



November 07, 2024

Records Centers

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,

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Reference Number: CTAS-1210

A records center is essentially a centralized area for storing records. It is a place where all county officials can send their inactive records as an alternative to keeping them in their own offices where they take up valuable space and get in the way of operations. By default, the basement or bell tower of the courthouse may have become an ersatz records center, but the county should consider investing in a true one. A well-run records center can result in significant savings of both time and money while it protects and preserves records. "The effectiveness of a records center is based upon (a) its use of low-cost equipment which makes maximum use of space, (b) its ability to provide an orderly arrangement and control of records, and (c) its ability to employ procedures which assure prompt and efficient handling of records."^[1] Setting up a records center may sound like a project that only large counties might try to tackle. But small- and medium-sized governments can also benefit from saving money. One federal government study on cost avoidance estimated that "...for every cubic foot of records stored in a records center, there is a savings of \$16.08."^[2] When you consider the reams and reams of records in local government offices, including the school system and the court system, the savings can add up quickly.

A records center does not have to be a separate building. "A small government can usually convert an existing room quite easily since less space is required. There are many cities, towns, or counties that need no more than 1,000 cubic feet of records storage space. A records center of that capacity can be placed in a room about the size of a two-car garage."^[3] If your county likes the idea but still thinks it does not have a great enough need to justify the expense of a records center, consider doing something radical—co-operate with other local governments. If the county, the school system, and all the municipalities within a county worked together through an inter-local agreement to establish a records center, costs would be spread among them and enough inactive records should be found to justify establishing the records center.

The Rome/Floyd County Records Program (population 81,250) is an excellent example of a cooperative venture supported by four Georgia local governments. This innovative records management program serves Floyd County, the city of Rome, and two school districts (Rome city schools and Floyd County schools). Each government partially funds the program. Service features included a records center with a capacity for 18,000 cubic feet (providing for records transfer, reference, selected microfilming, and records disposal) and technical assistance (a records management officer) on the proper management of records. These four local governments by combining resources to create a professional program which none could individually afford achieve most of their essential records management goals. All records placed in the records center still remain the property of the respective originating governments, however. The program has received the National Association of Counties achievement award, and it saved more than \$68,000 for the four local governments in 1990.^[4]

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If your county wants more information about starting a records center, including exactly what sort of space, equipment and organizational procedures are recommended for operating the center, contact the Archives Development Program at the Tennessee State Library and Archives or consult a publication entitled *A Guide for the Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities*, published by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators. While concerns regarding improper storage conditions are magnified the longer a record is kept and are therefore more crucial in an archive than a temporary records storage center, environmental concerns should not be ignored for records centers. These recommendations are a useful resource for considering both the creation of a records center facility and evaluating any current storage space you are using for records. The idea of setting up a records center is closely connected to setting up a local archives. Many of the same concerns apply to both, but they serve different functions and tend to be frequented by different groups. A comprehensive records management program will benefit from planning that considers and incorporates both concepts.

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- [1] *A Guide for the Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities*, p. 2.
- [2] *A Guide for the Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities*, p. 4.
- [3] *A Guide for the Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities*, p. 11.

[4] *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. 10.

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