Introduction to Records Management at UW-Madison

Archives & Records Management
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Introduction – Public Records and Records Management

The Wisconsin Public Records Law is intended to ensure that state agencies and institutions, including the Universities of Wisconsin, are transparent to the public and help to ensure accountability regarding the affairs of the government and the official acts of its officers and employees. It is this law that allows people to submit public records requests to the University.

To fulfill our public records responsibilities to the public, we must effectively manage the records we create and receive at the University throughout their lifecycle.

This introduction to records management at UW-Madison will provide you with the core knowledge you need to understand basic records management concepts, how it applies to the work you do at the university, and where to go for help.

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Learning Objectives

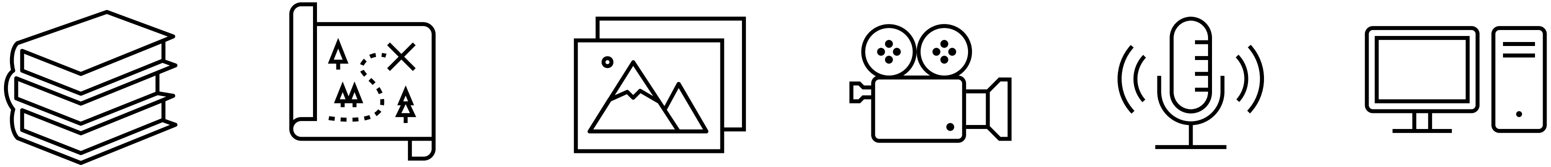
By completing this course, you will be able to:

- Understand what public records management is
- Understand what is a public record
- Understand the importance of public records management
- Understand your responsibilities for public records management
- Understand how to manage public records through proper maintenance and disposition of records
- Understand how Records Officers can help

What are Public Records?

Wis. Stat. § 16.61(2)(b) defines a record as:

All books, papers, maps, photographs, films, recordings, optical discs, electronically formatted documents, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by any state agency or its officers or employees in connection with the transaction of public business.



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What are Non-Records?

- Reference materials (e.g., books, printed articles, catalogs, etc.
- Copies/Duplicates of records
- Drafts or working papers without substantive comments
- Notices or invitations that were not solicited (e.g., listservs)
- Personal notes not shared with others
- Personal property

Non-records do not follow records retention schedules and should be disposed of when no longer needed.

Importance of Public Records Management

- Complying with legal requirements
- Mitigating information security and litigation risks
- Reducing operating costs
- Preserving the University’s reputation
- Maximizing efficiency
- Preserving historical records

What is Public Records Management

Records management is the practice of maintaining records throughout their life cycle.

Creation → Use → Retention → Disposition

What is Public Records Management

- **Creation:** The record life cycle begins with creation. You create records as part of your work for the University. Creation also includes any records received by you as part of your job from an internal or external source, such as receiving a request via email.

- **Use:** After records are created, they are used for specific purposes and actions. For example, you may use a record to make decisions, serve as evidence, share information with colleagues or the public, or complete other types of university business.

- **Retention:** In the retention stage, a record may not be used as frequently, but it must still be retained for a specified period to support ongoing business processes or meet specific legal requirements. The length of time you need to retain a record and what you do with it afterwards is determined by a records retention schedule.

- **Disposition:** Once records have been retained for a specified period and are not part of an active public records request, audit, or litigation, they can be destroyed, deleted, or, in some cases, transferred to the University Archives. This process is known as disposition.

Your Responsibilities for Public Records Management

- Identifying records
- Filing and organizing records
- Securing confidential and sensitive information
- Retaining records for the required length of time
- Properly disposing of records and non-records
- Asking for help with records management

What are Records Retention Schedules?

Records retention schedules (sometimes referred to as Records Disposition Authorizations or RDAs) describe types of public records, mandate how long they must be retained, and describe how they are to be disposed of at the end of the retention period.

Records retention schedules are written by the University Records Officer and approved by the State Public Records Board. All records retention schedules must be resubmitted for approval every 10 years.

Records Retention Schedules

- **Schedule Number:** Each records retention schedule has a unique identifier, which is generally used for reference.

- **Schedule Title:** The title describes the record or group of records. Titles may be very specific or very broad, encompassing a wide range of related records. Titles may not reflect exactly how you or your unit refers to the records.

- **Description:** The description details the types of records to which the records retention schedule applies. Similar to the title, the descriptions may vary from being very specific to a certain type of record to being very broad, and include many related records. They often include language, such as "may include but not limited to," to allow for variations in the types of records that may be created in a given area. Descriptions may outline the purpose for which the records are used and include legal citations that indicate any restrictions or confidentiality associated with the records.

  It is important to read the description carefully to determine whether it is the correct records retention schedule to use.

Records Retention Schedules – Exceptions to Disposition

It is also important to note exceptions to the disposition of records.

- Employees cannot legally dispose of records if an approved records retention schedule does not cover those records. Your Records Officer can help identify or write record schedules.

- Records at the end of their retention period cannot be disposed of if they are part of an active public records request, litigation, or audit. Those records must be retained until those activities have ended.

Records Retention Schedules – Information Not Included

Records retention schedules will not include information specific to your unit, such as the location and format of the records, the unit's processes, and how responsibilities for managing records are shared among staff. These are often determined by policy and business processes for a unit and should be internally documented as part of a Records Management Plan.

Managing Public Records with Records Management Plans

A Records Management Plan (RMP) is a tool used to help manage records. It is a simple document created by your department that summarizes how records will be managed, stored, and disposed of.

An RMP should only list the records your department manages and document the records retention schedules that apply to your department's records.

RMPs can also include local information not included in the schedule, such as record format, record location, and the local name assigned to each type of record.

RMPs should be reviewed annually to ensure schedules haven't changed.

Contact your Records Officer for additional guidance on creating a records management plan.

How Can Records Officers Help?

Records Officers write and manage the records retention schedules used at the university. They also provide training and guidance, develop policies, and consult with individuals and campus units on records management issues.

At UW-Madison, you can contact the Records Management Program for help. For other UW campuses, contact information for your Records Officers can be found on the Universities of Wisconsin Compliance and Integrity website.