December 24, 2024

Evaluate

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the CTAS website (ctas.tennessee.edu). This website is maintained by CTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee county government.

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,

The University of Tennessee
County Technical Assistance Service
226 Anne Dallas Dudley Boulevard, Suite 400
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
615.532.3555 phone
615.532.3699 fax
www.ctas.tennessee.edu

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Reference Number: CTAS-1183

The first thing to do is find out exactly where you are. Begin with an evaluation of the current state of the records of your office. Performing an inventory of your stored records is fundamental to efficient records management and gives you some hard data with which to make sound decisions. It is virtually impossible for a county office to get any sort of handle on its records situation unless it knows, with some degree of exactness, what records are in storage, how much of them there are, and how old they are.

Inventory

Reference Number: CTAS-1184

Once you have selected someone to do the inventory, make sure they understand the information you need and the goals of the inventory. Your office may wish to use the Sample Records Inventory Worksheet as a guide for performing an inventory. "The general goals of the inventory should include

- Identifying the various records series in each office,
- Describing all record locations and storage conditions,
- Providing dates and other useful information,
- Measuring space and equipment occupied by records, and
- Providing a basis for writing records retention schedules."[1]

The inventory will be beneficial to your office in a number of ways.

- Obviously, it will tell you exactly what records you have and where to find them. This alone will increase the efficiency of your office.
- It will help locate records that you can get rid of. Using the inventory and the records retention schedules for your office, you will probably discover a number of records that are unnecessarily taking up space in your office or your storage area.
- It will identify records that are in danger. Paper records can be easily damaged by water or even excessive humidity or other environmental problems. If your inventory finds evidence of water damage to records, mold and mildew, or signs of damage from vermin, insects or other pests, take steps to remedy these problems before your office loses vital information.

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[1] *Managing Records on Limited Resources* A Guide for Local Governments, Stephen E. Haller, CRM, issued by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, November 11, 1991, p. 3.

Filing Systems

Reference Number: CTAS-1185

After you have evaluated the inventory of the records your office keeps, spend some time evaluating your filing system as well. If improvements can be made to the way you file records, you will improve administrative efficiency in your office and reduce costs. "If every employee of an agency of local governments spends even 5 percent of the time searching for hard-to-find information, that time translates into very substantial sums of money, and quality of services is sure to suffer."[1] A good filing system will provide two major benefits to the people using it: *precise* retrieval and *timely* retrieval.[2] Another way of thinking about these issues is to ask "Can I find *what* I want *when* I want it?" If your filing system results in records retrieval that takes too long, that only gives you part of what you want, or gives you back much more than you needed, it is inefficient. Poor filing system performance is generally attributed to seven major factors.

1. Inadequate management attention;
2. Poor organization and structure of files;
3. Poor labeling and indexing procedures;
4. Uncontrolled growth of records;
5. A high incidence of missing, misfiled, or lost records;[3]

6. Inadequate and/or poorly trained files personnel; and

7. Inadequate or no formal record-keeping procedures.[4]

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[1] *The Daily Management of Records and Information* A Guide for Local Governments, issued by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, p. 1.

[2] The Daily Management of Records and Information, p. 2.

[3] "Studies show that between 1 and 3 percent of an organization's records are not available to the users due to one of these causes." The Daily Management of Records and Information p. 3.

[4] The Daily Management of Records and Information, pp. 2 and 3.

Filing Equipment

Reference Number: CTAS-1186

You may think all filing cabinets are alike, but that is just not true. Do not simply assume the storage system you have cannot be improved upon. You have options to consider. Movable-shelving, color-coded open-shelving systems and even bar-coding have become common in many offices that handle a large volume of records. The old standard vertical-drawer filing cabinet first came into use in the late 19th century and many records managers consider these cabinets to be functionally obsolete for most modern office applications. "[The vertical-drawer file cabinet] is the most costly of all filing equipment, since it requires more floor space and more physical time and effort to access the folders. It also does not provide the full benefit of visual retrieval aids, such as special labeling and color coding."[1]If you know your filing system is inefficient, consider checking into more modern equipment. Although it will cost money initially, it may save money in the long run by saving floor space in your office, thereby postponing the need for expansion or relocation, and by reducing staff time that is wasted on an inefficient filing system with cumbersome storage units.

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[1] *The Daily Management of Records and Information* A Guide for Local Governments, issued by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, p. 8.

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