

INTRODUCTION

Managing and preserving government records is 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 State Archives Department as a trusted resource that can assist you in your archives-related work.

Who can benefit from the guidelines and why?

If you are a state or local government official or entity, or a county or local historical society, you will find the 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 up-to-date 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, the guidelines can easily be used as an integral part of your training program for new staff members.

Members of the general public will find the guidelines informative for their insight on how government manages the multitude of records held in government archives. The guidelines also help citizens understand their rights as a citizen of the state of Minnesota to access government records, and gives them the opportunity to become aware of the activities that state and local governments, and historical societies undertake to preserve our heritage.

What is in the guidelines?

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

- Chapter one begins by focusing 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 advancing technology affects your work managing archives.
- Chapter five gives you preservation and storage tips that you can use to improve the preservation of your paper and nonpaper records.
- Chapter six discusses the importance of providing reference service to your records, as well as your responsibilities when complying with the statutes that govern record access.
- At the end of the guidelines are two appendices with information to review when considering the transfer of local government records to another repository. Another appendix is a list with information about access to certain local government records.

If you wish to learn more about the topics presented in each chapter, turn to the “*Where can you get more information on...*” section at the end of the chapter where you will find recommended print and online resources. We have also conveniently provided a complete glossary at the end of the guidelines to help you understand many of the technical terms used in the guidelines and managing records in general.

How can you use the guidelines?

Although the 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. The guidelines are an excellent “jumping-off” point from where you can plunge further into the fascinating and extensive subject of government records preservation. You might want to bookmark this site for ready access to the guidelines and the numerous links to other helpful resources.

You can read the 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 the 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 Beth Lighthipe at the State Archives (telephone: 651-259-3261; email: beth.lighthipe@mnhs.org). If you wish to comment on the guidelines, please contact Charles Rodgers at the State Archives (telephone: 651-259-3266; e-mail: charles.rodgers@mnhs.org).

Regardless of your level of expertise in managing and preserving government records, you will find the information in the 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.