Records Inventory Guide

How to Conduct a Records Inventory

1. Define the inventory's goals
2. Define the scope of the inventory
3. Obtain top management's support
4. Decide on the information to be collected (the elements of the inventory)
5. Prepare an inventory form or use an existing one
6. Decide who will conduct the inventory, and train them properly
7. Learn where the agency's files are located, both physically and organizationally
8. Conduct the inventory
9. Verify and analyze the results

What is a Records Inventory?

A records inventory is a descriptive list of each record series or system, including the location of the records and any other pertinent data. When you conduct an inventory you will locate, identify, describe, count, and measure all records in your office and storage areas – in all media formats (this includes digital records). The information you gather will allow you to manage and dispose of your records systematically and can help you decide which records to reformat (such as digitizing paper records). The inventory will constitute the foundation of your entire records management program. Once you have obtained an accurate inventory, records retention schedules can be updated and created as needed, also giving you the necessary information for which records to destroy, which to store temporarily, or which records are meant for archival/permanent storage.

Plan the Inventory

The head of each state agency is required to appoint a Records Officer (ORS 192.105(2)(a)) who has a thorough knowledge of their specific agency, its records, and functions, and is responsible for the efficient management of the agency's records. That Records Officer should supervise the inventory. In addition, staff should be appointed by either the Records Officer or agency director to help with or conduct the inventory. Ideally, the individuals who conduct the inventory will have experience with the records, filing systems, and operations of the agency.

Training

Your inventory staff should attend a training session conducted by your Records Officer or the Oregon State Archives, Records Management Unit so trainees have proper knowledge to work with the records to be inventoried.

Notify Staff

Since the success of an inventory project depends on the cooperation of the people involved with the records, your director should be involved. Inform staff of the upcoming inventory and invite them to a meeting where the Records Officer explains the process. Before the work begins, the Records Officer or a designee should visit office supervisors to discuss the project, enlist their cooperation, and make it clear that staff will be conducting a records inventory and will need access to records and/or people to conduct records interviews.

Conduct a preliminary survey of all office and storage areas before you begin the inventory to:
• identify the location of records
• estimate the total volume
• flag any hazards
• note any problems with space and storage

Conduct the Inventory
The Records Officer should work with the department heads to set up a schedule for inventorying each office and storage area. Make sure the schedule is flexible to accommodate office needs/priorities. The inventory should include all your records. Non-records (or non-retention material) is included only as needed for staff informational purposes (such as common reference materials) or for initial inventories to locate and remove unnecessary materials.
Record means all documentary material (books, papers, photographs, maps, or other documentation, including digital records such as email messages and attachments), made or received and maintained by an agency in accordance with law or rule or in the transaction of its official business; because they serve as evidence of the agency's functions, policies, decision, procedures, operations, and other activities; or because of their informational value.

Non-records (non-retention material)
• Reference materials - magazines, catalogues, trade journals, books, pamphlets
• Blank forms
• Personal Communications
• Employee non-work activities
• Convenience copies retained elsewhere

Inventory Forms
You will inventory your records as ***series***, or a group of identical or related records (a group of records created by the same business process that document the same type of transaction). Series are kept together because they relate to the same topic, document the same type of transaction, or are created by the same business process. It includes all formats – paper, electronic, etc. These groups of identical or related records are evaluated as a unit because they are normally filed, used, and disposed of together. Record the information you gather on an inventory form. To help locate specific records in a series later, you may find it helpful to fill out a separate form — omitting recurring data about the series — for each of the locations where records in a series are filed or stored and to consolidate the information from these forms onto a "master" inventory afterwards.

Where to Begin
Start by interviewing staff to identify the records series created and maintained by each office or begin with offices where records are easily accessible and well organized. Estimate the value of the records to be inventoried: administrative, legal, and fiscal value to agency;

historical value to future researchers; temporary and permanent status. Inspect all files and record all information by series. Include records in all media. Complete the inventory form.

Establish a System

No matter where you inventory, you should be systematic. Begin at a specific location in a room, proceed logically, tag or label each file drawer as it is inventoried, and flag those records that are vital or permanent. These precautions will spotlight valuable records and decrease the chance of overlooking or duplicating information, especially if you frequently stop and restart – a situation that often arises when staff who are taking the inventory are conducting regular office duties as well. Look at every record. Open each file drawer, each box, etc., and check the accuracy of each label – often old labels are not removed when the contents of files are changed.

Verify and Analyze the Results

Once you've completed the inventory, you will be faced with a pile of forms organized by the locations and custodians of the files. Match the records series inventoried with the records schedules. If a series of records cannot be "matched" with an existing schedule, it may need to be added to your special retention schedule. Have your records officer contact the Oregon State Archives, Records Management Unit to update your special retention schedule.

Identify non-record material and destroy as necessary with no additional documentation.

- Determine whether the records you have are the ones you need. Compare the records you have identified to your documentation strategy.
- Do you keep records/files you don't need?
- Are you missing any you do need?
- Does the current organization and retention meet your current needs?
- If not, what should be changed so your needs are met?

Your records inventory will enable you to evaluate the content and function of your records and will give you data that will be crucial to your ability to make valid, justifiable decisions on the ultimate retention or destruction of those records. Conduct your inventory well, and you will build a solid foundation for a good records management program.