

FIRE DISTRICTS, RECORDS MANAGEMENT, AND THE NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

Fire Districts

- Local governments, most operating with little or no paid staff, relying on volunteers, trying to address their enormous responsibility without increasing local taxes.
- The essential mission of a fire district is to save lives and property from destruction by fire.
- Records of a fire district are key to a district's operations and obligations – governing board minutes, incident reports, vehicle logs, documentation of firefighters' service, and many other types of records.

Records Management

- A legal requirement for all local governments including the fire districts.
- Aids the mission of fire districts by ensuring needed records are identified, organized, accessible, and retention requirements met.

ARTS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS LAW

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS LAW (ARTICLE 57-A)

- The most important law dealing with local government records.
- Key sections 57.19 and 57.25.

The law requires:

- Governing body and the chief executive officer promote and support a records management program.
- A Records Management Officer (RMO). The district secretary is the records management officer under this law.
- Legal adoption and use of a State Archives retention and disposition schedule, currently ***Retention and Disposition Schedule for New York Local Government Records (LGS-1)***.

The law requires every local officer:

- Maintain the records of their office to document the transaction of public business.
- Keep those records for their legal retention period.
- Protect the records of their office.
- Work with the RMO to identify records of their office (in any format), particularly permanent records, and their retention requirements, and participate in organized and efficient management of those records.
- Dispose of records in accordance with legal requirements.
- Pass records of their office on to successors records to maintain office operations.

THE REGULATIONS OF THE COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, Part 185, 8NYCRR

- Provides details to meet requirements of the Local Government Records Law, including:
 - 185.2 Responsibilities of records management officers (RMOs),
 - 185.5 Issuance of the most current records retention and disposition schedule,
 - 185.6 Special approvals for disposal of certain records:
 - not listed on schedules,

- rendered unusable by disasters,
- predating 1910,
- employee disciplinary, investigative and performance evaluation records,
- 185.7 Standards for creating and maintaining micrographic and electronic records, and
- 185.8 Retention and preservation of electronic records.

THE STATE ARCHIVES

A division of the State Education Department that provides free services to assist fire districts with records management including:

- A Records Advisory Officer (RAO) for free training and assistance.
- Creation of and assistance with the ***Retention and Disposition Schedule for New York Local Government Records (LGS-1)***, which lists the types (or "series") of records kept by local governments and the minimum period records must be kept.
- An abridged version of the official ***LGS-1*** listing records common in fire districts.
- The complete ***LGS-1*** and abridged version are on the State Archives website www.archives.nysed.gov
- Grants for records.
 - Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF) grants available to assist fire districts with records management needs including:
 - inventory and program implementation,
 - records equipment and storage needs,
 - document scanning,
 - digital storage and management software,
 - historical records identification and care,
 - records disaster plan development, and
 - filing systems implementation for records in any format.
- Volunteer fire companies and voluntary ambulance services are eligible to apply for LGRMIF grants, pursuant to Chapter 508 of the Laws of 2014.

REASONS TO MANAGE YOUR RECORDS

- **Preservation of Permanent and other Important Records that are:**
 - identified as permanent in the LGS-1,
 - vital to the functioning of fire districts, or
 - are historically significant.
 - These records (in any format) require extra care to ensure permanency.
- **Cost Efficiency:**
 - Managed records ensure quick access to records needed for business, public requests, audit, or other legal need.
 - Routine records disposal saves office space and reduces the need to purchase additional filing equipment or server space.
 - Having records needed to protect staff, serve the public, and prove good business practices can prevent costs associated with litigation.
- **Planning:**
 - District planning, from vehicle and building maintenance to the purchase of new equipment, is more effective if records are available to support these efforts.

- Management of records helps to plan for future records (and software systems).
- Inventory data can provide information to project annual accumulation of records, growth in records production and use, and storage needs.
- Records retention and disposition needs can be used to plan specifications for new software systems creating records.
- **Staff Efficiency:**
 - Incorporating records management into regular business through regular transfer of inactive records from offices (or software) to separate storage areas, destruction of obsolete records, filing systems that incorporate retention and disposition, and the maintenance of an inventory with records locations will ensure records are found quickly to support business and other needs.
- **Improved Service to the Public:**
 - For general information or Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests providing records quickly fulfills legal obligations and reinforces public confidence in a district's ability to serve the community.

IMPLEMENTING A RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

- **Inventory**
 - The first step in any records management program is to inventory all records, in all formats.
 - Identify what records exist, where they are, and how long they must be kept, their dates, quantities, and formats.
 - The State Archives has inventory forms with instructions available on their website.
 - Use inventory data to identify records needs, such as the need to:
 - reformat paper to electronic images to improve access to the records,
 - develop a records management plan to address any needs identified, or
 - policies and procedures to support a records management program.
- **Dispose obsolete records**
 - Destroy records that have met their retention requirements.
 - Confidential records should be destroyed completely by shredding, burning, or other means.
 - Electronic records disposal may require coordination with IT staff or contracted IT vendor.
 - It is as important to destroy obsolete records as it is to preserve permanent ones. This is part of records management that should be part of regular business.
- **Divide Active and Inactive records**
 - **Active records** are those currently in use by the fire district stored nearby in office filing cabinets or on computers.
 - **Inactive records** are not used frequently but must be kept to meet retention requirements, legal or other needs, or are permanent and must be kept forever.
 - Move these out of offices and store in a secure central storage location set up with a box filing system. Use 18-gauge metal shelving units, one cubic foot boxes, and consistent labels. The room should have fire protection and a controlled environment.
- **Inactive electronic records**

- Manage in a secure, central storage location on a secure network or in software using non-proprietary formats, especially if the records are permanent.
- Permanent electronic records must follow the storage criteria in the **Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, section 185.8 Retention and Preservation of Electronic Records**.

STATE ARCHIVES ONLINE PUBLICATIONS, TRAINING, GRANTS, AND OTHER RESOURCES:

Publications: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/publications/records-management>

- ***Inventory and Planning*** – why and how to inventory, template and instructions.
- ***Guidelines for Storage of Inactive Government Records*** – standards for storage: shelving, boxes, security, access, environment, fire protection and other standards.
- ***Retention and Disposition of Records: How Long to Keep Records and How to Destroy Them*** - how to use State Archives retention schedules and destroy obsolete records.
- ***Administration of Inactive Records Storage*** – how to label, organize, locate, and use records in storage.
- ***Using a Data Storage Vendor*** – how to prepare a strong contract when storing records in an electronic system supported by a vendor.
- ***Digital Imaging Guidelines*** – required standards for producing and inspecting digital images of records, and electronic records storage.

Workshops: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/workshops/workshops-overview>

Live and recorded webinars on dozens of records management topics.

Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF) grants:

<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/grants/lgrmif-grants> Annual grant program information.

OTHER STATE ARCHIVES RESOURCES:

Local Government Records Management Newsletter: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/about/about-newsletters> Monthly training, grants, legislation, and records news.

Retention and Disposition Schedule for New York Local Government Records (LGS-1):

<http://www.archives.nysed.gov/records/local-government-record-schedule/lgs-1-title-page>

Web resource and PDF versions of the schedule

Forms and Tools: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/records/records-management-forms-and-tools> Forms and tools to help manage records.

Introduction for Records Management Officers: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/records/introduction-for-records-managers> Explains the role and responsibilities of the RMO and how to start a records program.

Disaster Recovery Grants: http://www.archives.nysed.gov/grants/lgrmif_disasterguide

Funds available to recover records in any format affected by disasters. Contact the State Archives immediately if records are affected by a disaster so we can assist you with your recovery efforts.

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