



Reasons for Records Management

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Proper records management not only conveys organizational and management benefits to an office, but also, for local government offices, it is a vital task, necessary for fulfilling important legal requirements and duties.

Space

In many cities, finding sufficient space for records is a real problem. It is rare for a city department to have all the space it needs. Most local officials would complain that the necessary records of the office are rapidly filling up all available space. City halls are overfilled with old and archived records, often found stuffed into basements, storage closets and attics. For this reason alone, it is important and cost effective for a city to implement a records management program.

Records Serve as a Legal Foundation

In a society of laws, both local governments and the citizens they serve are dependent upon good documentation to define their legal status. Court orders, tax records, and minutes of city council meetings are just a few examples of important documents that create relationships, establish rights and liabilities, and authorize certain actions. When disputes arise over legal issues, it is important to have good documentation on which to rely. Local governments have an important responsibility to preserve these records. Proper records management will ensure that these records are preserved and can be found when needed.

Open Records Requirements

Since government records generally are open to public inspection, the task of managing records becomes even more important and more complicated. The principle of allowing public access to government records, combined with the so-called Sunshine Law, which requires open meetings, is considered an important check on government and an important defense against corruption in public office and mismanagement of public resources. Unless there is a specific statutory exemption that makes a record confidential, the public has the right to inspect and copy the records of government agencies. Not only must you, as a municipal official, preserve and keep records, you must allow public access to these records for inspection. Unless your records are well organized and well protected, you may not be able to comply with public requests for information. This can undermine public confidence in government and hinder your city's relationship with the citizens it serves.

Historical Preservation of Documents

Cities play a vital role in preserving our nation's history. The documents and records of local governments give us insights into the lives of our ancestors and the circumstances of their times. Cities with too many records and too little space for them routinely end up placing them wherever they can. In many cases, these storage areas don't adequately protect records from the elements. Heat, moisture, mildew, insects and vermin can quickly render records useless. Your municipality and its citizens may be losing important information as well as a part of the community's heritage. With proper records management, the important records are preserved; the less essential records are destroyed when no longer useful so they do not take up valuable space; the records are cataloged and organized so that officials and the public can access them; and records are stored under proper conditions to enable long-term preservation.

DISCLAIMER: The letters and publications written by the MTAS consultants were written based upon the law at the time and/or a specific sets of facts. The laws referenced in the letters and publications may have changed and/or the technical advice provided may not be applicable to your city or circumstances. Always consult with your city attorney or an MTAS consultant before taking any action based on information contained in this website.

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