

## **Introduction**

In records administration, an inventory is a detailed listing of each record/record series or system, along with a location indicator, and other essential data. It is a list of each series or system rather than a list of each document or folder. The primary goal of the inventory is to supply the data needed to create the timetable for the inventory, and it also aids in the detection of records management issues. Among these management issues are insufficient documentation of official acts, incorrect use of recordkeeping technologies, poor filing systems and maintenance standards, poor management of non-record items, insufficient identification of vital records, and insufficient records security policies. When completed, the inventory should include all offices, all records, and all non-record goods. An incomplete or disorganized inventory may only lead to an insufficient schedule and a loss of control over records. A complete inventory should include all record series of an agency. The scope of an inventory will be determined during the planning phase of an inventory, which will have a few phases identified in the inventory timetable.

An inventory of an agency's documents is required as part of a successful records management program, as is the identification of present retention schedules or the design of new retention schedules for those records. Retention schedules identify the records that an agency needs to preserve and specify minimum retention periods based on the records' legal, fiscal, administrative, and historical significance. Once all retention obligations have been met, the records must then be properly disposed of. Keeping records just "because that is how we have always done it" just is not an acceptable response and retaining records past the required retention period will result in a non-compliant records management program. Disposition is an important component of a good inventory.

It must be noted that a records inventory is different from a retention schedule. An inventory is an accounting of all records/records series held by an agency. A retention schedule is used to determine the types of records/records series an agency has and how long the agency must retain them. An inventory and retention schedule are both key components of an effective records management program, and each has a distinct role in a records management program.

## **And now for the Legal Jargon or Legalese—Florida**

Just as it is important to know the difference between inventory and a retention schedule it

is also important to know what a record/record series is. A record series, as defined by Rule 1B-24.001(3)(k), Florida Administrative Code, is: “[A] group of related public records arranged under a single filing arrangement or kept together as a unit (physically or intellectually) because they consist of the same form, relate to the same subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction, or have some other relationship arising from their creation, receipt, or use. A record series might contain records in a variety of forms and formats that document a particular program, function, or activity of the agency. . . .” <sup>1</sup>

Before creating an inventory plan it is imperative to know what constitutes a record within the city, county, state, and/or country in which it is located. Policies or statutes may govern an agency’s records; therefore, a solid knowledge of governing laws is necessary.

## **Creating an Inventory Plan**

Before beginning to conduct an inventory, an inventory plan needs to be developed. The inventory plan should not only determine the scope of the inventory but also identify if it will include physical and/or digital records; and if the inventory is for a single department or agency-wide. A person or committee should be selected to oversee the inventory during this phase. This is when it is decided if an outside vendor will be used to assist with the inventory or if it will be conducted in-house. It is highly recommended that if the inventory is conducted in-house, a project manager is selected to oversee the project, keep the project moving, and make any necessary decisions.

Other considerations during the planning phase include determining if the department staff will be interviewed to determine the records on hand, if the inventory team will review the records, and who will be indexing (documenting) the records. A solid plan will help lead to an inventory that is solid and complete. During the planning phase, it is important to determine where and how an agency’s records are kept. Interviews with recordkeepers are one of the most efficient ways to procure this information. This may require follow-up interviews as well as providing questionnaires to be completed.

## **Where and How are your Records Kept?**

An inventory can come in a variety of shapes and sizes. It might be as detailed as the agency requires, or as simple as identifying and describing each record/record series created and/or maintained, including electronic record series. The use of inventory worksheets can help keep the direction of the inventory focused and make it easier to group related

records/record series together, as well as help to identify the “owner” of the record within the agency. The worksheets will also help weed out the Redundant, Obsolete, and Trivial (R.O.T) records. One of the biggest problems with many records management programs is the proliferation of duplicate records.

<b>RECORDS INVENTORY WORKSHEET</b>				
Department/Section	Contact	Phone No.		
Location of Records	Schedule No.	Item No.		
Record Series Title				
Record File Title				
Description (Contents, purpose, and use: Include form title and numbers, if any)				
Duplicate Copy <input type="checkbox"/>				
Type	Cut-Off Date	Arrangement	Authorization for Series	
Subject	<input type="checkbox"/> Calendar Year	<input type="checkbox"/> Alphabetic by _____	<input type="checkbox"/> a. Statute	
Business Activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Fiscal Year	<input type="checkbox"/> Alphanumeric by _____	<input type="checkbox"/> b. Regulations	
Working Papers	<input type="checkbox"/> Anniversary	<input type="checkbox"/> Numeric by _____	<input type="checkbox"/> c. Administrative	
Reference	<input type="checkbox"/> Continuous	<input type="checkbox"/> Chronological by _____	(Citation)	
Sex	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		
Media Form				
1/2" x 11" paper (letter size)	<input type="checkbox"/> 11" x 15" computer printouts	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer disks		
1/2" x 14" paper (legal size)	<input type="checkbox"/> 11" x 8-1/2" computer printouts	<input type="checkbox"/> Compact disks		
Bound books, catalogs	<input type="checkbox"/> Roll microfilm	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer tapes/cartridges		
3 x 5" Cards	<input type="checkbox"/> Microfiche	<input type="checkbox"/> Video tapes		
4 x 6" Cards	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Optical disks		
Electronic Records Filing				
What is the name of the system? _____				
Who owns the system? _____				
What operating system is needed to retrieve and view files? _____				
What application software is needed to retrieve and view files? _____				
What is the file format? (.doc, .xls, .tif, .rtf, etc.) _____				
What is current age of media on which records are stored? (1 year, 5 years, etc.) _____				
How quickly is this information usually needed? (within minutes, days, weeks, etc.) _____				
How often is this information accessed? (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.) _____				
What business activity do these records support? _____				
Are there any records related to these records? _____				
Do you need more assistance with assessing these records? _____				
Current Holdings				
Year Inclusive Dates	Paper Cubic Feet	Electronic Bytes/Item Count	Type Filing Equipment Used	Quantity



## Keys to an Inventory

Once the inventory plan has been completed and the inventory is set to begin there are important elements or keys to a good inventory. These keys include Record Series Title, Records Description, Retention, Vital Records, Custodial Office, and Disposition. A summary of each key is listed below.

**Record Series Title:** Short titles that encapsulate the form, function, and/or subject of the record/record series without using acronyms, jargon, or abbreviations.



**Description:** A brief description of the record series which identifies the purpose or function of the series within the agency.

**Retention:** A sound retention schedule classifies records/record series that an agency might hold, and it defines a minimum timeframe in which the records/records series must be retained based on legal, fiscal, administrative, and/or historical value.

**Vital Records:** A good inventory ought to indicate if a record/record series is considered a vital record to an agency. Vital records must be carefully managed as to not be lost or destroyed inadvertently.

**Custodial Office:** The party responsible for maintaining the records/records series. This will include the office, program, or position that is the custodian responsible for the record copy of the record/record series. It is important while conducting an inventory to determine

who “owns” the record/record series so that it is easily located as needed.

**Disposition:** Disposition can mean destruction, transferring of records to another agency, or archiving (storage) and is considered an important part of an effective records management program.

## **Record Series Title**

Many agencies are required to maintain a wide variety of records/record series and have a records management program in place. A record series is a convenient way of grouping file units or documents to permit their management as a group. Examples of record series are personnel, client case files, project research files, equipment maintenance and repair records, and procurement files. Each record series may contain records in a range of types and forms that collectively document certain agency programs, functions, or activities. These series must be identified in some fashion. A records manager or record creator will assign the record series a title. For example:

- “LOCAL OPTION TAX RECORDS” - not “Tax Returns”.
- “COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLANS: ADOPTED ” - not “Road Files”.
- “Correspondence and Memoranda: Administrative” - not “Tom Jones’s Files”
- “Directives/Policies/Procedures” - not “SOPs”.

When naming your record series, retention schedules can be a great resource. Listed below are some examples of record series titles pulled from the GS1-SL which is the State of Florida *General Records Schedule GS1-SL For State and Local Government Agencies*.

- Property Transfer Records
- Historical Designation Records
- Grant Files: Unfunded Applications

The retention schedule also provides a description, the retention period, and the item number for the record.

## **Description**

The description of the record series defines why the record was created and how it is used, as well as the type(s) of information or subject matter it contains. An agency’s records retention schedule should have a great naming convention built-in and include a description

of the record series. For example, In naming a records series of “Expenditure Detail Reports” based on the State of Florida *General Records Schedule GS1-SL For State and Local Government Agencies* <sup>2</sup>, the series would be named “#435 Financial Transaction Detail Records-Expenditure Reports - 5FY” or “Financial Transaction Detail Records #435-Expenditure Reports - 5FY”. Including the retention schedule, item number, and retention duration assists any successor in understanding your thought process, maintaining, and disposing of a record at the appropriate time. It is also beneficial to create an agency-wide record naming convention, which is particularly important in larger organizations.

## **Retention**

A retention schedule provides the information needed to determine the retention period of records/records series an agency creates or receives. The retention period is the amount of time that the agency must keep the record and is assigned based on fiscal, legal, historical, or administrative value. The retention schedule may list when the retention period begins (usually upon creation or receipt of the record) and will list when the retention ends. Sometimes, the retention schedule will also state the proper way of disposing of records that have met retention. The retention period applies regardless of the format of the record, which could be retained in physical format, digital format, photographic format, or audio format for example.

## **Vital Records**

Vital records are records that are essential for the continuation of operations in an agency or the protection of the agency’s or citizens’ legal rights in the event of a disaster or emergency. For example:

1. Charter
2. Emergency Management Plan
3. Resolutions
4. Employee Personnel Files
5. Asset Records

These records will help provide continuity of service in a disaster situation. These are the records that are essential for the agency to continue to function. Some other types of records that could be considered vital records are property tax records, election records, and city or county commission/council records.

## **Custodial Office**

Is the record kept in your storage facility or is it kept in the planning and zoning department? Will your local law enforcement agency hold that record? This is where the inventory worksheet comes in handy to determine where the record/record series will live and/or who has ownership of a particular record/record series. It needs to be determined if there will be a centralized location for the records/records series or if there will be a decentralized approach. In a centralized approach, all the records/record series are kept in a central location. In a decentralized approach each department, franchise, or unit keeps its own records/record series.

Either way, the chosen approach will need to be reflected in the record management program during the inventory process. Another suggestion for consideration is the utilization of a master index rather than individual indexes so that records are easily located by those within the purview of the records management program. For example, the IT department would be able to locate a record within another department should that department be unavailable to produce the record/record series.

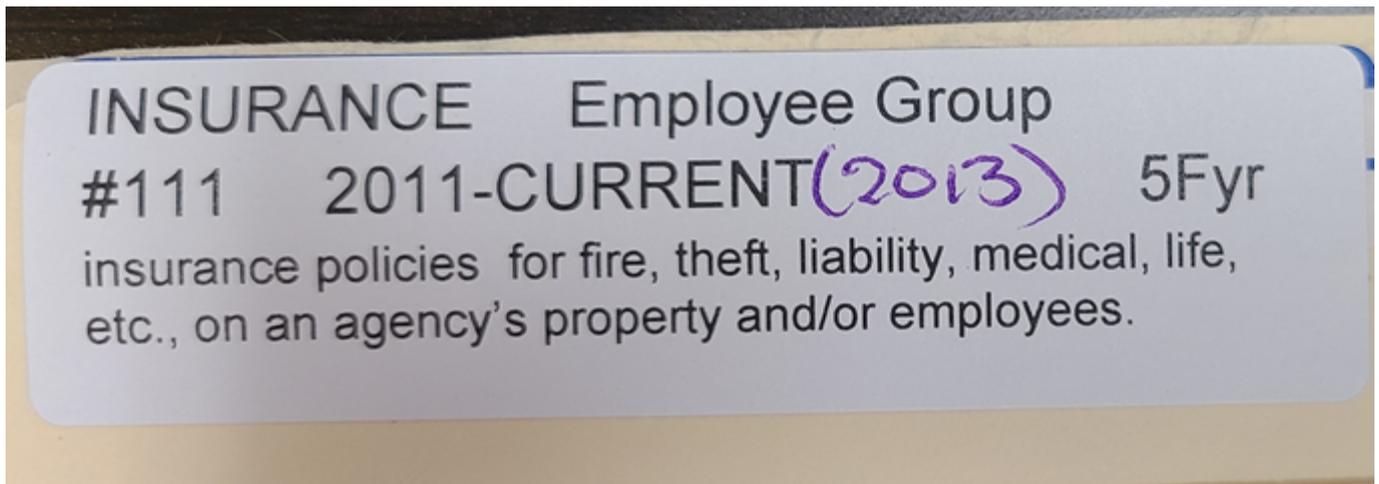
## **Disposition**

The disposal of the agency's public records must be documented as a part of the records management program. For example, *Rule 1B-24.003(9)(d)*<sup>3</sup> in the state of Florida, requires agencies to keep internal documentation of records dispositions, which states in part, "For each record series being disposed of the agencies shall identify and document the following:

1. Records retention schedule number;
2. Item number;
3. Record series title;
4. Inclusive dates of the records;
5. Volume in cubic feet for paper records; for electronic records, record the number of bytes and/or records and/or files if known, or indicate that the disposed of records were in electronic form; and
6. Disposition action (manner of disposition) and date."

Disposition may include either destruction of records or transfer of legal custodianship of the records to another agency. Determining disposition dates is an important facet of an inventory as well as an effective management program (disposition is also reflected on the inventory worksheet).

To the right is a sample of a record label that includes a title, description, and disposition information. However, it is missing the custodial office and whether or not it is a vital record. It is also missing the Date of Disposal (DOD), but there is enough information to determine the DOD.



Additionally, an agency must maintain a record of the disposition of records/record series. A sample of how one agency maintained its disposition records:

**Inclusive Dates: 10/1/1981 - 9/30/2012**

(Permanent Records)

Record Disposition Documentation	10/1/1981-9/30/06	Binder #1 (yes, 25 Years of records in one Binder).
Record Disposition Documentation	10/1/07-9/30/08	Binder #2
Record Disposition Documentation	10/1/09-9/30/10	Binder #3
Record Disposition Documentation	10/1/11- 9/30/2012	Binder #4

In this example, the records are maintained in a three-ring binder on a shelf in the storage vault, which may work well for a small agency. However, for a larger agency, this method would be impractical. Before a record is disposed of or archived, the retention date must be calculated to determine when and if the record can be disposed of, archived, or transferred to another agency.

## Calculating Eligibility Dates

If the ending date for a specific record series is 7/31/2017, when are these records eligible for disposition under different retention period types?

Retention Period:	Count starting from:	Add # of years	Retain through:
3 anniversary years	7/31/2017	+3	=7/31/2020
3 fiscal years (local govt.)	9/30/2017	+3	=9/30/2020
3 fiscal years (school district)	6/30/2018	+3	=6/30/2021
3 calendar years	12/31/2017	+3	=12/31/2020

In the example above (assuming the record series is following a local government retention period), what would the date of disposal (DOD) be? Is the DOD 9/30/2010 or 10/01/2010? 3 years after the *end* of the fiscal year, so the DOD, in this case, is 10/01/2020.

It is important to check local, county, state, and federal retention schedules for the required retention of a record. There may be requirements that apply based on the type of record. Understanding the legal requirements will help to prevent accidental dispositions.

## Creating an Agency Inventory File Plan or Road Map

Once the inventory has been completed, an agency inventory file plan or road map will need to be completed. You may know where a record is stored, but can someone else find it? Create a “road map” to your storage facility. Be cognizant of the person in the future who will be sitting in your seat. Will they be able to find a permanent record series that you inventoried? Once the basic information for each record series has been compiled, the inventory of records then can be assembled into a file plan. The file plan is an agency-wide “map” outlining an organization’s filing categories and record series, where they are located within the organization, who is responsible for managing them, and their retention requirements.

The file plan can be used to find crucial information as well as to spot redundancies and inefficiencies in a company’s filing system. The inventory and file plan should then be reviewed and updated regularly as new record series are established, existing series become obsolete, retention requirements change, offices and filing systems are rearranged, and records management responsibilities are changed.

Having a file planning system in place is crucial not only for physical documents but digital documents as well. Work with your IT department to confirm that the agency's retention policy applies to your digital data. Because the proper disposition of digital data is just as important as the proper disposition of physical documents, the file plan must include it. Just because something is digital and so takes up less physical space does not mean you should keep it "just in case"! Records management is incomplete without proper disposal of all records.

Though many of the principles discussed in this article are based on managing physical records/record series, they can be used as a basis for digital records as well. In an inventory of digital records, the inventory worksheet is used to document record series, retention periods, and disposition requirements. Individuals often have the same tendencies with digital records as they do with physical records, to keep numerous copies of the record. However, in the digital form, they are also kept in numerous formats such as PDF or Word on top of various departments maintaining their "own" copy of the records. The proliferation of digital copies is one of the biggest problems for maintaining an effective records management program.

Another consideration for managing digital records, as is the case with physical records, is establishing rules for who has access to the records, who can edit their contents, and who can determine the confidentiality of the records that may contain personal identification information like social security numbers. During an inventory, you may need to work with someone authorized to access certain restricted or confidential records/records series. For some confidential records, that person may need to complete a portion of the inventory. Most record inventories will involve many staff members and can encompass many departments if not all.

## **Conclusion**

As discussed, there are key elements that go into completing an inventory. Before beginning the inventory, it is important and necessary to understand the laws and policies that govern records management in your area (physical and function). It is also important to develop a plan to complete the inventory; know where and how records are kept, create metadata for the records, disposition, calculate retention periods, and create a road map for the future.

Understanding these key elements will help greatly while conducting an inventory and potentially relieve some of the stress associated with conducting an inventory. If done properly, it will lessen the burden on current and future recordkeepers of the agency. These

keys can unlock a great inventory process. the final key to the process is to remember that an inventory takes time and patience. It will not be completed quickly even if an outside vendor is brought in to complete it. Take it one step at a time and it will all come together.

## Author

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### About the Author

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#### Lisa Morris

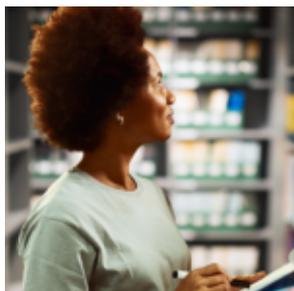
Lisa Morris, B.A., MMC, has worked in local government as a Deputy City Clerk since December 2014. She currently works for the City of Brooksville, Florida. She has earned her bachelor's degree in public administration and is a Municipal Master Clerk.

She serves on the Florida Association of City Clerk's (FACC) Professional Education Committee, FACC Scholarships Committee, and has served on the FACC Bylaws and Manual Review Committee. Lisa has been on a panel in which she presented information on records inventories at the FACC Fall Academy.

Records Management is an area of interest because of the historical aspects and preserving history for the future generations. She is currently studying for the CRM and expects to complete the testing by mid-2024. Before government service work Lisa worked in the legal field, automotive field, and in the human services field. She also has an associate degree in Paralegal Studies and an associate degree in Marketing-Management. She is the mother of eight children between the ages of 34 and 4, and

Mimi (grandmother) of two children. She resides in Crystal River, Florida with her husband, three of her children, and four fur babies (two dogs and two cats). She enjoys continuing education, reading and true crime TV shows.

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Disposition 2022.04.11 Records Inventory 101: