborate archival program serving a larger

government or several smaller governments might be staffed by full-time professional archivists and have facilities equipped with modern technologies, such as scanning and compact shelving. Whether the government is small or large – and regardless of the amount of funds available—records should be given proper care.

Establishing an Archives

For many local governments, deciding to establish an archives often evolves from a renewed interest in its records, which often occurs during significant anniversaries of a government's chartering. Special events can also create interest. The televising of Alex Haley's *Roots* generated much interest in local deed and estate records and census files. Even disasters such as Hurricane Katrina or the bombing of the World Trade Center Towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2011, can cause officials to look at their records with greater interest.

New-found pride in the heritage of the area sometimes leads officials to look back at the government's past. Having its historic documents in a disorganized mess can be an embarrassment for a locality. The idea for a Troup County, Georgia, Archives dates to the day when local civic leaders toured government buildings as part of a Bicentennial activity in 1976. When the group got to the prison work farm and found Inferior Court records dating from the 1820s, the earliest records of the county, stored in an unheated out building, they grew alarmed. Seven years later, an archives opened which continues to serve the city, county, and school boards.

An archival program can do more than help a government celebrate its founding or help improve citizens' access to old commission minutes. Whether staffed by one part-time person or several full-time archivists, such a program will **identify materials which warrant long-term retention, describe them, offer access for researchers, provide proper storage conditions for records, and help ensure the long-term preservation of the records.** An archival program may also assist in the development of records filing systems and in establishing standards for the creation and maintenance of computerized records of archival value.

A Formal Basis for Existence

■ **The governing body should pass an ordinance or resolution officially providing the basis of operation of a local government archives and records management program.**

Several steps precede the formal establishment a local government archives program. A government needs to indicate support of a records management program and endorse the use of state records schedules (guidelines developed by state archives) to help determine which records are archival and which can be destroyed after a certain number of years. The resolution will name the title of the person or office that will be in charge of the archives program, the records management officer, the archivist or the Clerk of Court's office, for instance. The resolution should contain a statement that physical custody rests with the archives while legal custody remains with the government's office of origin. The resolution gives the program legal authority to operate and defines the role of the archives, duties of staff and provides continuity from one administration to the next. A sample resolution can be found in the appendix.

The resolution should require all government officers to cooperate with the archival program and periodically transfer selected records to the archives. The resolution may specify exactly where the records are to be kept and will thus need to be updated if the location changes. Finally, the document will remind everyone that government records are public records and should thus be made available to researchers and any other users in accordance with state and local laws. Staff must make sure that archival records are accessible to the public and office staff during normal government operating hours. Placing archival records in a closed storage room which is open to the public and government officials for only a couple of hours per week is no improvement and may only burden the public. Your constituents deserve a viable archives program.

Other resolutions may relate to records retention and disposition schedules which describe the kinds of records created by governments and specify how long each record series must be kept, and in what form. Proper records management encourages public officials to dispose of records no longer needed for government operations. This process clears space

for permanently valuable archival records. More information about records management programs and about the everyday care/creation of records can be found in NAGARA's Local Government Records Technical Publication Series. See *Managing Records on Limited Resources* and the *Daily Management of Records and Information*.

Other considerations when establishing an archival program include creating an archival storage area which has security, temperature/humidity controls and a public reading room. An archival storage area for a small government or office could simply be a fire resistant vault, with ample room for the valuable records, accessible and served by knowledgeable personnel. Archives' staff should be familiar with basic archival principles and ideas. That staff member may perform records activities on a part-time basis. (See the checklist for government archives programs in the appendix for more specific details and to the Archival Fundamental Series published by the Society of American Archivists.)

Creative Approaches to Archives and Facilities

Deciding and planning to care for its archival records is an important step for local government. The next, and often more complicated step, is deciding what kind of archives program to establish. Every archives is different from the next, though they usually have similar missions. Actual local government archival records are seldom uniform in size, content or value. The same records will not be found in different governments, though certainly counties, cities or school boards within a state will create similar records. Yet even then, the information may be stored in different formats, recorded in different ways, and called by different titles.

Some localities have lost entire records series and most of their historic records in natural and man-made disasters (e.g., fires, flood and vermin), while others have indiscriminately thrown out everything over five or ten years old. Population size also makes a difference in the type and amount of records being created. Counties with a million residents produce a huge amount of records each year in comparison to those created by local governments with fewer than 10,000 people. The larger governments provide their residents more services which have to be documented, including special and grant projects. The age of the government unit makes a difference.

Peachtree City, Georgia, a planned suburban city incorporated in 1959, has different types and amounts of records than the city of Savannah, Georgia, which dates back to 1733. Nonetheless, governments of all sizes share a need to care for their records and should develop an archival program which matches their local situation and financial abilities.

Options

Several different options should be considered when planning to care for local government archival records. Archival programs can:

Become one part of the records keeping process in individual government offices;

Operate as a separate department offering both records management and archival services;

Serve as an area resource center to provide archival services - and also perhaps records management services - to two or more local governments forming a local consortium where governments join together to support an archives;

Function as part of a regional repository operated by state archives or by a region; or

Send local records from across the state to the state archives.

Each of these approaches has features better suited to certain types of governments and political climates. Across the nation, programs of each type exist and function well within their governments. A government can choose the option which best fits the local situation. Over time, one type of archival program might transform into another type program as the local situation or the archives program changes.

The Troup County Archives provides records management and archival services to the city of LaGrange, Georgia, Troup County, and the Troup County Board of Education. The director of the Archives serves as the official records officer for the governments and helps all of them identify and preserve records that need to be kept permanently.

Archives as One Part in the Records Keeping Process

Caring for archival records as one more responsibility in the originating office may be the simplest, least expensive way to care for archival records. Especially well-suited to a small government or to an individual office in a government, such as the city manager's office, this approach relies on the records keeper to care for files throughout their life cycle, from creation to disposal or permanent retention. The departmental or office-based approach presents an economical and effective way to establish both a records management and an archival program. A local government office will create and maintain records and use state schedules to determine retention periods. They may then microfilm or digitize records considered vital for continued government operation in an emergency and keep the files in fire resistant vaults. In order to know what records they have, office staff need to maintain some basic finding aids listing all the records created and maintained by the office, along with the dates and volume of records. Office staff must be available to assist researchers and government officials by retrieving requested records. Researchers will need space to be able to use the records. The government office would thus deal with records from their creation to disposal or permanent retention.

This departmental or office-based approach to the care of archival records **works especially well for governments that create relatively few archival records**, such as a school board, small municipal government or individual offices within a county government (e.g. traffic or juvenile court). Economy and practicality are the biggest advantages of this system of records keeping; managing archival records adds relatively little to the operational costs of the office and care of the archival records is incorporated into the daily jobs of a staff member. Many local governments already have fire resistant vaults large enough to store their archival and vital records. Yet records in vaults can be destroyed, as has happened in hurricanes and tornadoes. Governments may want to store back-up copies of records with state archives or in other secure places. Training personnel in records-keeping and archival practices poses the greatest expense, though many state and regional archives groups offer training to local officials at minimal costs.

Each office of origin is charged with preserving its archival records under this approach but there is a very real potential that some offices will continue to ignore their archival records or will start neglecting archival records when staff change. Another risk is that the archival records will receive no extra environmental protections. For example, heating and air conditioning may be turned off throughout the building when offices are not occupied or archival records may be stored in front of windows or beside office coffee pots. This can be harmful over long holiday periods when temperatures may dramatically go up or down. Moreover, this approach requires additional work for office staff to be certain that all archival records receive care. In the case of school systems, records staff should be vigilant that student records stored at various locations are all properly cared for, with supervised access.

Archives as Part of a Government Records Management Program

A step beyond archival records being cared for in originating offices is an archival program integrated into a comprehensive local government records management program. In this case, records are often moved to a records center after they are no longer needed on a regular daily administrative basis, usually one to three years after creation. Some archival records, like deeds or minutes, may be kept for several years or permanently in the creating office. Most government records eventually may be moved into a records center, since many records are seldom looked at after their initial filing. Upon receiving documents, records center staff place records slated for permanent retention in archival storage while records with temporary retention may be shelved in warehouse storage -- with less environmental control over heat and humidity. Vital materials and records that are expected to be heavily used, or that have long retention periods or large annual accumulations, may be scanned and kept in electronic format or microfilmed. For more information, see NAGARA's Local Government Records Publication, the *Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities*.

A combined records management and archives program is often the option of choice for governments that already have records management programs or that are establishing new records programs and want

to deal with all aspects of records care in one central location with a single program. Records center staff are usually trained to consider the life cycle of records, and may only need additional archival and preservation training to handle archival records properly. Staff members should develop a historical perspective when dealing with archival records, and remember that users of archival records may need more assistance than most records center users. Genealogists and local historians may be unfamiliar with older government records and may require more finding aids, access tools, or personal assistance than are usually found in a records center.

The main disadvantage of this system is that an archives might be designated as part of a records center in name only, without any real effort being made to improve environmental controls or security. Upgrading storage areas to meet archival specifications will require some additional expense and effort. Government leaders may also not appreciate fully the difference between records management and archives, or support the need for staff training in both aspects of records care. Continuing efforts may be necessary to fully educate local government leaders about the importance of managing both inactive and archival records.

Standalone Archival Programs

Another option for a local government is to have an independent, standalone archival program that works with departments which produce archival records. The archives might operate in its own building or storage room. It may also operate a scanning unit that produces preservation microfilm, and be responsible that archival and vital records of the government are copied onto film according to preservation standards. The standalone archival unit will need to work with a records management program (if one exists) in order to be successful.

■ A smaller government, or one just organizing a records program, might begin incrementally by first creating an information office with indexes and descriptions of the government's records and perhaps access to computer files and microfilm. Thomaston and Upson County Archives started years ago in a small closet in the courthouse. Volunteers assisted researchers with indexes and the files of a local historian. Guides would include an inventory of the titles, dates and locations of the archival records

along with brief descriptions of the records and indexes to materials. The information office might later expand to house duplicate copies of government records (e.g., copies of council minutes and microfiche copies of tax digests) and might house selected original government records in a small vault or safe, while other archival materials remain in the creating office. Duplicate copies can easily be digital copies rather than paper files.

■ **Acceptance by government leaders and local citizens might eventually lead the information office to develop a records management and archival program for the government.**

Even in the smallest government, records accumulate which do not need to be kept forever. A small records center overseeing care of inactive, non-permanent records could be maintained in a separate storage area under the direction of the archives staff. Another alternative is for the archivist to assist with records management activities while the records remain in the creating offices. Permission to dispose of records must be obtained from the head of the archives, so regardless of location, records remain under the care of the archivist.

A Multi-Government Archives

Advantages

Another economical alternative for cities, counties, townships and school boards is to pool their resources to develop **an archives which serves more than one local government**. For a relatively small expense, governments can gain both the services of a trained archivist and archival storage of their historic records. Such a consortium may prove to be much more cost-effective and practical than if a government developed its own archival program. Two such records programs have been operating in Georgia for over forty-five years combined. The Troup County Archives in West Georgia serves a population of 64,000 and provides records management / archival services for the city of LaGrange, Troup County and the Troup County Board of Education while also functioning as a local history and genealogy library. The Thomaston-Upson County Archives in Middle Georgia serves 27,000 and provides records care for local cities, Upson County and the local board of education. (www.upsoncountyga.org/tuarch/)

A joint government archives sometimes gets started when one local government seeks to do something about its archival records and realizes other local governments have similar needs for records care. For instance, a county, its cities, school boards and other independent local authorities might join together to operate a local archives. Usually, one government with records stored in a variety of inadequate sites, or an organization like a historical society, will spearhead the organizing efforts. Governments become involved by passing resolutions recognizing the archives as the official storage site for their records, and giving the archives' director responsibility for records care. A resolution gives physical custody of the records to the archives but retains legal custody with the originating government. A written agreement must also negotiate archives funding. A government is charged a percentage of annual operating costs based on the total percentage of records each government has stored in the archives, or on the amount of archival records produced annually by the government, or on the amount of use each government's records generate, or a combination of the two. For example, a county will probably have court, deed, marriage, and estate records, most of which require permanent retention. The county will have more archival records than other governments and would pay a higher percentage of costs for the archives. Alternatively, rates could be based largely on the number and amount of records pulled for researchers and government staff. Determining the details early in the life of the archives can mean smoother operations in the future, though such details should be periodically reviewed.

A local cooperative archival program might provide reference services, preservation facilities, scanning and microfilming capability, and records center facilities for non-permanent records. Such a local government archives will usually be better accepted if it is located in a central place convenient to all the governments and their researchers. A cooperative archives could be staffed by as few as one full-time and one part-time person, plus volunteers or interns who share duties on the reference desk. The archives might be located in a favorite local building (e.g., a historic city hall, bank or library could be retrofitted with the necessary vaults and environmental controls). Alternatively, an archives could be in an old warehouse or a building designed specifically

to house the archives and records center. A local cooperative archives provides an attractive option for local governments that want to keep their records nearby, but not taking up needed space in creating offices or in overflowing storage rooms.

Disadvantages

The biggest disadvantage to a cooperative archives is that archival records are physically removed from the creating office to an off-site storage facility. However, this may be a plus for busy office staff members who do not have time or knowledge to provide reference service for older records. Local governments need to make sure that state laws allow for records to be removed from their physical custody. In many states, records can be moved to designated centers, provided they are located within a certain number of miles of the main government office or that the government has passed an ordinance permitting relocation of records.

Care needs to be taken at the archives to keep records of the different governments distinct and separate. This respect for archival integrity or provenance is basic archival theory and offers researchers a better understanding of the records and the government. Records can be kept separately on computer files and paper inventories, but can be stored on the same shelves and in the same storage area. An archives located away from the governments will also need to make provisions for when governments want to see or borrow their own records. Archives need to have policies against allowing their one-of-a-kind records to circulate. However, since public records belong to and were created by the government, exceptions may occur. For instance, if the county commissioners' office needs its minute books, procedures should be in place allowing for a temporary loan.

Government officials should remember that their responsibility does not end with passing a resolution giving an archives program authority to care for its records. If records are placed in a non-government archives, library or historical society, governments need to make sure in a written agreement that after the initial burst of interest, their records are not neglected and are serviced properly. Continuing care of archival records can be judged by on-site visits, response to reference requests, and general levels of service. A specific person, preferably a trained archivist, should be designated by the government

as overseer/caretaker of the records to ensure that records are maintained as years pass.

Regional Archival Centers

Governments in several states have the option of placing their archival records in regional repositories operated by the state archives or by regional government centers. Often employees of the state archives oversee this type of program. The representative is usually a professional archivist trained in the care of records. A regional center can be a great boon for researchers who can use the records of a large geographic region at one location. Regional centers also help ensure proper care of the government records throughout the state. Regional representatives become contact persons for local government officials when they have questions about records care. As with other kinds of archives, local governments need to adopt resolutions giving physical, but not legal, custody to the regional center, and governing bodies should agree to any fees that might be charged.

The major problem with regional centers is that records will be geographically removed from the creating government. Some regions, especially in a sparsely populated area, may be quite large; regional centers may be many miles away from the creating governments and require long-distance travel to see the records. Prompt reference service and use of scanning, emailing, or faxing needed documents can help overcome the challenges created by distance.

Sending Archival Records to a State Archives

Yet another way for local governments to care for their records involves transferring archival records to the state archives. An exception might be certain heavily used records, like deed books and marriage records would be kept at the local government and digital or microfilm copies sent to state archives. This approach has worked well for some states with smaller populations or geographic areas. This system systematically documents local government activities throughout the state and enables researchers to work at one site. Staff members at state archives have the expertise to care for records, and costs to local governments are minimal.

There are some disadvantages to state-facilitated care of local government records. State archives can be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of local records. Local governments produce too many archival

records for a state archives with limited resources to be able to care for them all. Even in a small state, many separate governments create records. In some states, there is also resentment that everything revolves around the “State Capitol”; local governments may resist losing control of their records by turning them over to the state. Sending records to the state archives also means having to travel from the local government to the state archives to see local records. One way around this problem is to make sure that the local governments get digital or microfilm copies of their records, allowing researchers to use records either at the local office or the state archives. Another disadvantage occurs when states have major budget problems, and archives are forced to cut back on reference service to researchers and governments. Local governments can suddenly have trouble getting access to records. Many state archives provide records schedules and guidance on records management and archival issues, but depend on local governments to take care of their own records.

Summary: What Kind of Archives?

When considering the kind of archives to establish, a local government should decide what kind of program will work best in the current situation – centralized archives operations may evolve over time. An inter-office program where staff create, maintain and then either dispose of or place the records in an archives can grow into a larger records management / archival program, which might evolve into a regional archival center. Alternatively, a local government that sends records to the state archives or a regional center might later decide that they need to have digital images or microfilm copies of their archival records. Consequently, an archival information room may be established at a local government building.

Many issues may help what kind of archives to have, including government funding, staffing, and space/building requirements. One often overlooked, but very important concern is the user: the government staff member who needs access to old minutes or audit reports, the historian or genealogist using old court records, the journalist who desires photographs and documents relating to government response to a natural disaster, the taxpayer with questions about deeds, or the lawyer inquiring into court files from five years ago. Which system will work

best for the majority of users and still be feasible for the government? Do you send archival records to the state archives when the capitol is a six-hour drive away? This may work if the government has copies of the archival records digitized or on microfilm. Is a records center and archives a better option than joining with a local cooperative archives program? This works if the government provides necessary staffing, space and equipment for a center within the government. The key point is that these options can be economical and can work for most governments. Local officials need to determine which option will work best for their local situation in the foreseeable future.

Organizational Issues

Funding

Financing and maintaining operations of the archives through the years pose some of the most serious questions local government officials must consider when planning an archives. An archival program as a standard, viable office function makes sense. Although there are some costs for taking care of the archival records and disposing of scheduled records, such as for storage equipment, floor space and labor, these expenses will be relatively minor for a smaller government. Operating a separate archives and records center can add costs. However, expenses are more than offset by savings: less expensive, high volume storage, recycled filing equipment, or by freed up shelving space through more efficient records keeping. For instance, storage space in one local government that was once crammed full of both archival records and unneeded documents, such as forty-five year old canceled checks, was renovated to create additional space for sheriffs' deputies. In another case, the local government records archivist sent materials in an upstairs storage room in city hall to an off-site records room and used compact shelving to make maximum use of that warehouse space. The original space in city hall soon became home to the offices of the city manager and other city staff. (LaGrange, Georgia, City Hall, Ridley Avenue, LaGrange. See also shelving company websites for information on mobile and high-bay storage systems.) The omnipresent local government space-crunch is the friend of the ingenious archivist/records manager. Compact shelving can be expensive but pays for

itself when more materials can be stored in a space than would otherwise be possible. High-rise shelving takes advantage of vertical storage space to yield especially great space savings.

Several states, including New York, New Jersey, and Kentucky, have had success developing innovative ways of funding archival projects. For example, an additional filing fee of one to five dollars or more is charged when documents are filed in superior, probate and civil courts or county offices. The filing fee means that people who are creating documents are helping pay for their long-term up-keep. Part of this fee stays with the local government and part goes to state archives which then awards grants to local records projects. In other states, part of the fee goes directly toward funding the local archives. The filing fee helps pay for the long-term preservation of documents. A disadvantage of filing fees are that they can be hard to get passed through legislatures or approved by the general public who tires of fees and taxes. Also, depending on filing fees can be tough during recessions or economic downturns. Monies can be plentiful in good times and scarce in hard times.

Other creative solutions include co-operative local records management and archives centers where governments pay only a portion of the cost to maintain their own records centers. Fees for photocopying, scanning and microfilming, and research can also help an archives recover operating expenses. Other archives with extensive photograph collections make substantial monies each year selling copies of the images. Another possible source for funding for special projects or start-up operations includes getting grants from private foundations, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and the National Endowment for the Humanities for preservation supplies. These grants help the local archives to become a regular, on-going item in the local government budget. Publicity and careful efforts in making the records of the government accessible will also encourage continued funding.

Advisory Boards

Closely tied to funding is continued support from government officials, the general public, local attorneys, and others. One of the easiest ways to build support is by providing efficient and prompt reference service. Another is through publicity and letting government officials and the public know what is going on with records care in a newsletter or through newspaper articles. Yet another way for building support is having a records advisory board. A board can guide and promote the development of a records program and this may be required in some states for records disposition. Board members' advocacy - within the government, for funds and staff, and within the community, for promoting savings and retrievability, can be most meaningful to the program. Members also serve as liaisons with individual departments and oversee activities of persons trained in, or knowledgeable about, archives / records management techniques. Membership on such boards usually includes three to ten people, and often includes representatives from different departments and governments served by the archives, as well as members of the general public.

Staffing

One person or office needs ultimate responsibility for operating the archives, to ensure that archival and record management tasks get accomplished. Tasks vary greatly. They may include inventorying government offices, describing government records, preparing indexes, assisting researchers, drafting press releases, making sure that proper archival storage conditions are maintained, writing grants, and fund raising. If the archival program falls within the creating office, one person needs to be assigned this responsibility. Otherwise, an office or department head should be responsible for the archives. Staff members should have training, either from previous on-the-job experience, classes from state archives, workshops offered by local/regional/national archival and government records groups, or archival classes in graduate school. Some communities are blessed with qualified residents. For instance, one community was able to hire an archivist with a master's degree and archival training when the archivist moved back home and wanted to work part-time. Whoever is in charge of the archives needs to be familiar with

basic concepts of care and preservation of archival records. Depending on the size of the archival collection and the government, this person and any assistants may have other job responsibilities. Staff members need support of the governing body. Other offices must be expected to cooperate with records staff when the time comes to transfer or dispose of records, and retrieve difficult-to-find records.

Volunteers and student interns often provide significant assistance with staffing and operating the archives. Members of local genealogical and historical societies sometimes volunteer for a few hours a week or month. Other assistants might be found in colleges, technical schools or high schools where students are taking history, museum, business or office management courses. Some volunteers who are knowledgeable about local history and genealogy love to help researchers at the reference desk. Others prefer to answer telephones, greet researchers and visitors, and respond to emails and letters. Still others might help prepare indexes or describe records groups. The work of volunteers will always need to be coordinated and supervised. Archives' staff should realize that volunteers have other priorities in their lives, and may or may not want to help with mundane, repetitive tasks. They may be unavailable at busy holiday times. Also, some volunteers and interns will need close supervision; others will be able to accomplish much with very little assistance from staff. Paid staff will have to watch that the time required for supervising is not more than the volunteers are donating. Good volunteers are a tremendous asset, but it is almost impossible to staff an archives completely with them.

Prisoners and people sentenced to do community service work are a different sort of unpaid or low paid labor. Despite a wide variety of capabilities, they can help an understaffed archives. Such persons available for community projects can be used for painting walls, making / moving boxes, or even carry out selected digitizing and microfilming tasks where they learn a task at the end of their service. Others might perform computer entry and index files. Prisoners are often glad to be out of the jail, even temporarily, and they may be of great help with more

routine tasks. Security concerns offer the biggest disadvantage when using prison labor and community service workers. These people have already broken some kind of law, ranging from driving under the influence to theft, battery, or other crime; yet they may have access to one-of-a-kind historic documents. Extra care must ensure that prisoners are not allowed access to confidential or private records. Prison labor will not work in every situation, but it is an avenue to be explored. Community service workers vacillate between extreme reliability (who will be missed when duties are complete), or they may only show up occasionally.

Technical Issues

Archival records (i.e., records of permanent continuing value) of a government need to be identified early. Archival records constitute only a small percentage of the total volume of records produced by local governments. However, with the huge volume of records now being produced by governments, a small percentage can mean a significant accumulation over a few years. Local government archival records include a broad range of records, such as minutes of the governing body, civil and criminal court civil case files, zoning maps, lists of high school graduates, annual reports, ordinances, and policy manuals. Many states also consider any documents dating from the 19th century and before to be archival. There may be valuable archival records in one locality which do not exist at another place. For instance, mining maps and mineral rights comprise the earliest and most valued records for some western governments, but do not exist for others. For this reason, it is impractical to present an all-encompassing list of archival records for local governments in this publication.

To determine whether a record has archival value, the archives employee or designated local government records person should first consult state schedules which specify whether a record merits permanent or short term retention based on its administrative, fiscal, legal, informational, or evidential value. The state schedules specify only the minimum amount of time that records are required to be kept; local governments may choose to keep certain records longer and the reasons should be documented (e.g., on the inventory, notation should be made that the record is being kept until a certain lawsuit is

settled or permanently because of its historical value to the community). In addition to consulting the state archives or records management program, local officials may wish to review a companion publication in this NAGARA series, the Daily Management of Records and Information, and the publications listed in the bibliography.

Whether or not a records series is listed on a state schedule, the local government may decide to retain it permanently due to the government's appraisal of the series' long term value. Generally speaking, records having permanent worth contain significant information about persons, places, events, or corporate bodies, which is useful for research in such fields as medicine, social science, environmental studies, city and urban planning, history, the arts, genealogy and family history (informational value) or contain evidence of the government's origins, functions and activities (evidential value). Long-term value of records may have been apparent at its creation, as with ordinances, minutes of public meetings, or land and probate records. Alternatively, value may relate to reasons other than those for which the record was created. For example, immigration and early divorce records were created to document the legal status of individuals. Yet, they provide valuable genealogical details for later generations.

The value of a record may relate to external circumstances beyond its informational content, such as scarcity, format or creator. In a county where the courthouse has burned, most any record that survived will be retained to help document the earlier time period. Original signed copies of minutes of meetings may be scheduled for permanent retention, but an electronic copy may also be retained because its format provides for easy keyword searching. However, local governments should not go overboard worrying about "possible" legal, administrative or historical value. An argument can be made that invoices from the 1930s document local businesses, but more complete and useable information is available in more compact form in city directories and charter records. The cost of maintaining original invoices and providing reference is too high, given the remote chance of use.

Many states require approval by the state archivist or state records coordinator of local government schedules and/or implementation of the schedules. To ensure compliance and prevent later problems,

consult the state archives or records management program before destroying or transferring any records.

If an inventory of government records has not been conducted, an archivist or staff member should inventory the records by visiting each government office/storage room to locate and identify archival records. The archivist should list all records, both active and inactive, including both those records which have short retention periods as well as those that will be kept permanently. This listing of titles, dates and expected yearly accumulation will help determine the current size of archival holdings and the amount of materials that need to be disposed. The inventory will enable an archivist to estimate potential growth over the next five, ten or twenty years. As part of the inventorying process, a person will determine the value of records based on their administrative, fiscal, legal, and historic value. This information will help determine the amount of storage and shelving needed for the archives. The inventory can determine which records need to be moved into the archives versus heavily used records that should remain in the creating office. Other records might be moved to a records center, destroyed, or microfilmed. For more information, see NAGARA's Local Government Records Publication, the Daily Management of Records and Information.

Locating and Equipping an Archives

Where should the archives be located? Much depends on the kind of archival program being planned. For instance, establishing an archives for several local governments means finding a centrally located storage area which can be adapted as an archival records center with fire resistant vaults, climate controls and a public reading room. For governments deciding to have their archives as part of a records management or standalone program, physical placement may be somewhere in a government building or complex.

The archives may be more impressive if it occupies a prominent location on the town square or just inside the front doors of the government building. More importantly, however, considerations should relate to environmental controls and size of the archival storage space. The ideal is to have a vault, or at least a storage room, with proper temperature controls to avoid fluctuations of temperature and

humidity. This provides long-term protection of archival records. Of equal importance is good air flow and avoiding contamination from open windows and doors. Areas with no windows or with windows well-protected against drafts and light also help preserve archival records. Windowed, corner offices are for people; archival records deserve metal shelving along inside walls away from temperature changes. For more information, see NAGARA's Local Government Records Publication, Protecting Records, and the Society of American Archivists' Preserving Archives and Manuscripts.

Accessibility, Size and Security

Several factors help to decide where to locate archives, including convenience to the public, size of holdings, security, and proximity to copying equipment. The key reason for saving historic records is accessibility to researchers and government officials. Being located in a remote corner of the building that is inaccessible due to stairs, narrow hallways or lack of elevators means the public is not being served. Another location should be found for the archives. Archives are sometimes offered "free space" for storage and reference by a local government but this does not always mean a perfect or suitable location.

Government staff in Alabama considered the former body shop of an old car dealership building before finally rejecting it. Renovating the "free space" for use by an archives would have been too expensive, due to conditions of the building. In Morgan County, Alabama, a large building in a great location could not offset the costs of overcoming workspace with an inadequate roof, poor lighting, concrete floors covered with years of grease, and an outdated heating and air conditioning system. (Alabama-funded National Historic Preservation and Records Commission grant, 1994, Kaye Minchew, consultant.)

Size of the area under consideration is also important. Is there room for storage of archival records now in existence, plus space for growth for the next ten to twenty years? Volume of local government archival records will grow as long as the government continues to exist and provides public service. An archives should feature metal shelving to hold both bound volumes, boxes of loose papers and oversized materials such as maps. Desks or tables are needed for both researchers and staff. A photocopier, scanner, and microfilm reader/printer should not be in the

storage area but adjacent. Compact and high density shelving will gain more storage space but allow for floor weight and space for box-handling.

Finally, security and safety should not be overlooked. Archives are valuable records which should be supervised at all times, regardless of whether the archives is located in a small, close-knit community or a big city. Storage areas should be locked and accessible only to archives' staff members. Archival records should be stored in a clean, fireproof environment equipped with sprinklers, burglar alarms and electronic detection against fire and water.

Reference and Outreach

Archives are not such valued documents that they should always be guarded and never used. Records must be available to all responsible researchers in accordance with state and local laws; several states have open records acts requiring accessibility of most government records to the public. Records closed to the public are restricted for very specific reasons and for specific lengths of time. Very rare or fragile documents should be placed in polyester sleeves or scanned / microfilmed and copies made available for public use. An archives should maintain regular, stated hours and be staffed by someone familiar with the holdings. This person should be able to retrieve requested items, but should not be expected to interpret the contents of each document.

Finding Aids

Having finding aids, such as descriptions or inventories, available for specific groups of records helps make those materials more accessible to researchers. A printout in the archives of records titles, inclusive dates and formats will make researchers aware that the records are available.

Having these descriptions available on the archives' website improves accessibility to researchers before they ever contact the archives. More detailed finding aids include descriptions of the records and the kinds of materials one might find in the records, a subject catalog (i.e., for estate records, wills, annual returns, ordinary court minutes and guardians' letters) and subject guides for specific topics (e.g., pages of descriptions about where to check for local genealogical or Civil War materials). Good finding aids will lessen the researchers' dependence on the



*Volunteers process Supreme Court of Missouri case files
(Photo courtesy of Missouri State Archives)*

records clerk while making the records more open to the public.

Publicity

Archives, despite their importance, are easily overlooked and forgotten. Archives' staff members must publicize the fact that the government has an archives. Publicity announces the availability of materials to researchers, reminds government officials of the value of older records and invites local history, genealogy and academic researchers to investigate the materials. Archives promotion should be accurate; press releases should not promise more than is actually available. Every researcher will not find exactly what they want, nor will the desired or expected information always be contained in the records.

Publicity can take many forms. Small town newspapers are often happy to run stories taken from government records. For example, finding \$330 in crisp, little used bills dating from the Civil War era in a probate case made the front page of one local newspaper, while finding a court record signed by President Abraham Lincoln generated national news. Other publicity can come from giving radio interviews, compiling local history trivia taken from historical documents, and furnishing local history stories for radio or television personalities to use on their shows or as a public service announcement. Historical trivia contests or "historical minutes" add much to heritage celebrations and often

generate favorable response for the archives. With such information, every effort should be made to see that the Archives receives credit for developing the news spot. A brochure or book of historical photographs of the area can also draw attention and excitement to the archives.

Other forms of publicity include the archives website, social media pages, blogs, brochures, information pamphlets about doing research, and newsletters. Websites can be prepared by staff or professionally developed and should include information of interest to the general public. Brochures can vary in expense and type of information included—from those printed on slick paper with photos to those done with desktop publishing and focusing on special topics, such as a spotlight on genealogical resources or city history. These are effective, and often inexpensive, ways to spread the word about archives. An archives may sponsor workshops / classes on local history / genealogy to encourage use of local records and give tours to school groups, service organizations, and Scout troops. Speeches to local civic clubs can effectively reach other people. Copies of the archives' newsletters and brochures should be regularly sent to the general public and members of the governing body so that they are aware of what the archives is doing.

Outreach efforts can be timed to keep the archival program's presence regularly before the public and local government's officials/employees. A story culled from old records is not usually going to become dated. Outreach can easily be done by more than one person. A volunteer or assistant might give presentations and write newspaper and newsletter articles. Publicity helps fight the image of an archives: a dusty back room staffed by people who seem to be older than the records themselves. Authentic materials convey a more accurate image of the archives as a place to gain a better understanding of the past, present, and future.

Preservation

Along with making records accessible to the public, archivists are entrusted with preserving the records of their government. Preservation involves several different processes: securing the records against theft, placing original materials in alkaline folders and boxes; maintaining proper temperature

and humidity controls; keeping documents away from sunlight and protecting records from the ravages of floods or fire. Security can be as simple as storing records in rooms accessible only to designated staff members, and supervising use of the records so that someone cannot walk off with one-of-a-kind records that document the history of the government. Security and burglar alarm systems offer further protection.

Storage of original documents poses preservation challenges. Court cases in over-stuffed file drawers with old acidic, crumbling file folders offer little protection for the records inside. Acid-free alkaline folders and file boxes do much to extend the life of these documents. Boxes with lids offer protection against light and dust by putting more layers of materials between the documents and the source of damage. Storing boxes / bound volumes on metal shelving, not in fire-prone wooden cabinets, will extend their life.

Archival material prepared for conservation processing at the City of Oceanside, California's archives room in 2001. Oceanside's archives room consists of two rooms, in the records center, with their own climate controls (HVAC & Humidity).



Archival material prepared for conservation processing at the City of Oceanside, California's archives room in 2001. Oceanside's archives room consists of two rooms, in the records center, with their own climate controls (HVAC & Humidity).

Storage rooms with no natural light, or at least with no light that reaches the records, also help preserve the materials; so also will carefully regulated environmental controls. Temperature and humidity swings do much to speed the aging of paper. Maintaining temperatures at 68 degrees, plus or minus two degrees, and humidity levels at 40 percent (with

a variation of no more than three percent) are considered ideal, though many local governments have trouble maintaining this goal.

Local governments should maintain temperatures below 75 degrees, with less than 55 percent humidity. Conditions need to be monitored at all times; heating, cooling and humidity equipment cannot be turned off when the staff leaves for the day or weekend. Related conservation and preservation issues are discussed in detail in NAGARA's Local Government Publication, *Protecting Records*.

Protecting against a disaster is another concern of records keepers. In the last few years, the United States has seen destruction wrought by hurricanes, floods, fires, ice and snow storms, earthquakes and tornadoes on courthouses, libraries and archives. No one wants archives lost to flames or water. Ideally, archival and vital records will be duplicated, either on paper, electronic media, or microfilm with a copy stored at another site. Having backups in different geographic regions of the state or country offers further protection. However, this will not be feasible for every document. The original copy should be stored in a fire resistant vault, away from damage-prone areas, such as basement storage rooms in a flood plain or near water pipes. Digitizing and preservation microfilming can lessen this threat by making copies of documents available to researchers which also reduces wear and tear on originals. Electronic copies and master films should be stored elsewhere; thereby, large quantities of data can be stored in a small area away from the originals, quickly available for use. Making preservation microfilm copies of digitized materials can be an excellent safeguard. When properly processed, stored and cared for, microfilm should last for many decades. Heavy use is upon the research duplicate, not the original. For more information about microfilm as a preservation tool and as a way to save storage space, see NAGARA's Local Government Records Publication, *Using and Storing Microfilm*.

Electronic Records

New technology holds much promise for records storage. Optical storage and digital scanning offer the potential of storing huge amounts of information in small spaces and, even more importantly, offers easier access than was ever possible using paper re-

ords. Optical disks are becoming more standardized and courts in all fifty states admit information stored on electronic media as evidence, though disks have to meet varying standards. Still expensive, the cost of scanning equipment is decreasing, however, as the process becomes more common.

As attractive as electronic records are for storage and access, electronic storage poses several concerns to archivists and government officials. Development is so rapid changing; technologies are costly. Government budgets must allow forward migration of electronic files to ensure that tomorrow's technology can read today's files and that permanently valuable information is accessible for future generations. Obsolescence of both hardware and software could mean that information is lost as equipment changes, unless governments carefully budget for and implement plans to transfer data from older files. Longevity of media is also a concern; tests will determine how long optical disks last, even when equipment is available to read it. Archives also address long-term storage of electronic media. Since individual offices or government computer centers have the technology to read the files and know the procedures, archives may become referral agents - a place to locate where electronic records are stored, rather than the actual storage site of electronic records.

Information systems are changing rapidly and these transformations directly impact the activities of records managers and archivists at the local government level.

Guidance with electronic records will probably come from state archives and the National Archives, as states and the federal government develop policies regarding preservation / management of electronic records. For more information on electronic records of local governments, see NAGARA's Local Governments Publication, *Managing Electronic Records*.

Conclusion

Local government records serve as the official memory of a government and its people; these records document and directly affect the lives of local citizens. Local governments have an obligation to take care of their records for the legal / fiscal protection of the government and its citizens. Records also contain a wealth of historical information. Operating archives cannot be a task attended to on an oc-

casional slow afternoon or when someone is bored with daily tasks. Local governments, regardless of their size, can and should establish cost-effective programs to care for their archival records, and make their records open and more accessible to the public. Establishing an archives can be done with a modest expenditure, and can make government more efficient and better able to serve its citizens.

Staff of state archives can help local government officials meet these challenges. Many state archives have manuals which explain laws pertaining to records keeping and provide schedules that describe local government documents and tell how long to keep them. State archives staff also answer technical questions (e.g., can historic government records be moved into an old car dealership two miles from city hall?) and support for new programs. Having the director or a staff member of the state archives speak at the dedication of a new local archives confirms residents' opinions of the value of the project. (Troup County Historical Society Newsletter, March 1983.) The state archives and its staff can be a tremendous resource to local governments.

A variety of tasks contribute to a successful local government archives and records center; all tasks do not have to be accomplished at the same time. Establishing an archives and records program can be done in a matter of months, or it may take several years. Either way, the program can develop very economically and can fit the local situation.

Appendix

Archives Program Checklists

- | YES | NO | Essential Elements |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the state archives or records administration in your state been contacted for assistance? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has your government adopted a formal resolution/ ordinance and policy supporting an archives / records management program and do these actions fully comply with state requirements? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have all records been inventoried and analyzed? Have records of archival and historical values been identified? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a full-time/part-time archives /records manager or some official formally assigned responsibility for the program? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the use of volunteers and student interns been explored? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have the appropriate records schedules adopted by your state been used in identifying records of historical and archival value? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have finding aids for holdings been prepared? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have publicity and handouts about the program been prepared? |

Facilities

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have sufficient and appropriate space and equipment been identified and allocated for researchers? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have space and equipment been provided for reference staff use? Is the archives storage area available only to approved staff? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the archives storage area under temperature and humidity control? Is the storage area equipped with steel shelving? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do researchers have easy access to microfilm readers/ printers? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is equipment available and accessible for quick copying of paper records? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has appropriate working and office space been identified for staff, including microfilm cameras and processing area? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have controls been established for natural and artificial lighting? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is receiving and shipping area easily accessible to records processing and storage areas? |

Sample Ordinance/Resolution

Authorizing Records Management

Whereas, the Georgia Records Act, O.C.G.A. 50-18-90 through 103, requires that all local governments adopt a records management plan; and

Whereas, the records of _____ are public property; and

Whereas, these records contain information needed for varying lengths of time for the conduct of public business; and

Whereas, these records contain information that retains value as legal, audit, and historical evidence for varying lengths of time to protect the rights of the government and of its citizens; and

Whereas, some of these records are for varying lengths of time vital for the continuity of government or for the protection of the rights of citizens; and

Whereas, the efficient and cost effective management of records is in the best interest of government and of the public,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED/ RESOLVED THAT _____ authorizes and adopts the following records management plan;

_____ is hereby designated as the Coordinator of the records management plan and authorized to act for and on behalf of _____, in directing and coordinating all records management matters under the Georgia Records Act; and Records Retention Schedules approved by _____ shall be documented in the record of the governing body deliberations; and

Records shall be maintained in accordance with approved retention schedules; and

No record shall be destroyed except as authorized by a State Records Committee approved retention schedule.

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED/RESOLVED that any ordinance/resolution in conflict with this ordinance /resolution is hereby repealed.

[From Local Government Handbook, Georgia Department of Archives & History, 1984.]

Resources

There are several places to turn for more information and help with records problems. The National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA), publisher of this manual, is an obvious source of help. Local government records publications can be of tremendous assistance. The Society of American Archivists with its Government Records Section and Local Government Records Roundtable can also help. The American Association of State and Local History has many fine publications of value to local governments.

National Association of Government Archives & Records Administrators

1450 Western Avenue, Suite 101,
Albany, New York 12203

American Association for State & Local History

1717 Church Street
Nashville, TN 37203

ARMA International

11880 College Blvd., Suite 450
Overland Park, KS 66210

National Historic and Publications Records Commission

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408

The state archives is an even closer source of information about proper records care, state records schedules and copies of state records laws. For grant funds, the National Historical Records and Publications Commission is part of the National Archives. NHPRC has given grants covering operating costs for the first year or two of a special records project. Also, consider asking local foundations for support. Some support special one-time projects which can be vital to the operation of the archives.

Society of American Archivists

600 S. Federal, Suite 504
Chicago, IL 60605

Association for Information & Image Management

1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 1100
Silver Springs, MD 20910

International Institute of Municipal Clerks

8331 Utica Ave., Suite 200
Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730

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Glossary

(Definitions taken from A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology by Richard Pearce-Moses. Society of American Archivists, 2005.)

ARCHIVES n. 1. Materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control; permanent records. 2. The division within an organization responsible for maintaining the organization's records of enduring value. 3. An organization that collects the records of individuals, families, or other organizations; a collecting archives. 4. The professional discipline of administering such collections and organizations. 5. The building (or portion thereof) housing archival collections. 6. A published collection of scholarly papers, especially as a periodical.

APPRAISAL – n. 1. The process of identifying materials offered to an archives that have sufficient value to be accessioned. 2. The process of determining the length of time records should be retained, based on legal requirements and on their current and potential usefulness. 3. The process of determining the market value of an item; monetary appraisal.

DISPOSITION – (also final disposition), n. ~ 1. Materials' final destruction or transfer to an archives as determined by their appraisal.

FINDING AID – n. 1. A tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records. – 2. A description of records that gives the repository physical and intellectual control over the materials and that assists users to gain access to and understand the materials.

INVENTORY – n. ~ 1. A list of things. – 2. DESCRIPTION · A finding aid that includes, at a minimum, a list of the series in a collection. – 3. RECORDS MANAGEMENT · The process of surveying the records in an office, typically at the series level.

MICROFILM - 1. Transparent film containing highly reduced copies of documents. – 2. High-resolution, low-grain film used make such copies.

PRESERVATION - 1. The professional discipline of protecting materials by minimizing chemical and physical deterioration and damage to minimize the loss of information and to extend the life of cultural property. – 2. The act of keeping from harm, injury, decay, or destruction, especially through noninvasive treatment. – 3. LAW · The obligation to protect records and other materials potentially relevant to litigation and subject to discovery.

PROVENANCE – 1. The origin or source of something. – 2. Information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or collection.

RECORD – 1. A written or printed work of a legal or official nature that may be used as evidence or proof; a document. – 2. Data or information that has been fixed on some medium; that has content, context, and structure; and that is used as an extension of human memory or to demonstrate accountability. – 3. Data or information in a fixed form that is created or received in the course of individual or institutional activity and set aside (preserved) as evidence of that activity for future reference. – 4. An instrument filed for public notice (constructive notice); see recordation. – 5. AUDIO · A phonograph record. – 6. COMPUTING · A collection of related data elements treated as a unit, such as the fields in a row in a database table. – 7. DESCRIPTION · An entry describing a work in a catalog; a catalog record.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT – The systematic and administrative control of records throughout their life cycle to ensure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition.

VITAL RECORDS - 1. Records that document significant life events, including births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and public health matters; vital statistics. – 2. Emergency operation records immediately necessary to begin recovery of business after a disaster, as well as rights-and-interests records necessary to protect the assets, obligations, and resources of the organization, as well as its employees and customers or citizens; essential records