



General Commission on Archives & History  
*The United Methodist Church*

Records Management Guidelines

# Guidelines for Managing Episcopal Office Records of The United Methodist Church 2009 Edition

GUIDELINES FOR  
MANAGING EPISCOPAL OFFICE RECORDS OF  
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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## Purpose of this Manual

This manual is produced by the General Commission on Archives and History. Its purpose is to provide for each episcopal office some general guidance in developing retention policies for their records. This is a manual of examples and ideas. It is not meant to provide an exhaustive or comprehensive records management plan. That only can be done at the episcopal office level. The intention is to provide enough material and ideas, and some examples, to assist in starting a records management program. Some of the ideas mentioned here can be used directly in a local program, while others just offer a place to begin. Please read the *Who's Responsible* section and the *Records Transfer Procedures* section. Consult the *Model Records Schedule* to see what we recommend. We have listed items which should be sent to Archives and History and some which should not. For a clearer idea of what is involved in creating a record schedule see the *Creating a Record Schedule*, the *Storage of Non-Permanent Records* and *Other Resources* sections. If you have any questions contact the General Commission on Archives and History at (973) 408-3189, (973) 408-3909 (FAX), or write to: Archivist/Records Administrator, GCAH, P. O. Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940.

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## What is Records Management?

**R**ecords management is the attempt to systematically control the growth and disposition, or destruction, of office, committee and other official records. Its basic purpose is to help answer that nagging question of what do I keep, for how long do I keep it and when can I remove it from my office. For a concise definition of a “record” refer to the *Disciplinary Responsibility* section.

Now we need to define some terms. In every office there are a variety of records which are related because they result from the same filing process, or the same function or the same activity, or have a similar form or contents. This group of related documents we will call a *series*. For example file folders of bank statements from different banks would be a series. A collection of check requests would be another series. Staff memos are yet another series. For each series there are two important concepts, or questions to be asked. The first is "for how long are these records used?" - this is referred to as the *records life cycle*. The second is "how significant are these records?" - this is referred to as *appraisal*. Understanding these two concepts are key to understanding the nature of records management.

### What is Records Management

The essence of records management can be summarized as follows: The task of managing our office records so that we have the records on hand to conduct today's ministry, to dispose of those we no longer need, and to see that valuable records are preserved. Its basic purpose is to help answer that nagging question of what do I keep, for how long do I keep it and when can I remove it from my office.

### Records Life Cycle:

Records can be considered like a living organism; they are born, or created, mature during their use, and then are retired or removed. In records management the task is to recognize when a record has reached the end of its life cycle. That is to say that there comes a time when every record no longer serves a useful administrative function. In general, the less a record is consulted, the less useful it is administratively. There are some significant exceptions to this rule, but the main focus is on those records occupying important space in an office and when can they be removed from that office. There are some records which will always have value, and which need to be kept, but which don't need to be in the main office files occupying valuable space. When a records has reached the end of its *useful administrative purpose* it is ready to be retired from the office. It is the function of *appraisal* which helps us determine when to retire the record and what to do with the record once it is retired.

### Records Appraisal:

Appraisal is the process which identifies the administrative, legal, and fiscal value (primary value), and the historical and long-term research value (secondary value) of records. Once the value of a record series has been determined, a realistic retention period can be assigned to it. Appraisal can take place at any point during a record series' life cycle, but is most frequently done when the records become inactive.

There are several questions to be asked when appraising a series: How frequently is the record used by those who created it? If the record is still frequently consulted then it should probably remain in the

office. But even for records which are not consulted frequently, is there still a consistent, although low, demand for the record? Is there some legal or fiscal need to hold on to the record even though it is no longer consulted or used? An example here might be financial information. What is the historical significance of the record? Always consider records as historical when they contain information about the institution which created the record. An example here might be Charge Conference records or staff or board minutes.

## Disciplinary Responsibility

Each episcopal office is responsible for developing its own retention policies in consultation with GCAH. Your episcopal office should select at least one individual to function as its records officer. This person will be the primary contact between your episcopal office and GCAH. This records officer is responsible for seeing that the records management policies are carried out. This person should see that the files are weeded at the proper time, and that the appropriate files are sent to Archives and History or that files are disposed of in the proper fashion for each series. If a new series appears, which can be a frequent occurrence in some offices, then that person should also be responsible for bringing the situation to the attention of the records committee so that an appropriate action can be taken. The records committee, along with the appropriate advisors, should then assess the new series and create a new schedule for those records. For more information about a series see the “Creating a Records Schedule” section below. The disciplinary authorization for these actions are found in ¶1711.3b.

*The Book of Discipline* is the basic body of administration and law for our denomination. It is reviewed, revised and edited once every four years by the General Conference. The General Conference is the only body which can speak for the entire denomination. It is composed of representatives selected from every annual conference. This means there are delegates from within and without the United States.

The bishops, General Conference officers, the Judicial Council, general boards, commissions, committees, and agencies of The United Methodist Church shall deposit official minutes or journals, . . . in the archives quadrennially and shall transfer correspondence, records, papers, and other archival materials . . . from their offices when they no longer have operational usefulness. No records shall be destroyed until a disposal schedule has been agreed upon by the General Commission on Archives and History and the agency.

Definition of “records” from the *Discipline* (¶1711.1b):

*Documentary record material* shall mean all documents, minutes, journals, diaries, reports, pamphlets, letters, papers, manuscripts, maps, photographs, books, audiovisuals, sound recordings, magnetic or other tapes, electronic data processing records, artifacts, or any other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to any provisions of *The Discipline* in connection with the transaction of Church

business by any general agency of The United Methodist Church or of any of its constituent predecessors.

Finally, each episcopal office should have a records committee to plan and implement an office-wide records policy.

## Reasons for Records Management

There are a variety of reasons for a episcopal office to deal with records management; other than the obvious one that the *Discipline* requires it. Every office is faced with problems of storage space, as well as decisions about which records to keep and which to discard. This manual was designed to

It must be made clear at the outset that this is a manual of **guidelines** only. Every effort has been made to provide reliable and accurate information. However, records management policy, rules and regulations, can vary from state to state. Before you put any records management program into place please check your plans with your local counsel.

assist offices with these problems and decisions. A records management program strives to achieve economy and efficiency in the creation, use, maintenance, and disposal of episcopal office records.

### Preservation of the Important and the Historical:

In order for our future to have a past we must be concerned for the records of today. The development of a records management policy is the first step in preserving our past by deciding what needs to be kept today. A concern for the historical, the legal and the fiscal needs of our church and conference motivates us to faithfully preserve our important records.

### The Effective Use of Space & Time:

It is estimated that after personnel costs, records keeping is one of the largest expenditures in the church. Record creation, maintenance, filing, office storage space, filing supplies, and equipment all contribute to the high cost of keeping records. In our usually limited office space we are often faced with the question of what can we remove in order to have room for what we need.

We need to be aware of certain factors which can help us make the most effective use of space:

#### Three Reason for Records Management

1. Preservation of important and historical documents
2. Removing older records from the office means less time spent filing/searching for files and fewer storage requirements
3. Financial and legal concerns - will have the documents necessary for audits or for legal needs

- Dispose of records as soon as legally possible. It is estimated that between 90 to 95 percent of all records are non-permanent; an estimated 85 percent have a retention period of less than eleven years.
- In comparison to government, the church has fewer restrictions on what we are required to keep. For the majority of the records we produce we can set our own guidelines. There are laws affecting financial, personnel and legal files. But the majority of the material in our files falls outside these regulations.
- Having a controlled filing system means a smaller system. This can save time by making record retrieval and refiling easier and faster, and reduces the number of misfiles.

## Legal Protection:

If an office or local church is ever faced with legal action, having a records management program in place is one way to assure courts and litigants that records are being cared for and disposed of properly and in a routine manner, not maliciously or in a capricious way.

## Church's Attitude to Openness:

The denomination has committed itself to openness. The relevant section from the *Discipline* is ¶ 721.

In the spirit of openness and accountability, all meetings of councils, boards, agencies, commissions, and committees of the Church, including subunit meetings and teleconferences, shall be open. Portions of a meeting may be closed for consideration of specific subjects if such a closed session is authorized by an affirmative public vote with at least three-fourths of the voting members present. The vote shall be taken in public session and recorded in the minutes. Documents distributed in open meetings shall be considered public.

Great restraint should be used in closing meetings; closed sessions should be used as seldom as possible. Subjects that may be considered in closed session are limited to real estate matters; negotiations, when general knowledge could be harmful to the negotiation process; personnel matters; [See Judicial Council Decision 751,869] issues related to the accreditation or approval of institutions; discussions relating to pending or potential litigation or collective bargaining; communications with attorneys or accountants; deployment of security personnel or devices and negotiations involving confidential third-party information. Meetings of the committee on pastor-parish or staff-parish relations are to be closed meetings pursuant to ¶ 258.2e. While it is expected that the General Conference, the Judicial Council and the Council of Bishops will live by the spirit of this paragraph, each of these constitutional bodies is governed by its own rules of procedure

A report on the results of a closed session is to be made immediately upon its conclusion, or as soon thereafter as is practicable.

We need to remember that all have a right to view various documents. A well managed record environment enables the retrieval and reviewing of our public documents with greater ease and efficiency.

## Vital Records

**V**ital records are those records necessary for basic office operations. They are the records which can not, or should not, be lost. While it is true that all records created by an office are important it is also true that some records are more important and significant to the operation and well-being of the institution. The best way to understand the importance of vital records is to ask the question, if the building was destroyed which records would be most important for getting the office back into operation? Some of those vital records are identified in the *Discipline* while others are identified by state or local laws. A few records which need to be included in any list would be agency journals and administrative policy. In addition to these basic records, there are also personnel records, financial records, deeds and contracts among other important records.

Copies or originals of these records should be stored offsite of the episcopal office, perhaps in a local bank or other secure place. Some of these records may well exist in electronic format. Copies of these electronic records should be stored offsite and frequently updated by replacing the older files with the most recent copies.

Having copies of your institution's vital records stored in a safe place will assist in the transition back to normal operations (or at least basic operations) after a disaster.

## Electronic Records Issues

**W**hat follows is a summary overview of electronic records issues. Please consult our *Guidelines for Managing Electronic Records* for a more detailed discussion of this important topic. The management of electronic records usually revolves around word processing documents. There are other types to be considered however. Most of the examples given will relate to word processing. To gain an idea of the complexity of the problem one only needs to consider the different number of word processing formats in use. A popular program which converts one type of word processing format to another currently has conversion routines for around 48 different formats. Without such a program, and if an archives wanted to maintain the electronic files in their native format, an archives would need more than 40 different word processing programs to deal with all of these formats. Not only would they need the programs, but also the operating system on which the program was designed to run. In the past twenty years there has been at least six different operating systems and a variety of versions under those six. It quickly becomes obvious why an archives cannot maintain electronic files in their native format. Electronic files, in order to be used, are dependent on software and hardware. This dependency makes them extremely vulnerable over time to loss due to changes in technology and the market. And this doesn't even touch the issue of the stability of the medium on which electronic records are stored. To preserve an electronic file for the future it either needs to be converted to some standardized electronic format or printed. While there are standardized formats for both electronic document files and for databases which are supported by the archival and technological communities, they are minimalist file formats, which means that much of the formatting of a document will be lost and some of the flexibility

of complex databases will also be lost. The most secure way to deal with most electronic documents is to print the document out on paper. The document can then easily be managed under records retention guidelines.

It must also be admitted that the use of electronic records in the office are vital to its smooth operation. Without the ease of use electronic records affords the office today much of our productivity would be lost. So, while electronic records in their native format are not useful, and in fact detrimental, for long term storage they are essential to today's productive office environment. In using electronic records there are several points which must be kept in mind.

- The first is migrating the records when operating systems or software are upgraded. This is one of the most easily overlooked issues. Most offices have a variety of records on their hard drives, servers and backup media like CDs. Many of the records are not used on a daily basis but need to be near by for routine occasional use. When a computer's operating system or software is upgraded the data files need to be migrated as well. This usually isn't a problem for the files stored on the computer or server and which are probably used on a regular basis. But files on backup media, diskettes, Zip drives, and CDs may be overlooked and could be found unaccessible when they are finally used. This could especially be the case if the files were created more than two upgrades ago. When software or operating systems are upgraded you want to make sure that all of your files can be accessed by the new system. Take the time to open and access files especially on your backup media and if necessary open them all and save them in the new format. And don't assume that the upgrade of the same product will mean that your files are always accessible. It is well known that a popular word processing product cannot read files from earlier versions. A person has to go back to an earlier version of the product, open and save the files and then they can be accessed by the most current version. If you are going to keep records in an electronic format always make sure that you migrate them along with each upgrade.
- Organizing your computer's file system is another important element. The same retention guidelines apply to electronic files as it does to paper files. Many users just store files on their hard drives without any planning. Some with just minimal planning. This has negative consequences in several areas. The first is a degradation of your computer's performance. Folders (or directories) which contain a large number of files are inefficient for the computer. It takes more memory and time to manage a large amount of files in a single folder. It is also takes longer to search a large folder or directory, either visually or with a search engine. As much as possible replicate your paper filing structure on your computer. This will make it easier for the computer to manage itself and for you to manage your files. Where appropriate make sure you can distinguish between files which do not need to be kept from those which have a longer or permanent retention. You can do this either by creating appropriate folders or by a naming convention. This makes backup easier and it makes management of your files easier. Copying entire directories is much faster than hunting through a long file list.
- Making backups is probably the most important task to be done. Computers do wear out and cease to operate and all information on them will be lost. Offices are damaged during storms and vandalism happens. Where are you keeping copies of your data? Backing up data is the most difficult thing to do, as it takes time and seems unproductive. But without it, after an accident, productivity will really cease. In a networked environment it is a little easier to backup data. Files can be stored on the server and the server automated to make backups on a

regular basis. But in the small office the single-user computer also needs to be backed up. That may be as simple as copying files to a CD-RW on a daily basis, or using a backup program. And for very important files you will want to store the copies somewhere else than at work, just as you do for important papers. This has been touched on in the Vital Records section.

It is worth mentioning, as a final note, the longevity of some electronic media. None of the electronic storage media has as long as a shelf life as does acid-free paper. Disks, diskettes, and hard drives all have about a twenty-five year life expectancy. Zip drives also fall into this category. There have been several claims about CDs. Different claims actually apply to different types of CDs. The ones purchased in stores, such as music CDs and games, are usually pressed CDs which means that their data is actually pitted into the surface of the CD. That might be fairly stable. CD-Rs and CD-RWs use a heat sensitive dye which changes color when data is written to it. Both are encased in plastic and there are questions about the stability of the plastic. There are questions about what happens to heat sensitive dye when subjected to temperature extremes. There are questions about the stability of the CD if the plastic surface is scratched allowing air in to oxidize the metal. And finally, and more importantly, there are questions about stability as the technology that allows the CDs to be read. Just as there are hardly any computers which can read 8-inch floppy disks, the next generation of CD readers won't be able to read earlier CD versions. This is another way of emphasizing the importance of migration. Not only must electronic records be migrated as operating and software systems change, but they must be migrated as storage system change as well. It doesn't matter how long the media lasts if there is no equipment left which can read the media.

## Storage of Records

In some cases records might be able to stay in their office of origin until they are destroyed or transferred to the archives. But in the case of small offices, another solution may be necessary. If office space is at a premium, then it may not be advisable to retain records which aren't used for seven or 20 years in the office. So, another step in the retention schedule concept is to determine how many years a record should remain in the office and then, if it still has some years to go before it can be destroyed, move it to some other storage location where it will remain until it can be destroyed. Permanent records could be immediately sent to the archives once they are removed from the office.

As an example of the procedure let's consider the case of some financial records which have no permanent value, but need to be kept for five years before they can be destroyed. However, let's say that the records are not used after their second year and so are taking up valuable space in the office. Yet the records can't be thrown out. The answer is to remove the records from the office, packed in a box, and store them in another safe location, either on the premises or at some secure rented space. The box could be labeled with the date of destruction for the records, and when that date rolls around the records officer removes the box, verifies there is no historical value to the records and/or no pending legal or financial actions and then appropriately disposes of the contents. Financial and other records which contain personal or

Before disposing of your records be sure that there is nothing of historical value or no legal actions pending on those records.

In today's world there is no reason not to have a shredder in the office. A secure shredder will help to protect sensitive information from prying eyes.

financial information should be securely shredded or pulped. In the mean time the office has not been crowded with unnecessary records.

In a case like this always make a list of the material which is removed from the office and keep the list in the office. Be sure the list notes where the material is located, just in case the records are needed.

## Destruction of Records

In today's world of identity theft it is important to thoroughly destroy the records which your institution is not keeping. Any record which contains personal information, financial information or any type of information which can be considered private should be thoroughly destroyed when permanently removed from the office. This means either shredding the document or having it pulped. Secure shredders are affordable and within the budget range of most offices. There is no reason not to have one. A single cut shredder, one which cuts the paper into strips, is no longer satisfactory. Multi-cut or screening shredders, ones which cut the paper into random sizes, should be used. Be sure to get a shredder which can cut credit cards and CDs as well. If you store your office's sensitive files on a CD-R once that CD is full and no longer useful it should be shredded. Even with shredding the institution should consider turning the paper over to an organization which pulps the paper. Almost every major city has one or more records management companies which provide secure shredding and pulping as one of its services.

## Records Transfer Procedures

Please follow these procedures before you transfer records to the Archives. Your cooperation in the systematic transfer of our episcopal office records to the Archives will enable us more efficiently to identify, transfer, preserve, and make available the historical records of our denomination and will result in the disposal of useless records.

### STEP 1: RECORDS SELECTION

Before you remove records from office filing cabinets or storage areas and pack in containers bound for Archives and History, check for material not accepted by the Archives.

Transfer only noncurrent records to Archives and History. If you occasionally refer to the material, the records are of administrative use.

Please refer to the records retention schedule at the end of this document, or to your own episcopal office's official retention schedule, to see what type of records should not be saved. Those that must be saved for a period of time should be placed in a separate container and stored at your location. Only permanent records should be sent to the Archives.

### STEP 2: CONTAINERS

Place the records to be shipped to Archives and History in sturdy record center containers. These containers, measuring about 15 x 12 x 12, are available at any office supply store. Please feel free to purchase what fits your budget. Once at the archives we will transfer the records into new containers. Do not use larger boxes, such as “bankers’ boxes,” as these tend to break open during shipping

The postal address for the General Commission on Archives and History is: GCAH 36 Madison Ave., Madison, NJ 07940.

### STEP 3: TRANSFER FILES TO CONTAINERS

Place the files upright in the containers. Try to keep the files in the same order as they were used in your office. For example, if you had a group of files (called a series) dealing with annual reports try to keep that material together.

Keep material from one office together. Be sure to identify on the box, and on the forms, from which office the material came and the name of the staff person in that office.

Do not lay files flat in the containers.

Do not remove the records from the file folders, unless the material has been kept in hanging file folders. In that case replace the hanging file folders with new regular file folders.

If the records are not contained in file folders, give us a call for assistance.

Do not overload the containers; allow at least one inch room in each container.

If a container (it should be the last container in the shipment) is not full, please note this on the transmittal form (see step 4).

Write the episcopal office’s name, the office name, and the box number on the outside of the box.

### STEP 4: THE TRANSMITTAL FORM

Please fill out the transmittal form provided to you from GCAH using either the WordPerfect or Word template version. Follow the instructions at the top of the first page. If you do not have any forms in your office please give us a call. Copies of this form is available for download from our web site under the Episcopal Office selection of the Ministries Resource section.

[http://www.gcah.org/site/c.ghKJI0PHIoE/b.2858897/k.9D47/Episcopal\\_Office.htm](http://www.gcah.org/site/c.ghKJI0PHIoE/b.2858897/k.9D47/Episcopal_Office.htm)

Each shipment should be composed of a page one and then as many continuing pages as are necessary to complete the description of the shipment.

Complete sections 1 through 7. Be sure that you list your name, address, your name and a telephone number on the form. List the box numbers in ascending order in the column marked 'Box no.' and beside each box number list the titles of all folders or materials as they appear in that container. The transmittal

form should contain a folder title listing for each container transferred to the General Commission on Archives and History.

Make a copy of the finished forms and retain for your files. Print out the finished form and enclose with the shipment. You may also wish to print out a copy for your own files. Email the finished WordPerfect/Word file to GCAH. We will return the WordPerfect/Word file with the accession number added to the document.

Please refer to this accession number when you request records or information from your records at the General Commission on Archives and History.

## General Records Descriptions

### Paragraph Style

#### ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

*Episcopal rulings and actions, annual reports  
Budget and audit reports*

This series contains official reports from the episcopal office. These are reports generated by the office and distributed elsewhere. The budget and audit reports document the financial and fiscal life of the office. Other administrative reports, such as annual conference journals, general agency journals or Council of Bishops minutes are preserved through other channels. Only send such administrative reports as are generated by your office.

Record Copy: episcopal office

Retention: Permanent, transfer to the archives after 2 years

#### COMMITTEE RECORDS

*Council committees, general agency committees  
conference cabinet and related committees*

This series documents the activities of standing and ad hoc committees, agencies and boards in which the bishop is involved. This series may include but is not limited to agendas; meeting minutes; reports; notes; working papers; and related documentation and correspondence.

Record Copy: episcopal office

Retention: Permanent, transfer to the archives after 4 years

#### CORRESPONDENCE

*Transitory correspondence,  
Subject correspondence*

A large amount of correspondence should be considered *transitory* or routine general correspondence. Correspondence of this type might include responses to routine invitations or inquiries concerning functions of the episcopal office or conference; routine inquiries about programs or functions in which the

church is involved and other routine correspondence which reflects a normal part of the episcopal office. Special or *subject* correspondence may focus on a special program or service in which the church is involved, such as special worship services or specific annual conference or general agency concerns or some other program which has a specific beginning and end and which involves the episcopal office. *Transitory* correspondence should be reviewed and destroyed on a yearly basis, while *subject* correspondence should be kept, as it documents a special event in the episcopal area's life.

Transitory correspondence  
Record Copy: episcopal office  
Retention: 1 year  
Destroy after one year

Subject correspondence  
Record Copy: episcopal office  
Retention: Permanent; transfer to archives on routine basis or after end of program

## EMPLOYMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES RECORDS

### *Employment Policies*

This series documents employment policies and procedures administered by personnel offices. This series may include but is not limited to information on appointments; employment of handicapped persons; family employment program; interviewing; job sharing; nepotism; temporary appointments; transfers; and related documentation and correspondence.

Record Copy: episcopal office  
Retention: Permanent, transfer superseded copy to the archives.

## STAFF MEETING RECORDS

This series documents the meetings of the staff which sets policy and procedures for the unit. Participants at meetings may be composed exclusively of or a mixture of staff, administrators, and managers; specialized and task oriented sub-committees composed of unit personnel are also documented as part of this record series. These meetings may concern routine matters of procedure and topics such as program development, planning, administrative and personnel management, and assessments of future needs. This series may include but is not limited to meeting notes/minutes; reports; working papers; agendas; and related documentation and correspondence.

Record Copy: episcopal office  
Retention: Permanent, transfer to the archives after 4 years

## Tabular Styles

2009-2012 EDITION

EPISCOPAL OFFICE RECORDS SCHEDULE				
RECORD SERIES TITLE	DESCRIPTION	Total	Current	Archives
Administrative Reports	Episcopal rulings and actions, annual reports, Budget and audit reports	Permanent	2	YES
Committee Reports	Episcopal rulings and actions, annual reports, Budget and audit reports	Permanent	4	YES
Correspondence - subject	Correspondence on special or topic interest	permanent	Active	YES
Correspondence - transitory	Routine correspondence	1 year	1	NO
Employment Policies and Procedures Records	Employment Policies	Permanent	Active	YES
Staff Meeting Records		Permanent	4	YES

## Other Resources

**F**or those who want to read further on the planning and use of records management below is a list of useful texts. All are available from the Association of Records Managers and Administrators, Inc., 13725 West 109<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 101, Lexena, KS 66215 (website: [www.arma.org](http://www.arma.org).)

*Developing and Operating a Records Retention Program.* ARMA International: Prairie Village, KS 1989.

Penn, Ira A., Gail Pennix, Jim Coulson. *Records Management Handbook*, 2nd edition. Gower Press: Aldershot, UK 1994

Skupsky, Donald S. *RecordKeeping Requirements.* Information Clearinghouse: Denver, 1988.

Maedke, Wilmer O., Mary F. Robek, Gerald F. Brown. *Information and Records Management.* Glencoe Press: Beverly Hills, 1974.

Aschner, Katherine *Taking Control of Your Office Records: A Manager's Guide.* Knowledge Industry Publications: White Plains, NY. 1983.

You can also contact the General Commission on Archives and History, P.O. Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940, 973-408-3195, 973-408-3909 (FAX) with any questions.

## Appendix: Creating a Records Schedule

### What is a Records Schedule?

**R**ecords, as they reach the end of their life cycle, need to be removed from the office filing system. This should be done on a regular or annual basis. The basic tool to guide the records officer in this task is the *records retention and disposition schedule*. This tool helps remove the old and obsolete records from the office, making room for more recent and active records.

A records schedule identifies record series and prescribes the time period that they must be retained before they reach their ultimate fate or disposition. The disposition of a record, as prescribed in a records schedule, may range from immediate destruction, to destruction after a period of time, or to permanent retention in the archives.

### Steps in Creating a Records Schedule:

If a record series is not listed in the existing records retention and disposition schedule (or if no schedule exists at all), the department's Records Officer should contact the appropriate records committee. The committee, after reviewing the existing schedule, may determine that an addition to the schedule is required. These are the steps in the scheduling process:

- \* Inventory the record(s) series in question, using the *Record Series Inventory Data Sheet* (see steps below). This is to be done either by the local responsible person, the committee, or by both working together.
- \* Retention periods based upon frequency of use and archival value will be agreed upon and incorporated into the records schedule.

### Steps in a Records Inventory

1. Locate records: they may not only be in offices, but also in basements or homes.
2. Once all records have been located the inventory can begin. Use an inventory sheet similar to the example in Fig 1.
3. In order to help identify your records and how long they should be kept, it is important that you always include the following information in your inventory: Type of record (see Fig. 2); whether the original or copy is in your office, the location and the format ( e.g. computer, cassette tape, paper)

<b>RECORDS INVENTORY SHEET</b>
Type of Record:
Location:
Format

Example Inventory Sheet

minutes  
 annual reports  
 by laws/charter  
 incorporation records  
 annual audits  
 annual budgets  
 financial ledgers of final  
 entry  
 subject correspondence  
 manuals/handbooks  
 newspapers/newsletters  
 brochures/promotional  
 materials  
 photographs  
 will, bequests  
 legal/judicial cases  
 personnel  
 records/employee  
 records  
 accounts payable  
 invoices  
 bank deposit slips  
 mailing lists  
 expense reports  
 invitations  
 meeting notices  
 travel plans and  
 arrangements  
 resource files

### Types of records commonly found

## Retention Periods:

The term "retention period" refers to the maximum and minimum lengths of time that a record must be kept. Once you have identified your records you will need to determine how long they are to be kept. At the end of this manual are some examples of retention schedules. However, it is important to remember that, especially concerning financial records the laws governing retention can vary from state. Before implementing any retention schedule be sure to let your legal counsel see it. What is listed in this manual are examples and suggestions only.

Several different retention period designations can be used, such as: "Permanent", "Until Superseded", "Until Obsolete," or a specific number of years. "Permanent" indicates that the record series will be kept indefinitely. Records with a permanent designation should probably be sent to the archives.

"Until Superseded" is a retention assigned to records that are routinely updated or revised and where the previous version has no continuing value.

"Until Obsolete" is assigned to record series that become valueless on a non-routine basis. Specific time period retention periods are based upon usage factors and legal requirements, such as audits.

With the exception of financial and personnel records the records committee, acting in consultation with the office it is surveying, will assign the retention periods. For the most part, most denominational records are not governed by any specific legislation which affects their retention. Always be sure to check your locale for any legislation which might affect financial records or personnel records. While establishing

the retention period will be dependent upon the needs of the office or the committee it is should be mentioned here that before actually disposing of any records one should verify that there are no pending legal actions against the agency which necessitates keeping the records longer. If a record is needed in a legal case it has, in effect, become an active record again. Its useful administrative value continues until the legal case has been resolved, which could also change the long-term status of the record. In such issues always be sure to consult with your legal counsel.

## Calculating Retention Periods:

Retention periods usually begin at a chronological file break, such as the fiscal, or calendar year. The retention period applies to all records created during the time period. For example, the official copy of many accounting records has a five-year retention period, by fiscal year. The retention period for journal vouchers created during the 1992-93 fiscal year (July 1, 1992-June 30, 1993) begins July 1, 1993. After 5 years, on July 1, 1998, they will be eligible for destruction.