

Records Appraisal: An Overview

Appraisal is the process of evaluating how a record is—or is not—important to your organization. As archivists know, sometimes records also have an unintended value, usually as a historical record useful beyond just your organization.

To develop a records retention schedule, you need to inventory and appraise your records. The appraisal process, in records management terms, is a means of determining the value of all materials to an organization.

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

**Society of
Rocky Mountain Archivists**
www.srmarchivists.org

Records Appraisal



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Records Management Basics Series

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Appraisal Defined

Appraisal: n. ~ 1. The process of identifying materials offered to an archives that have sufficient value to be accessioned. 2. The process of determining the length of time records should be retained, based on legal requirements and on their current and potential usefulness. 3.

The process of determining the market value of an item; monetary appraisal.

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

Differences in Appraisal

Archivists already understand archival appraisal (the first definition above). To perform records management appraisal (the second definition above), following the completion of an inventory you decide not only the inherent worth but how that relates to the proper retention time for a record.

Appraising All Your Records

Once your organization establishes what records series exist through an inventory process, the next step is to perform records appraisal. This appraisal of record value will help you identify which records to retain and for how long, thus creating a basis for a retention schedule.

Determine Series Value

Using similar criteria to appraise records for archival value, you should evaluate records for immediate destruction or short-term, long-term or permanent retention.

- ***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.

Determine Retention Periods

After using the aforementioned criteria to establish the value of each records series, you can use that information as part of your retention schedule development. Records with little or no administrative, fiscal, historical, legal or operational value will have a short retention, whereas records that document one or more appraisal criteria will have a long-term or permanent retention. For instance, a draft should be destroyed upon publication of the finalized annual report. The annual report, however, will have a permanent retention, as it probably evinces all five values.

“The records appraisal process ensures that proper retention and disposal of records are provided.”

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