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# Establishing a Public Records Commission

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Dear Reader:

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other CTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Reference Number: CTAS-1150

The Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA) has been extremely helpful in the development of the following guidelines and the retention schedules. It has employees on its staff who have the task of working with local officials and records commissions to ensure good county records management and the preservation of important historical documents from Tennessee's history (those from days gone by as well as those we are creating each day). TSLA offers the following list of basic minimum actions that county public records commissions should be taking in order to fulfill their function of basic records management and oversight. For those records commissions that desire and have the resources to be more progressive, there are further recommended courses of action that follow.

## Minimums

- Meet at least twice a year. (This is the statutory minimum.)
- Set a schedule for regular meetings so that county officials can plan ahead for their interactions with the records commission.
- Elect officers (at least a chairman and a secretary).
- Keep minutes and records of decisions and transactions.
- Oversee the preservation and authorize the destruction of any and all public records as defined by the law.
  - Request offices to conduct an inventory of their records and submit that inventory to the PRC.
  - Use records inventories to gauge need for the destruction of temporary records and the sufficiency of storage space for permanent records.
  - Encourage records-keeping officers and PRC members to familiarize themselves with the records retention schedules.
  - Require county offices to begin using a standard Records Disposition Authorization form to document requests for records destruction.
  - Review the request, then authorize or disapprove requests from county offices to destroy original records, using the retention schedules for guidance.
  - Assure that authorizations for destruction of public records are forwarded to TSLA for review within 90 days of the PRC authorization.
  - Follow-up on requests sent to TSLA before destroying any records to make sure that approval of the destruction has been given.
- Establish rules and regulations regarding the making, filing, storage, exhibiting, and copying of reproductions of records.
- Establish procedures for compiling and submitting to all county offices lists, schedules, or time tables for disposition of particular records within the county.
- Establish procedures for the physical destruction or other disposition of public records.

## Progressive Steps

TSLA suggests the following further measures that a PRC can take to strengthen its records management function.

- Hold meetings more than twice a year. (If your county is just beginning an effort to get records management going, meeting more often will be necessary. Also, if all the offices of a county begin actively participating in records management, two meetings will probably not be sufficient to thoroughly review all requests.)
- Report at least once a year to the county mayor and legislative body on commission activities and the state of records and archives management in the county.
- Review records keeping practices in county offices and recommend to the offices and to the county mayor and legislative body remedies to correct faults and improvements to deal with emerging information and records needs.
- Work with county offices, CTAS, TSLA, and the Records Management Division of the state Department of General Services to draft, review, revise, and issue realistic records management

schedules for local government records.

- Encourage the development of disaster recovery and vital records protection plans for all county offices.
- Review and approve all plans by county offices for electronic imaging or data processing systems to assure that
  - (a) the system employed will protect and preserve records designated as permanent by CTAS retention schedules, and
  - (b) a permanent, archival-standard microfilm of permanent records is produced.
- Encourage a regular program of microfilming to protect and preserve permanent records of the county. Send a copy of any microfilm produced to TSLA for quality control testing and storage in the vault.
- Become more familiar with any records you intend to destroy so that you can recognize any that may have historical value or are good candidates for transfer to a county archives or outside institute that can preserve the record for historical purposes.
- Propose to the county cooperative arrangements with other counties or cultural institutions such as libraries and universities for keeping, managing, and allowing for the public inspection of historically valuable records, including permanent public records of the county.
- Advise and propose to the county mayor and the legislative body the planning, development, site selection, establishment, funding, budget, regulation, and operation of a local archives and records office.
- Advise and recommend to the county mayor and legislative body the appointment and removal of personnel, including an archivist as director, for the central records office and archives.
- Review operations of any existing county records offices and archives to assure the county legislative body that they meet records management and archives management standards and satisfy the needs of the county and its citizens.

See Basic Records Management for additional information.

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