



Geauga County Automatic Data Processing Board

Department of County Archives and Records Enterprise
Charles E. Walder, Chief Administrator

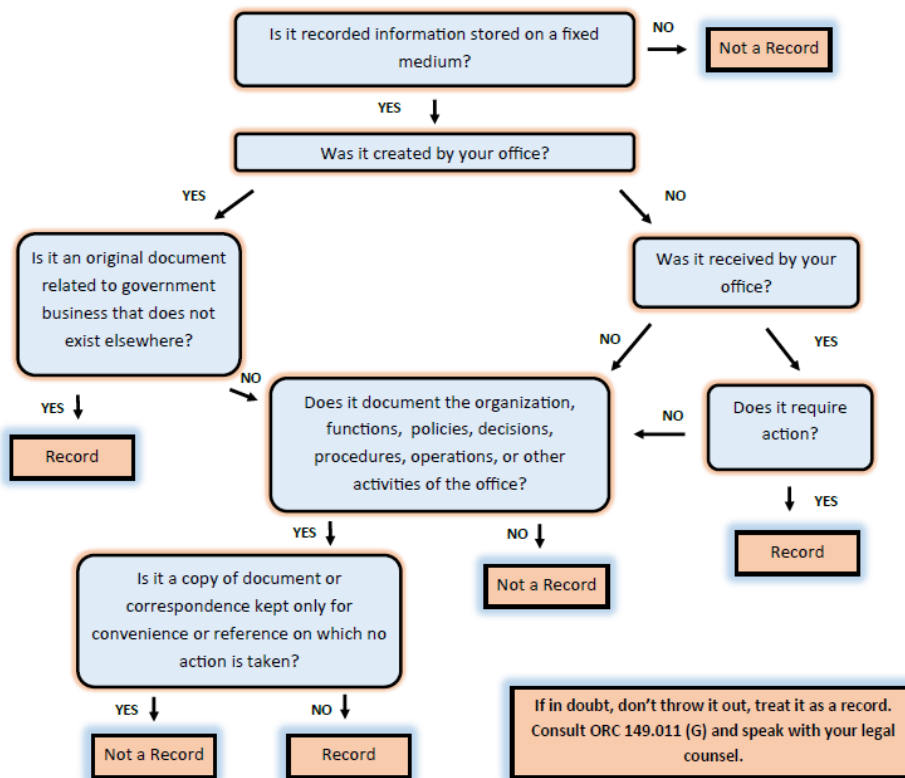


Management Records Training

Records

What is a record?

Ohio History Connection, State Archives of Ohio: Is it A Record?



Record: Section 149.011 of the Ohio Revised Code defines a record as:

- a) any document stored on a fixed medium (paper, computer, film, audio/video, etc.) that is
- b) created, received or sent under jurisdiction of a public office, and
- c) serves to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, and other activities of the office. (If in doubt, don't throw it out!)



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Public Record: “Records kept by any public office, including, but not limited to, state, county, city, village, township, and school district units, and records pertaining to the delivery of educational services by an alternative school in this state kept by the nonprofit or for-profit entity operating the alternative school pursuant to section 3313.533 of the Revised Code,” (ORC 149.43 (A)(1)).

[ORC 149.43](#) also delineates which records generated and kept by a public office are considered non-public, in the sense that they cannot be requested for view by a member of the public. Some non-public, permanent records become public records after certain time constraints are met. It is recommended that you familiarize yourself with any record types listed in this ORC that your department generates or keeps that are exempt from public records requests.

It is also worth noting that there has been a court-upheld instance of AI being admissible as evidence in court, including prompts, model outputs, and interaction logs. Organizations must keep this in mind if they are planning on or are currently using AI as part of their operations in any capacity. [See article.](#)

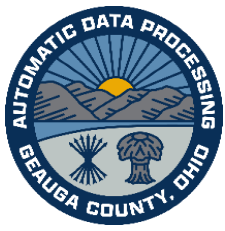
What is a public record request?

Any person can make a public records request. They can be anonymous and from outside of the state. However, in certain scenarios, journalists have greater access to some records and incarcerated individuals have more limited access to some records. In those situations, the identity of the requester matters. ORC 149.43(B)(8) and (9) contain the legal boundaries regarding incarcerated individuals and journalists making public records requests.

The Ohio Attorney General’s office has an excellent [tip sheet](#) for responding to public records requests that you can reference if you are unsure how to do so and what the limits and boundaries are. This includes some starting points for records that fall into non-public categories.

Why is it important to have good records management?

Good records management is critical for every county department. Some of the benefits of good records management and the dangers of poor records management include, but are not limited to, the following:



Geauga County
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The benefits:

- Ease of conducting daily business
- More organized, less cluttered physical office and digital space
- Rapid response to public records requests
- Protection against legal action

Compared to the dangers of not doing so:

- Delays in conducting daily business
- Increased clutter and disorganization
- Records disposed incorrectly for their retention period
- Danger of public legal action for delayed or incorrect requests

The National Archives (NARA) has a more comprehensive list of the benefits of good records management [here](#). When comparing these benefits and their opposing dangers, the answer is obvious. Having strong, clearly defined records management procedures for your department is beneficial for every area of departmental function. If you are consistent in carrying out your procedures for good records management there will be a minimal time impact on your daily operations and it will save you more time in the long-term.

Keep these baseline questions in mind when approaching the task of records management:

- Do you know what your records are?
- Do you know where your records are?
- Are your records labeled correctly?

Organizing digital vs physical

It is important to remember that digital records are just as important as physical records, despite not being as visible. Digital records must have the same retention schedules applied to them as physical records; there is no difference. To



Geauga County
Automatic Data Processing Board
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make it as simple as possible, it is advisable to apply the same organizational structure to your digital records that you do to your physical. Give digital files the same naming conventions and same housing order as physical.

For example: a physical box holds File Series A, files A – M, and another box holds the same file series, files N – Z. This would translate to a digital file folder titled File Series A, two folders inside it titled Files A – M and Files N – Z, and then within those folders you would have the files themselves. Keeping these kinds of systems as simple and clear as possible will cut down on your overall records management time needs and make it easy to learn for new employees.

One important thing to note is that email is a **format**, not a series unto itself. Each email should be evaluated for retention according to individual content. Non-record emails such as personal correspondence and postings from external mailing lists can be deleted at any time. Emails that meet the definition listed above of a record must be scheduled, retained, and disposed of according to the applicable retention schedule. More detailed information on email management can be found with the OhioERC, including a short video training series on email management that can be found [here](#).

When going completely paperless, make sure to have your naming convention, metadata, and scanning standards (if applicable) established ahead of time from starting the project. Whether you are scanning something for short- or long-term retention or have records that are born-digital, make sure that your records retention schedule matches what you are doing in terms of media requirements, and that it reflects the legislation relevant to your department. More on retention schedules and media requirements can be found later in this document.

Digital Preservation

What is digital preservation?

Digital preservation is not just about backups and recovery or immediate access, though these are critical aspects of it, nor is it to be considered as an afterthought. Digital preservation is the total process involved in long-, medium-, and short-term preservation of records in a digital format. If any records critical to the operations of the department are



Geauga County Automatic Data Processing Board

Department of County Archives and Records Enterprise Charles E. Walder, Chief Administrator



being stored digitally or are born-digital, digital preservation is a process that the department must engage in. As a matter of organizational management, it must be included as a consistent part of day-to-day operations to be successfully implemented.

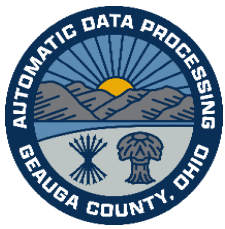
[This](#) 8-minute video introduction to digital preservation by the Sunshine State Digital Network is a recommended watch for those who are planning on using digital preservation of any kind. If you are uncertain whether a particular part of digital preservation is your responsibility, reach out to the archives and they will be happy to help you work through your questions.

It should be noted that the archives long-term plans include administrating a digital preservation software for county-wide use. Once that software is acquired and implemented, this section of the training module will be updated as needed. Until that point, it is recommended that departments not make any drastic changes to their digital preservation process beyond what their current solutions are capable of to comply with the standards listed below. Any questions regarding this can be directed to the archives.

Backups and recovery

Part of the digital preservation process is making sure that the records are not lost in the face of deterioration such as natural disaster impacts, deletion, and bit rot. Though digitized files commonly originate from paper files, they are often digitized and/or put to microfilm so the paper copies can be destroyed, and therefore the paper copies should not be relied on as a long-term backup. If microfilm copies exist that still have the physical integrity to be viewed and are not suffering their own deterioration, these can be considered a backup and recovery option.

However, born-digital records likely will not have eye-readable backups such as paper or microfilm due to how digital records management has developed. Similarly to physical records, if a digital record is only stored in one location that is damaged or destroyed, the record is gone. Alternatively, if a file is accidentally deleted or the file becomes corrupted, the record is also gone. Digital records are also more prone to accidental or malicious alterations than physical records, due to such changes being easier to hide in digital form than physical. Files being sent as copies via emails can result in



Geauga County
Automatic Data Processing Board
Department of County Archives and Records Enterprise
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confusion as to which version of the file was the “original,” or the original not being updated in favor of a copy and then both existing in different digital locations or formats with potentially conflicting information.

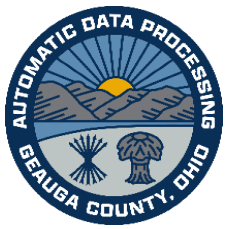
A recovery plan for digital records should be a subsection of any disaster recovery plan a department has in place. This should include discussion with your IT team for digital records retrieval in the case of disaster or deletion. Talk through with them what those processes look like, particularly for disasters that have a higher likelihood of happening in your geographic area.

Digital upkeep

Digital records also require additional kinds of upkeep compared to physical records. Physical records are in danger from sunlight, temperature and humidity extremes, physical destruction, and the effects of natural disasters or pests. Although digital records can fall victim to those same dangers, they have an additional set of risks. Technology advancements can cause digital records formats to be difficult to access or become completely inaccessible through changes in hardware or software. Repeated accessing of records can cause bit rot (the degradation of a digital record’s resolution from repeated use) over extended periods of time. The simple deletion of a record can be far more damaging than accidentally tearing a sheet of paper. Paper can be taped back together in all but the most extreme circumstances. There is no guarantee that a deleted digital record can be recovered.

In many ways, digital records are far more fragile and prone to loss than physical records are. For that reason, the optimal number of copies is three; one for operational use and two for preservation, with all three being stored in different geographic locations and on at least two types of storage. Two copies is an acceptable number in the case of financial constraints or other roadblocks so long as they are stored in different locations, but not ideal or recommended. In the case of digitized records, a physically sound microfilm version can serve as one of the backup copies. Currently, the recommended file formats for digital records are PDF or PDF/A, and TIFF, at a minimum of 300 dpi but optionally up to 600 dpi in the case of the preservation copies.

Perform regular checks to ensure all file types are still accessible, and if not, upgrade them to the current advised archival file type. Maintain separate “access” and “use” sets among your backups to protect against bit rot. Make sure



Geauga County
Automatic Data Processing Board
Department of County Archives and Records Enterprise
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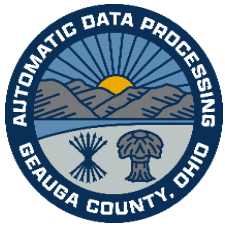
that any use sets that receive updates are always done at the source, rather than through a copy sent via email. Do not simply delete the original and replace it with the copy; if the original file is legally required, maintain that file. A good way to ensure original digital files are being maintained and unaltered is to run a periodic checksum. This will catch any alterations that were made to the files, which is particularly helpful in the case of a file that should not have been altered.

More information for physical and digital preservation standards can be found in *ADP-04-000*, the Geauga County Historic Records Preservation Policy, which can be accessed upon request from the archives. Though these standards are more specifically for historic records, the information can still be applied to non-historic records. The primary difference is in the use of color versus greyscale or black and white. For non-historic records, you do not have to scan in color unless you deem it necessary for preservation of information in the record (a color-coded index, for example). Greyscale is the general recommendation for non-microfilmed non-historic records.

Access

Another important aspect of digital preservation is access. When we consider long-term access of digitized or born-digital records, file format and storage media obsolescence are the largest points of concern that must have plans in place to deal with them. Digital backups, or even microfilm backups, mean nothing if the ability to read them is lost. Microfilm that doesn't have vinegar syndrome will last for a long time, but there is no guarantee that microfilm readers will continue to operate for as long as the film will survive. Microfilm readers and companies that make and service them are becoming fewer and farther between, and increasingly expensive. A department must take an active management role in maintaining their digital records by keeping their file formats consistent and up-to-date, and by continually ensuring that their storage media interfaces smoothly with advancing technology. This includes migrating records to new formats or storage media as needed.

Archives staff can assist with information in best practices and current standards of storage, but ultimately it is the management of the department who must take ownership of their digital records in the same way they must take ownership of their physical files.



Geauga County Automatic Data Processing Board

Department of County Archives and Records Enterprise Charles E. Walder, Chief Administrator



Retention and Disposal

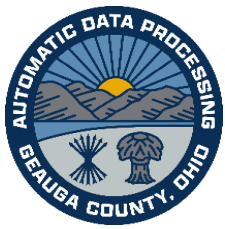
Retention: The length of time a record must be kept because it is needed for ongoing business, to document an action, or for statutory reasons. The retention is recorded on a Records Retention Schedule (RC-2).

For all records, media type is a part of the retention schedule. This describes the kind of media that the records can be stored on and still fulfill the schedule requirements. Many schedules have this expressed as “Paper/microfilm,” or “Paper/electronic,” which is brief but not always clear. Typically, the slash represents “or,” so these mean “Paper **or** microfilm” and “Paper **or** electronic.”

These can be expressed in more complex terms, as well, with specifications for how long they must remain as one type of media before they can become another type of media. However, media type is **not** a factor for determining if a record is permanent or non-permanent. More complex requirements are almost always only determined by legislation that requires them to be so. If there is no legislative requirement for the media of the record, it is best to keep the media type simple and aligned with how your department typically functions to avoid any confusion or additional unnecessary steps in the record keeping process.

Retention Schedules

The General Retention Schedule is used for types of records that are commonly found in most departments. Your individual departmental retention schedule is for a) records that your department generates that do not appear on the general schedule, or b) records that are on the general schedule that you want to keep for a **longer** period of time than is listed on the general schedule. You cannot choose to keep a record listed on the general schedule for a **shorter** period than what is listed on that schedule. In short, the general schedule is the marker for the minimum amount of time you can keep the records that it lists.



Geauga County
Automatic Data Processing Board
Department of County Archives and Records Enterprise
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Many record types, particularly those that are department-specific, have retention periods set by legislation relating to them. This legislation can change over time, and it is the responsibility of the department to remain abreast of any changes to legislation that might impact their retention schedule. If a retention period changes and requires a retention schedule to be changed, inform the archives so they can assist as needed. This is crucial, as the archives will not reach out to check with your department for the legal need to update your departmental retention schedule. It is the responsibility of the department to initiate that change.

When changing a retention schedule, it must be sent to the Ohio History Connection (OHC) for final approval. Before sending it to the OHC, it must have the signatures of the official responsible for the department and the administrator of the board managing the archives, which in this case is the Auditor on the ADP Board. Once the document has been signed, then it can be sent for final approval with the OHC and then enacted in your department. If your department has an administrative board instead of or in addition to a single official, have them sign it first before continuing with the process. The archives can assist with the changing of the schedule and acquiring the necessary signatures.

Retention length

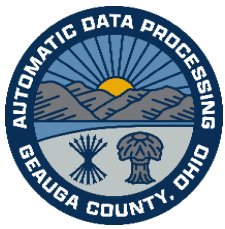
- Permanent
- Non-permanent

These are somewhat self-explanatory in name, however each of them has some additional nuance that requires careful administration.

Permanent records must be kept forever on an accessible media type. For decades, this has meant they must be kept either on paper or microfilm. Now, in the advancing technology of today, that definition is broadening by necessity to include digital.

Records have four values that apply to them, which often impact how long records are kept. The four values of records are as follows:

- Administrative – how long does your office need them to do your work?
- Fiscal – are the records needed for an audit?



Geauga County Automatic Data Processing Board

Department of County Archives and Records Enterprise Charles E. Walder, Chief Administrator



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- Legal – do the records document any rights or obligations?
 - Historical – do the records contain important information about people and places?

Retention periods are then expressed in one of three ways:

- In terms of time (three years, permanently, etc)
- In terms of an event or action (retain until case closed, until audit report is released by Auditor of State, etc)
- In terms of both (retain three years after case closed)

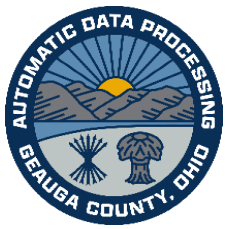
They can also be subdivided (retain in office five years, then in storage area/with archives for five more years, etc) but this is not a common choice outside of legislative requirements.

Records disposal

When records have met their retention period, whether a non-permanent record has reached the appropriate criteria or a permanent record has been preserved on a different permanent media type per your retention schedule requirements, they can be disposed. If a record type is not on a retention schedule, it **cannot be destroyed** until it exists on either your department schedule or the general schedule.

If the archives is currently storing those records, they will send your department an RC-3 form, or Certificate of Records Disposal, already filled out with the records that are due to be disposed. The archives determines what is ready to be disposed by matching what is written on the label of the box with a line item in the general or departmental retention schedule. The labeling of the box is the responsibility of the department who owns the records. This is why it is crucial for a department to understand the general schedule and their own schedule, if they have one. Keeping records with the same retention in the same series separated from records with a different retention or disposal year is necessary for the archives to do their job, regardless of how full or empty the box ends up being.

If your department is storing the records but wants to have the archives dispose of them, it is your responsibility to fill out the form and submit it to the archives with the boxes of records. The RC-3 form can be found on the Ohio History Connection website, and that page is linked through the [archives website](#) for your convenience. If you need assistance in completing the form correctly, do not hesitate to reach out to archives staff, they will be happy to help you.



Geauga County
Automatic Data Processing Board
Department of County Archives and Records Enterprise
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If your department wishes to dispose of the records in-house, without archives involvement, the legality of doing so is entirely up to your department. In order to lawfully dispose of a record, an RC-3 or RC-1 must be completed and appropriately signed as described on the forms themselves. It is up to your department whether you would like to send a copy of that form to the archives for permanent filing under the other forms for your department or if you would like to keep them entirely in your office.

Records transfers

If you have boxes that you want to send to the archives for either permanent or non-permanent retention, you must fill out a Records Transfer Request form, which can also be found on the archives website. When the archives receives that request form, they will send you a set of stickers to put on the boxes so Maintenance knows that the boxes were approved to be moved and then you can have them move the boxes. If you are sending them because the records have met their retention and you want to include them in the next archives shred for disposal, you can fill out and sign the RC-3 form and send it to the archives with the transfer request for the boxes, keeping a copy for yourself for your records.

As stated multiple times above, at every stage of these processes, the archives is available for questions and to offer assistance. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns. We are here to help. To that end, please consider taking the quiz linked [here](#) to test your knowledge of the concepts discussed in this training.