



Municipal Technical Advisory Service
INSTITUTE *for* PUBLIC SERVICE

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Develop RDAs

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,

The University of Tennessee
Municipal Technical Advisory Service
1610 University Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37921-6741
865-974-0411 phone
865-974-0423 fax
www.mtas.tennessee.edu

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Develop RDAs

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Step Two: Develop RDAs

Your first question is probably “what is an RDA?” The acronym RDA stands for records disposition authorization. At a minimum level, an RDA provides a formal statement of when a record can be destroyed and what authority serves as the basis for its destruction. But these documents can be much more. A comprehensive RDA becomes a plan for the entire life of a record series from creation to final disposition.

Among other things, a comprehensive RDA should include:

- a basic description of a record series;
- how the record is created, how it is used,
- where it should be stored,
- in what format it should be kept,
- who should have access to it,
- how long it is in active use by an office,
- when to move it into inactive storage,
- whether it is vital or confidential,
- and whether or not it can be destroyed.

Fully developed RDAs differ from records retention schedules in a number of ways. Retention schedules uniformly describe the various records of an office, state whether a record is permanent, identify the minimum amount of time a temporary record must be kept, and state a legal authority or rationale for that retention period. They generally do not tell you where to keep a record, how long the record may be in active use, and when a record can be moved to inactive storage or an archive. Those determinations are office specific based on the resources available to you and the operating procedures of your office.

The retention schedules give you the foundation for writing your RDAs, but you are encouraged to consider them only a starting point. If your office handles a large number of records and a lot of people deal with them, consider putting more than the minimum into your RDAs. While they take a significant amount of work to develop, RDAs are fundamental to an efficiently operating records management program in any office with a large volume of records. Once created, they will need only periodic review to ensure that the plan you laid out for a group of records still makes sense and complies with your needs and any applicable legal requirements.

The following general principles and considerations may be helpful in making decisions about how to manage your records. They are quoted verbatim from the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Tennessee Archives Management Advisory (TAMA) 99-08 entitled “Appraisal and Disposition of Records.”

If a legislative mandate requires permanent or temporary retention of any record, set of records, or class of records, then the record(s) specified in the mandate must be kept at public expense for at least as long as the mandate requires.

- A record or set of records should be retained by an agency as long as it is useful to performance of its routine functions.
- A decision to retain records beyond their active usefulness or legislative mandate is a decision to maintain them so they can be examined readily by the public. Such a decision requires a commensurate commitment of resources to continuous care and custody for the entire term of retention.
- A decision for permanent retention is a decision for perpetual care.
- Records should not be kept beyond their useful life in the public interest.
- No record that is necessary to the public interest should be destroyed.

- Records that are retained beyond their active usefulness to the routine functions of an agency must be of sufficient public interest to justify the expense of keeping and administering them, and the justification should be clearly stated, understood, and agreed to before accepting responsibility for and paying the cost to retain the record(s).
 - The following kinds of records may all be appraised as having archival value for permanent retention:
 - Essential records that are needed to resume or continue operations or to re-create legal and financial status after a disaster, or that are needed to protect or fulfill obligations;
 - Records that have lasting value as legal and fiscal evidence to account for responsible government;
 - Records that are of such high evidential and historical value that they should be retained at public expense for the sake of a sound, reliable, and comprehensive understanding of the political, social, economic and historical context of government and culture.
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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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