

Records Management

As a government entity, the Village has very stringent guidelines for Record Retention and each department is required to know and follow these guidelines in order to remain in compliance with current policy. The purposes of Record Retention can vary from agency accountability to public research and therefore the requirements will differ from department to department.

It is most important, first of all, to understand what to look for when organizing your files or computer for retention purposes.

What is a Record?

For the purposes of Records Management, the term Record can refer to any official documentary material created in connection with the transaction of public business including, but not limited to:

- Word documents
- Maps
- Plans
- Photographs
- Faxes
- Emails
- Voice mails
- Videos

Each department will have its own, more specific guidelines for what to keep as well as how long to keep it but as a general rule, if the item in question pertains to departmental business and has applicable content (meaning that it contains relevant information to the departmental procedures or goals) or if it is the end-result (documentation or product) of a project, then it is likely considered a record. Keep in mind, not all project-oriented or departmental documentation would be considered a record, for example: an email about lunch arrangements is not a record.

Electronic Records

Existing public records may be reproduced in a digitized electronic format and once reproduced legibly, accurately (without additions, deletions or changes to the original document images) and durably, the physical public record may be disposed of, if necessary. Any information that was a public record when produced in paper remains a public record when produced or maintained in any digital format, and any information created as, or converted to, an electronic format is a government asset and must be retained for any period required by law or Local Records Commission regulations.

One thing to bear in mind with electronic records management is that systems and software are ever-changing and versions degrade at an ever-increasing pace. Documents created in a word processing software from twelve years ago are virtually unreadable using today's software – not only the bells and whistles have changed but so has the metadata within. As well, it is important to use a universally-standard format in keeping records so if/when systems change, recovering and reformatting the records to the latest version will not be a difficult task.

As a dominant form of communication, email is held to the same standards as physical communication and both physical and electronic documentation. What makes the classification process difficult for email is that so much of it is not considered a record but rather regular

communications. Because email is easy to send and receive, the standard definition of a record could apply to so much of it but doesn't. For instance, an email from an outside vendor or source could be considered a public record if it fell into the definitions listed above but if received as a forward from inside the Village, it would not be. The original Village sender, in this case, would be the record keeper and not everyone on the forward or cc list. And having received that email, the user may want to keep it for referential purposes but there is no need to keep it for Records Management purposes.

See the Email Retention Policy (available on the Intranet) to further classify what may and may not be considered a public record but until then, you can use the following as a simple guide of what would not be considered a public record for organizational purposes:

- A draft of an official letter but not the official letter itself; notes; meeting requests
- If it is not in connection with public business
- A duplicate of an existing record

In an effort to maintain a clean and organized mailbox, deleting or filing away emails that do not fit the qualifications of a public record, as outlined above, is recommended.

Responsibilities and Benefits of Records Management

Employees have three basic obligations regarding Village records:

- Create records needed to do the Village's business, record decisions and actions taken and document activities for which the Village/employee is responsible
- Take care of records so that information can be found when needed. This means setting up organized directories and files and filing materials (in whatever format) regularly and carefully in a manner that allows the materials to be safely stored and efficiently retrieved when necessary
- Carry out the disposal of records in accordance with Village record schedules and State of Illinois regulations

There are several benefits to be gained from a systematic approach to the management of records:

- Contributing to the smooth operations of Village programs by making the information needed for decision-making and operations readily available
- Helping deliver services in a consistent and equitable manner
- Facilitating effective performance of activities throughout the Village
- Protecting the rights of the Village, Village employees and residents
- Providing continuity in the event of a disaster
- Protecting records from inappropriate and unauthorized access
- Meeting statutory and regulatory requirements including archival, audit and oversight activities
- Providing protection and support in litigation
- Allowing quicker retrieval of documents and information from files
- Improving office efficiency and productivity
- Providing better documentation more efficiently
- Supporting and documenting historical and other research

- Freeing up filing cabinet and server* space for other purposes by moving inactive records to storage facilities and digital archival objects
- Avoiding unnecessary purchases of office equipment and server storage

*Servers do not have infinite space and therefore need to be purged periodically of their unnecessary or outdated content. This is most easily done by organizing record content by date so that folders that have passed their schedule can be moved or disposed of leaving room for new folders to be preserved.