

What is a County Record?

The Revised Code of Washington (40.14.010) states that "public records shall include any paper, correspondence, completed form, bound record book, photograph, film, sound recording, map, drawing, machine-readable material, compact disc meeting current industry ISO specifications, or other document, regardless of physical form or characteristics, and including such copies thereof, that have been made by or received by any agency of the State of Washington in connection with the transaction of public business, and legislative records as described in RCW 40.14.100."

Records Management & the Law

King County employees are required to comply with the laws and regulations developed for public records by the State of Washington and King County policy. These laws and rules are found in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), and the King County policies that govern the retention, preservation, access, and disposal of county records.

- **RCW 40.14.060** Public records cannot be destroyed unless destruction is completed according to the requirements in a Washington State approved retention schedule.
- **RCW 40.16.010** Anyone who willfully & unlawfully destroys public records before the end of the retention period is guilty of a class C felony and is subject to a punishment of 5 years in jail, a \$1000 fine, or both.
- **WAC 434-662** Electronic records are bound by the same provisions as paper records and should be accessible and securely preserved for their retention period, and must remain in their original electronic format.
- **WAC 434-663** Identifies State requirements for scanning physical records as electronic replacements for the original hard copy. These requirements must be met before physical records can be destroyed.

Effective Records Management

Proper management of county records is an essential component of Best Run Government. Records are part of the County’s overall information management structure where valuable information is created, received, captured, managed, and disposed of according to retention requirements. Records management supports continuous improvement practices involving the people and work processes that create and use the records and is governed by policies, procedures, and roles put in place to meet regulatory, legal, risk management, and operational requirements.

Benefits of Managed Records	Consequences of Poor Records Management
-Reduces county operating costs	-Increases operating costs for records storage -Decreases usable office space -Increases duplication of information
-Strengthens accountability -Supports open government goals -Reduces financial and reputational risk	-Non-compliance with laws and regulations -Inability to provide public access to information -Monetary penalties for non-compliance with Public Records Act -Loss of evidentiary value to support legal actions
-Increases staff efficiency, productivity, decision making, and well-being	-Increases staff time to locate needed information -Increases employee stress due to cluttered, inconsistent, and disorganized work environments -Inability to trace evolution of policy decisions
-Enables continuation of essential services during emergencies	-Inability to provide essential services or fulfill legal and financial obligations to the public -Rights and interests of the county unprotected
-Identifies and protects historically valuable records	-Loss of institutional memory

What are my records management responsibilities?

As a county employee, you have four basic responsibilities:

- 1 **Document your work:** Create records needed to document the work you are responsible for.
- 2 **Organize and maintain your records:** Organize your records so that information can be found when needed. This means regularly setting up organized well-named file directories that allow records to be safely stored and efficiently retrieved when necessary.
- 3 **Abide by the retention schedule:** Carry out the disposition of records under your control in accordance with the county's records retention schedules and state record keeping requirements.
- 4 **Comply with required legal holds:** Do not dispose of records if they are needed in response to a current public records request, audit, investigation, or a current or imminent litigation action.

How long should I keep my records?

Records must be retained according to approved retention periods. The King County Records Management Program is responsible for identifying retention periods for county records. Retention requirements are based upon the content and function of the records. Retention requirements can be found on King County retention schedules or by contacting the Records Management program. Records are retained when they have administrative, fiscal, legal, or historical value to the county. If you can answer "yes" to any of these questions you may have a record with retention value:

- **Was it created in the course of county business?**
- **Is your action/response expected?**
- **Does it document county activities and actions?**
- **Is it mandated by statute or regulation?**
- **Does it support financial obligations or legal claims?**
- **Does it communicate county policy or requirements?**

The King County Retention Schedules can be found at:
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/recordsmanagement>

What records can I destroy now?

Transitory Records are records without retention value that have only temporary or short-term use. These records can be deleted, recycled, or shredded once they are no longer needed. If you can answer yes to any of the following questions you may have a **transitory record**:

- **Is it reference material or a convenience copy?**
- **Is it a draft or working paper?**
- **Is it work unrelated to my office?**
- **Is it purely informational not requiring action or response?**

Common examples include: notices about employee meetings or holidays; KC Global emails; advertisements; external periodicals; automatic system notifications; handwritten notes; emails not related to your office and not needed to document work you are responsible for.

Tools and Services of ARMMS

The Archives, Records Management, and Mail Services Section (ARMMS) is here to provide the resources, tools, and education necessary for county employees to manage their records appropriately throughout their life cycle. ARMMS includes three workgroups that provide important services related to the management of records.

1 Records Management Program: Assists all county agencies with issues related to records management by: helping county employees identify proper retention for records; providing training for, and access to, the King County Electronic Records Management System (KC ERMS); assisting agencies to properly prepare records for storage, and more!

2 Records Center: Provides secure managed storage for the county's inactive physical records by: storing records throughout the duration of their retention period; ensuring protection and maintenance of records according to paper records storage requirements; providing pick-up, delivery, and destruction of eligible records.

3 Archives: Preserves and provides access to records with historic value by: assuming legal custody of archival records upon the completion of their retention period; stabilizing and storing records in a secure, climate-controlled environment; organizing and describing records for public access.

The Information Life Cycle

The Life Cycle model is a helpful visual management tool used to identify the various stages of a records “life span” from creation through final disposition.

CREATION/COLLECTION

The life cycle of a record begins when a record is created or received by a county employee. All recorded information regardless of format, is considered a public record when made or received in connection with the transaction of public business.

The Records Management Program can provide assistance in this phase by identifying recordkeeping requirements for electronic information systems, evaluating records workflow to identify efficiency opportunities, and more.

ACTIVE RECORDS: USE AND DISTRIBUTION

Records in the active phase of the life cycle are needed to support current work and are accessed frequently. Active records must be organized in a way that allows them to be easily located and accessed when needed.

While records are active, the Records Management Program can help implement an approved scanning program, create a records file plan, assist with identifying records categories, and more.

INACTIVE RECORDS: MAINTENANCE, PRESERVATION, AND PROTECTION

When a record is no longer needed to support the work it was created for, it must still be retained for a specific amount of time based on the function and content of the record. This time period is called the retention period.

Records must be maintained, preserved, protected, and accessible for their entire retention period.

The King County Records Center provides managed secure storage for physical records living out their retention. The King County Electronic Records Management System (KC ERMS) is the official storage repository for electronic records for the duration of the retention period.

Records retention schedules can help you identify the types of records you have, how long they should be retained, and when they become inactive.

DISPOSITION

When records have met their retention requirements, they reach the final stage of the life cycle: Disposition. There are two methods of disposition: Destruction and Archival Transfer.

Destruction: Non-archival records that have met the required retention period, and are not subject to legal hold, can be destroyed.

Archival Transfer: A small percentage (about 3-5%) of County records have long-term historic value. Records designated as archival or potentially archival on the records retention schedule must not be disposed of without prior approval from the King County Archivist.

The Records Management Program can help determine if records are eligible for disposition and assist with the completion of records destruction forms.