Building a Successful Records Management Program

Mississippi Municipal League

2025 Annual Conference

July 22, 2025

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ISO 15489: Definition of Record

"Information created, received, and
maintained as evidence and information
by an organization or person,
in pursuance of legal obligations
or in the transaction of business"

Documentation of an activity

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Mississippi Code Section 25-59-3 (b)

"'Public records' shall mean all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings or other materials *regardless of physical form or characteristics* made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency or by any appointed or elected official."

[emphasis added]

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What is Records Management?

"A systematic approach to the creation, use, maintenance, storage and ultimate disposition of records throughout the information life cycle."

-- ARMA International

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Records Management helps you:

- Identify what is and what is not a record
- Determine what to do with records
- Organize records

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Why is Records Management important?

- It makes it easier to find records
- It addresses storage issues
- It saves money
  - Less costly storage areas
  - Unneeded records disposed
    - "Law of Thirds" – could move 2/3 of records out of primary office space
- It helps with legal & compliance issues
- It can help identify essential records
  - Emergency preparedness / Continuity of Operations Plan

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Determining Records Retention Periods

- Administrative value
- Fiscal value
- Legal value
- Regulatory value
- Historical value

Retain for the longest value

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Sample Retention Schedule

https://www.mdah.ms.gov/local-government#retention

State of Mississippi Local Government Records
RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULE

All Local Governments
Financial Records

SERIES #	TITLE	DESCRIPTION	RETENTION
GSL 02 05	Bank Reconciliation	Documentation including spreadsheets, book balance reports, and associated working papers used for reconciliation of all bank accounts held by a local government entity. *Replaces Schedule GSC 02-03.*	Three (3) years after release of audit. Approved: 7/16/2019
GSL 02 06	Bank Statements	Bank statements received from banks maintaining funds of a local government entity. *Replaces Schedule GSC 02-04.*	Five (5) years. Approved: 7/16/2019
GSL 02 07	Bond Catalog	Annual publication of all outstanding bonds and schedule of bonds. *Replaces Schedule GSC 02-23.*	Permanent. Approved: 7/16/2019
GSL 02 08	Bond File	Working papers and final documentation related to the issuance of bonds for which a local government entity is obligated. May include project schedule and budget, financing timetable, comparison of alternative funding	Five (5) years after bonds are redeemed. Retain closing documents

Application of retention schedule:
Scheduling locations

- **Current year:** Active files – In office
- **Previous year:** In-house storage
- **After 2 years:** Offsite Storage Facility
- **End of retention period:** Dispose

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RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULES are LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Once approved by the

Local Government Records Committee,

Records Retention Schedules

have the force and effect of law.

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If you can't find an appropriate retention schedule:

- You **CANNOT** legally dispose of a record that is not covered by a records retention schedule.
- Contact LGRO to see if the record fits an existing schedule
- If not, LGRO can help you develop:
  - One-time disposal authorization
  - Entity-specific schedule
  - General schedule

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Section 25-59-23, *Mississippi Code*:

- theft, alteration or unauthorized destruction of records
- divulging of restricted information

→ misdemeanor fine of $500 to $1,000

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File Cabinets:
Lateral vs. Pull-out

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Storage Boxes

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Identification System

- Standardize Filing System
  - Alphabetic
  - Numeric
  - Subject
- Standardize Labeling
  - Design
  - Content
  - Taxonomy (pre-selected names)

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Sample Storage Labels

Record Number _____ Date Stored _____

Retention Status _____ Destroy After _____

Per Retention Schedule _____

DESCRIPTION:

Originating Office _____
Department:

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Preparing records for storage

- Check for a retention schedule
- Organize records
  - Pack like records together
    - Date range / Record series / Retention schedule
  - Put records in logical order
- Label box so someone else can find its contents easily – use consistent terminology
- Arrange for transfer to storage

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Storage Shelving

- Best is heavy 18-gauge steel shelving with baked enamel finish
- Worst is bare wood, especially plywood or particleboard
- Use protective sealer over wood

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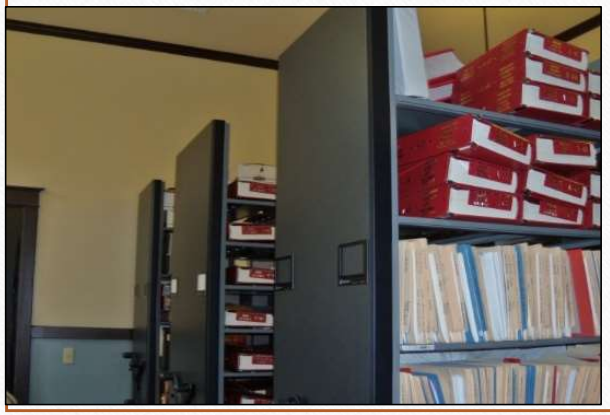
Shelving Options

Roller Shelves

Steel Shelves with Wire Racks



Mobile-Aisle Shelving

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In-house storage

- Active files – in office

- Less-active files – in-house storage

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Off-site storage

Municipally-owned facility

Commercial records warehouse

Mini-warehouse unit

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Off-site storage:

Archives

Municipally-owned facility

Local Public Library

Historical Society

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Managing Electronic Records

- **Managing hardware and software**
  - User security
  - Passwords
    - Strong passwords
    - Change often
  - Keep software updated
  - Keep anti-virus program updated
  - Backups
    - Short-term on-site
    - Long-term off-site
- **Managing digital records**
  - Various types / formats
  - Originals vs. duplicates
  - Files and folders
    - Structure
    - Taxonomy
  - Delete records as needed
    - Transitory records
    - Follow retention schedules
    - Empty trash

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Concerns about Electronic Records

- Storage Medium
- Accessibility
- Back-ups / Disaster Recovery
- Longevity
  - Life of hardware
  - Life of software
  - Migration

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Average Media Lifetimes

Floppy disk: 10 – 20 years

Hard drive: 3 – 5 years

Solid state media (flash drives): 5 – 10 years

Optical media (CD / DVD): 2 – 5 years (recorded)

Magnetic tape: up to 10 years

"Data storage lifespans: How long will media really last?"
https://www.storagecraft.com/blog/data-storage-lifespan/

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Which Records Should we Scan?

- How often will it be used?
- How long must it be kept?
  - Will the hardware / software outlive the record?
  - If not, can I afford to migrate it?
- Is the effort worth the cost?

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Choosing an Imaging Vendor

- Will they follow MDAH standards?
  - https://www.mdah.ms.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/Public-Records-Reformatting-Policy-2013.pdf
  - Indexing, quality control, searchability, workflow, backups, migration
- How will they handle fragile, faded, photostat, and oversized documents?
  - Ask for test samples
- How viable is the business long-term?
  - Will records be accessible if business closes or merges?
- Can they work with in-house IT staff?
  - Is equipment compatible?
  - Is there sufficient storage space?
  - Is redundancy built in?

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The dangers of not managing records

Costs

- **Storing** records no longer needed
- **Staff time** trying to find records when disorganized
- **Liability** for not having records requested
- **Liability** for having records that should have been disposed
  - Extra costs of discovery
  - Potential liability for info found
- **Repair and restoration** of long-term / permanent records that have deteriorated
- **Loss** of records due to fire, weather, or other disaster
- **Bad publicity** from poor records management

Storing records in an unmanned facility

- **Undetected** structural **damage** (leaks, broken windows, termites, etc.)
- **Damage** from rodents, insects, other pests
- **Break-ins** and **vandalism**
- **Disorganization** of records without regular supervision
- **Deterioration** of records due to lack of climate control

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Implementing a Records Management Program

- Advocate program
- Adopt $1 Records Management Fee *(MS Code § 25-60-5)*
- Designate Records Management authority
- Find a willing laborer
- Get assistance from MDAH
- Encourage participation
  - Other municipal offices
  - Computer / IT staff

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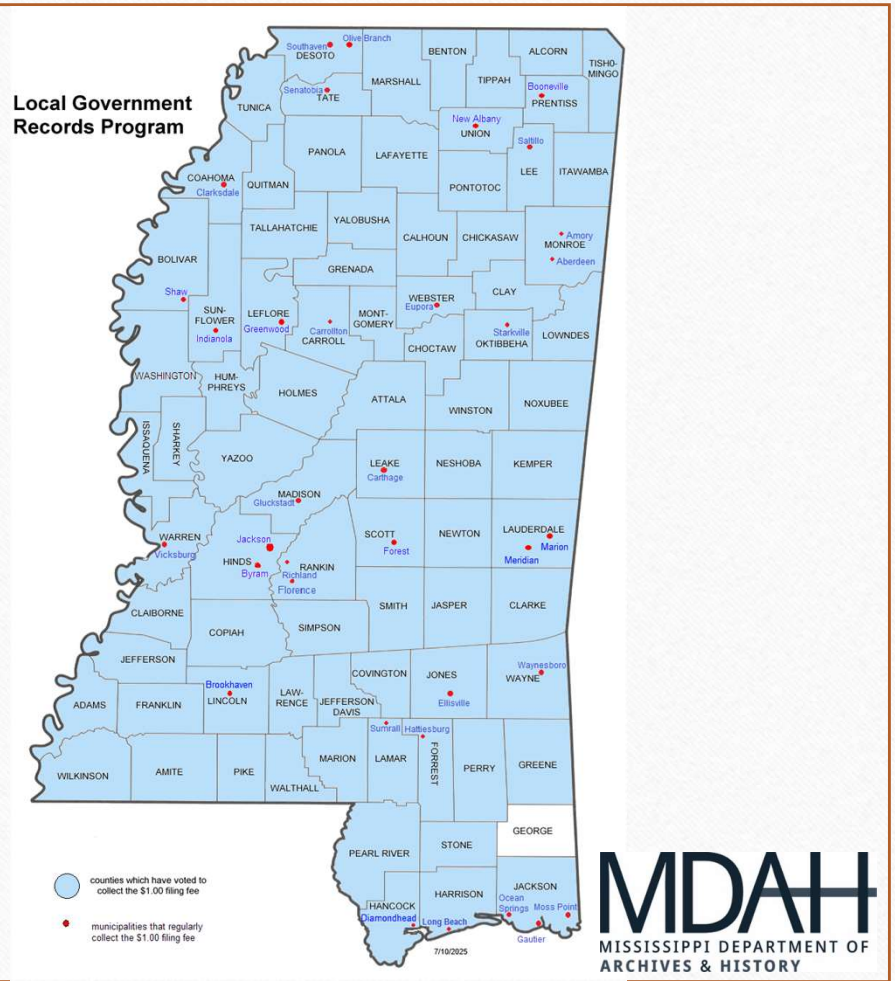
- All municipalities must follow retention schedules
- **$1 RM Fee mandatory for municipalities**
- All counties must follow retention schedules
- **$1 RM Fee optional for counties**



Possible Funding Sources

City Clerk:

Licenses, etc.

- Bus driver / Vehicle for hire (taxi) licenses
- Cemetery deeds
- Garnishment of employee wages
- Tax deeds

City Clerk:

Special Events

- Garage / yard sales
- Parade permits
- Temporary event applications
- Temporary vendor applications

Fire Department

- Bonfire permits
- Fire inspections

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Possible Funding Sources

- **Building Code / Zoning Office**
  - Building permits / Inspections
  - Certificates of development
  - Demolition permits
  - Electric / gas / plumbing applications / permits / inspections
  - Planning / zoning applications
  - Pre-development review/applications
  - Publications for zoning changes/variances
  - Tree / landscape / fence permits
  - Use and occupancy certificates / permits

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Uses for Municipality's Half of Fee

- Wages (supplement)
- Supplies
  - Record storage boxes
  - Archival supplies, file folders, etc.
- Services
  - Off-site storage
  - Shredding
- Equipment
  - Computers & related equipment for scanning
  - Shelving for boxed records

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MDAH Assistance

- Consultation & advice
  - Phone
  - Email
- On-site visits
  - Courtesy visits
  - "A Day at Your Disposal" (hands-on assistance)
- Emailing list "Locgov-list"
  - *NEWS on the Record* newsletter
  - Periodic announcements & info
- Workshops
  - Maintaining a Healthy Records Program
  - Managing Electronic Records
  - Emergency Preparedness for Records

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Questions?

Thanks for your attention

and cooperation!

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