

Inventory: An Overview

Before you can develop a good records management program, you need to know what records you have and how they are useful for business or historical purposes. To understand your records, conduct an inventory (or survey) within your organization to identify varieties, quantities, and locations of materials.

The inventory is the first step in determining series, appraising records and developing a retention schedule. It confers the added benefit of providing intellectual control over your holdings and getting you in touch with the people who create and use records.

For further information on Records and Information Management (RIM), visit the ARMA International website: www.arma.org.

**Society of
Rocky Mountain Archivists**

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Inventorying Records



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Records Management Basics Series

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Inventory Defined

Inventory: n. ~ 1. A list of things. – 2. DESCRIPTION · A finding aid that includes, at a minimum, a list of the series in a collection. – 3. RECORDS MANAGEMENT · The process of surveying the records in an office, typically at the series level.

Records Survey: n. ~ The process of gathering basic information about an organization's records, including their quantity, form, location, physical condition, storage facilities, rate of accumulation, and associated business processes.

Vital Records: n. ~ 1. Records that document significant life events, including births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and public health matters; vital statistics. – 2. Emergency operation records immediately necessary to begin recovery of business after a disaster, as well as rights-and-interests records necessary to protect the assets, obligations, and resources of the organization, as well as its employees and customers or citizens; essential records.

Retention Schedule: (also disposal schedule, records schedule, records retention schedule, transfer schedule), n. ~ A document that identifies and describes an organization's records, usually at the series level, provides instructions for the disposition of records throughout their life cycle.

<http://www.archivists.org/glossary/index.asp>

“A records appraisal is an examination of the data gathered through the records inventory to determine the value of each record series to the organization.”

- Information and Image Management, 3rd Edition
Ricks, Swafford & Gow

Identification of Your Records

The records inventory, sometimes also called a survey, provides the groundwork for developing a records retention program. You can't safeguard your vital records, properly recover records after a disaster, or create a comprehensive retention schedule without knowing what records exist in your organization.

INVENTORY

An inventory should assist you in identifying important information about your records.

- Type/kind
- Location
- Quantity/number
- Status—active, inactive, or nonrecord
- Vital records
- Official versions (as opposed to duplicates or drafts)

General Considerations

- Obtain leadership/management support for your inventory. Also remember that nobody is excused from the inventory process, including the highest ranking people in your organization.
- Make sure to carefully plan the process before undertaking the inventory. Should you survey in person (physical survey), require people submit a self-survey (questionnaire) of their records, or some combination of the two? Who will help you conduct the inventory? Who or what offices will you survey first? A standardized and thoughtful approach will provide the best information.
- Records come in many forms, so make sure you don't just do an inventory of paper. Electronic information, objects, or artwork can all be records of your organization.
- Records may not exist only at your administrative offices or in employees' offices. Flash drives, off-site storage, and home offices (or attics and garages) are all examples of places to look for records.

APPRAISAL

After conducting an inventory, you can use that information to determine the value of records series.

Appraisal: “The process of determining the length of time records should be retained, based on legal requirements and on their current and potential usefulness.”

Administrative Value - Records providing information on operating or business procedures.

Fiscal Value - Records detailing use of funds.

Historical Value - Records offering evidence of an organization's duties, accomplishments, or activities.

Legal Value - Records documenting business transactions.

Operational Value - Records showing actions to accomplish the organization's mission or mandate.