

INTRODUCTION

Managing and preserving government records are important and essential work. Not only are such records used for conducting the important business of government, but they also provide invaluable witness to our rich heritage. These guidelines are provided by the Minnesota State Archives as a trusted resource that can assist you in your archives-related work.

Who can benefit from these guidelines and why?

If you are a state or local government official or entity, or a county or local historical society, you will find these guidelines very useful for they contain a wealth of information on a variety of topics related to the management of government records. They present many essential concepts and practices used every day in the management of archives, and contain information on the current legislation that affects your archives and your archives-related services. And because they serve as a practical, easy-to-read introduction to the subject of government records, these guidelines can easily be used as an integral part of your training program for new staff members.

Members of the general public will find these guidelines informative about the management of government records. These guidelines also help citizens of the state of Minnesota understand their rights to access government records, and give them the opportunity to become aware of the activities that state and local governments and historical societies undertake to preserve our heritage.

These guidelines have been written specifically for Minnesota agencies but the concepts addressed apply to similar organizations nationwide.

What is in the guidelines?

These guidelines serve as an introduction to the most important topics related to government records, and provide you with the basic tools and knowledge that are required to manage and preserve your collections.

- Chapter one focuses on the definition of government records and the laws that govern them.
- Chapter two discusses the many values a government record can have, and helps you get started appraising your own records.
- Chapter three discusses the practices of good documentation and record description and shows how these practices can help you manage your archives more effectively.
- Chapter four presents a discussion on information technology and electronic records, and discusses how changes in technology affect your work managing archives.
- Chapter five gives you preservation and storage tips that you can use to improve the preservation of your paper and non-paper records.
- Chapter six discusses the importance of providing access to your records, as well as your responsibilities to comply with the statutes that govern record access.

- At the end of these guidelines are two appendices with information to review when considering the transfer of local government records to another repository. The third appendix is a list with information about access rights to common local government records. The fourth is the revision history for the guidelines.

At the end of each chapter, you will find a “*Where can you get more information on...*” section that provides additional recommended print and online resources. The glossary at the end of these guidelines can be used to clarify many of the records management and technical terms used in these guidelines.

How can you use the guidelines?

Although these guidelines are a complete introduction to the subject of government records, there is a multitude of detailed information available on managing archives from many resources all around the United States. These guidelines are an excellent “jumping-off” point into the subject of government records preservation. You might want to bookmark this site for ready access to these guidelines and the numerous links to other helpful resources.

You can read these guidelines as an HTML-formatted document on this web site, or, you can easily download them, chapter by chapter, or in their entirety, in PDF format. Each chapter is self-contained; to understand the material presented in any chapter, you do not need to read all previous chapters (although reading these guidelines in their entirety would be most beneficial). Also in each chapter are occasional references to other chapters where you can find more detailed information on a related topic. If you are a manager, you might find it worthwhile to distribute this resource to your staff and volunteer members, or at least make it available to them in some way.

Unfortunately, Web page addresses do change and we therefore endeavor to periodically confirm all hyperlinks contained in the guidelines. If you find broken links or errors of any kind, please contact Shawn Rounds at the State Archives.¹ If you wish to comment on the guidelines, please contact Charles Rodgers at the State Archives.²

Regardless of your level of expertise in managing and preserving government records, you will find the information in these guidelines informative and useful, and you will be able to put it to work in your archives immediately, leading to archives that are of greater use and value.

¹ Shawn Rounds: Telephone: 651-259-3265; E-mail: shawn.rounds@mnhs.org (9/2009)

² Charles Rodgers: Telephone: 651-259-3266; E-mail: charles.rodgers@mnhs.org (9/2009)