



## Records Centers

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Dear Reader:

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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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A records center is essentially a central area for storing records. It is a place where all city officials can send their inactive records as an alternative to keeping them in their own offices where they take up valuable space and interfere with operations. By default, the basement or bell tower of the city hall may have become an ersatz records center, but the city should consider investing in a true record center. A well-run records center can result in significant savings of both time and money while it protects and preserves records. "The effectiveness of a records center is based upon (a) its use of low- cost equipment which makes maximum use of space, (b) its ability to provide an orderly arrangement and control of records, and (c) its ability to employ procedures which assure prompt and efficient handling of records." [1]

Setting up a records center may sound like a project that only large cities might try to tackle. But small- and medium-sized governments also can benefit from saving money. One federal government study on cost avoidance estimated that "... for every cubic foot of records stored in a records center there is a savings of \$16.08." [2] When you consider the reams and reams of records in local government offices, including the school system and the court system, the savings can add up quickly.

A records center does not have to be a separate building. "A small government can usually convert an existing room quite easily since less space is required. There are many cities, towns, or counties that need no more than 1,000 cubic feet of records storage space. A records center of that capacity can be placed in a room about the size of a two- car garage." [3] If your city likes the idea but still thinks it doesn't have a great enough need to justify the expense of a records center, consider doing something radical: cooperate with other local governments. If the county, the school system, and all the municipalities within a county worked together through an interlocal agreement to establish a records center, costs would be spread among them, and enough inactive records should be found to justify establishing the center.

The Rome/Floyd County Records Program is an excellent example of a cooperative venture supported by four Georgia local governments (population 81,250). This innovative records management program serves Floyd County, the city of Rome and two school districts (Rome City Schools and Floyd County Schools). Each government partially funds the program. Service features included a records center with a capacity for 18,000 cubic feet (providing for records transfer, reference, selected microfilming and records disposal) and technical assistance (a records management officer) on the proper management of records. These four local governments, by combining resources to create a professional program which none could individually afford, achieve most of their essential records management goals. All records placed in the records center still remain the property of the respective originating governments, however. The program has received the National Association of Counties achievement award, and it saved over \$68,000 for the four local governments in 1990. [4]

[1] See *A Guide for the Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities*, p. 2

[2] *Ibid*, 4.

[3] *Ibid*, 11.

[4] *Managing Records on Limited Resources*, Stephen E. Haller, CRM, issued by *The National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators* (November 1991), p.10.

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