PURPOSE

The purpose of this guideline is to help school boards/authorities determine what information should be retained in accordance with their School Board/Authority Records and Information Management (RIM) Program.

What Is a Record?

Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (**MFIPPA**)

The MFIPPA is an act to promote access to information held by government and to protect the privacy of personal information which provides the public with a right of access to records collected by government, subject to limited and narrow exemptions. It defines a record as follows:

A record is recorded information however recorded whether in printed form, on file, by electronic means or otherwise and includes correspondence, a memorandum, a book, a plan, a map, a drawing, a diagram, a pictorial or graphic work, a photograph, a film, a microfilm, a sound recording, a videotape, a machine readable record, any other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, and any copy thereof. It further states that any information that is capable of being produced by a machine and subject to the regulations any record that is capable of being produced from a machine readable record under the control of an institution by means of computer hardware and software or any other information storage equipment and technical expertise normally used by the institution.

It is important to note that not all records will be released in response to a Freedom of Information Request. Contact your Freedom of Information Coordinator for more information.

International Standard Organization (ISO) Standard 15849 - Information and Documentation - Records Management

This standard defines a record as recorded information created, received, and maintained as evidence by an organization or person in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business. It requires that records:

- correctly reflect what was communicated or decided or what action was taken;
- support the needs of the organization; and
- support accountability.

Why Are Records Important?

Records are important for their content and as evidence of communication, decisions, actions, and history. As public institutions, school boards/authorities are accountable to the public and to government. Records support openness and transparency by documenting and providing evidence of work activities and by making them available to the public. Records support quality program and services, inform decision making, and help meet organizational goals.

What Activities and Transactions Should Be Documented?

Records include any information that documents the mission and planning objectives of the organization which include planning, decisions, actions, and results, as follows:

- results of significant daily activities that support the mission and objectives of our organizations;

- advice and recommendations made to management and the decisions and actions taken as a result, along with supporting documentation;

- problems encountered in organizational operations and the steps taken to resolve the problems;

- interactions with the public, customers, clients, stakeholders, consultants, vendors, partners, and other government jurisdictions;

- verbal communications such as meetings, telephone calls, and face-to-face discussions where significant actions or decisions have occurred;

- legal agreements of any kind, including contracts, along with supporting documentation;

- policy, organizational planning, performance measurement, and budget activities, and supporting documentation;

- work done for the government by consultants and other external resources; and

- actions and decisions where payments are made or received, funds committed, services delivered, or obligations incurred.

What Are Official Records?

Not all records and information need to be retained. Records and information that should be retained as part of a records management are records that:

- are required to support daily operations; or

- document and provide evidence of business transactions; or

- are required by legislation; or

- protect the rights of citizens and the government; or

- provide evidence of compliance with accountability or other organizational requirements; or

- will have some future organizational, financial, legal, research, or archival value to the government and public; or

- are personal information that has been used by the organization which is required to be retained pursuant to the legislation; or

- evidence of compliance with a duty/responsibility to report a child in need of protection.

Official records should be stored securely so that they will be readily available to those who need them and are authorized to access them. This applies in both our paper-based and our electronic work environments.

What Are Non-Records or Transitory Records?

Not all records created or received should be treated as official records. Some have no further value to the organization beyond an immediate or minor transaction. Others might be required only for a very short time, perhaps until they are made obsolete by an updated version of the record or by a subsequent transaction or decision.

Non-records or transitory records are not required to control, support, or document the delivery of programs, to carry out operations, to make decisions, or to account for activities of the department. Non-records should be managed and routinely disposed of in an appropriate manner once the administrative, legal, or fiscal use has expired. These non-records may include:

- **Advertising materials:** solicited or unsolicited information you receive from businesses or individuals advertising their products or services.

- **Blank information media:** blank information media, e.g., letterhead, blank CDs, etc.

- **Draft documents and working materials:** correspondence, reports, and other documents, which usually have not yet been finalized. These include research or working materials such as calculations and notes that are often collected and used in the preparation of documents. Once the final version of a document is complete and filed, most drafts and working materials should be disposed of.

- **Duplicate copies** where nothing has been added changed or deleted, where the copy is used for information or reference only, and where the original is filed in the records management system.

- **External publications:** books, magazines, periodicals, pamphlets, brochures, journals, newspapers, and software documentation, whether printed or electronic, that you have obtained from sources outside your organization. Publications that are about schools or school boards/authorities may have historical value and should be retained as part of the records management program.

- **Routine notices:** notices that contain information useful for only a brief period of time, after which it has no further value or is of little interest. Note that the originating department is responsible for retaining the notice if it supports departmental activities, responsibilities, or communication.

- **Information of short-term value/unsolicited information:** information received as part of a distribution list, or email messages received from listservs and other Internet sources, solely for convenience of reference.

When Should Non-Records or Transitory Records Not Be Disposed of?

Any information that may relate to a Freedom of Information Request or to pending litigation or legal discovery should not be destroyed until finalized. In addition records containing personal information must be maintained for a minimum of one year from use unless a shorter period is authorized under MFIPPA.

What about Email?

Over time, email has evolved from an electronic message delivery system to a repository of records and non-records. It is important to remember that any information contained in an email or an email repository that meets the definition of a record as defined in this document must be managed as part of the organization-wide records management program. School boards/authorities need to develop policies and procedures to ensure that these are managed as part of the records management program.

Characteristics of a Record

The International Standard Organization (ISO) Standard 15849 - Information and Documentation - Records Management defines the characteristics of a record. In addition to demonstrating accountability, a record should support organizational needs.

Records Should Have:

- **Content:** A record should reflect what was communicated or decided or what action was taken, and should provide enough information so that it is understood.
- **Context:** It should reflect how it was used or why it was created (purpose), the date, the time, and the participants.
- **Meaning:** It should be linked to other documents or information to which it relates.

Authenticity

A record is one that can be proven:

- to be what it purports to be;
- to have been created or sent by the person purported to have created or sent it; and
- to have been created or sent at the time purported.

Reliability

Records must be trusted to be a full and accurate representation of the transactions, activities, or facts and can be relied upon in subsequent activities. To ensure reliability, records should be created at the time of the transaction or incident or soon afterwards and by individuals with direct knowledge of the facts.

Integrity

A record must be complete and unaltered and must be protected from unauthorized changes, and verifiable unaltered.

Usability

To be useable, records must be retrievable, presented, and interpreted. The links between other records should be maintained.

Summary

Records are a strategic organizational asset that must be managed. To manage them appropriately, staff must recognize that information has a lifecycle and that not all records and information must be retained.

References

1. *Official and Transitory Records: A Guide for Government of Alberta Employees*

2. *ISO Standard - 15849 - Information and Documentation - Records Management*