



On the Record

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Born Digital and Digitized Records

The most frequently asked questions the Records Management Unit receives are around born digital and digitized records. For this month’s newsletter we will be sharing some of those questions (and answers!). We will use the terms “digital” and “electronic” interchangeably.

Are electronic records really records?

Yes! Effective January 2017, *M.G.L. Chapter 66 Section 3* was updated to include electronic records:

Public records may be made by handwriting, or by typewriting, or in print, or by the photographic process, or by the micrographic process, or by *electronic means*, or by any combination of the same. (italics added).

And *Chapter 66, Section 26, Clause 26* states “regardless of physical form or characteristics.”

How long do I have to keep electronic records?

The *Statewide Agency Records Retention Schedule* provides guidance for state agencies and the *Municipal Records Retention Schedule* provides guidance for municipalities regarding how to retain records. Retention is determined by the CONTENT of the record, not the format the record is in, whether it is physical or electronic.

What happens to the paper after digitization?

Records creators are responsible for maintaining an accurate, reliable, trustworthy, and accessible record for the complete required retention period, regardless of format. If you choose to digitize a paper record, you need to be sure that you can maintain the digital file and provide appropriate access to it until the retention period is met. Assuming there are no statutory requirements to retain the record

in a physical eye-readable format, you can dispose of the paper record without requesting permission from the Records Conservation Board or the Supervisor of Public Records. You will need permission to destroy/delete the final copy of the record – in this case the digitized file. Some paper records may have inherent evidentiary or historical value and you may want to retain them even after digitization.

Definitions

Accurate: Correct in all details.

Reliable: The quality of being consistent or undeviating; created with appropriate authority, according to established processes, and being complete in all its formal elements.

Trustworthy: The quality of being dependable and producing consistent results based on well-established procedures.

Accessible: Maintaining digital ecosystem to ensure that the file can be opened and read.

How can I ensure my records are accurate, reliable, trustworthy and accessible?

There are a lot of factors that go into maintaining digital records, especially if they need to be retained long-term or permanently. The Council of State Archives has published a framework to help assess your digital preservation program <https://www.statearchivists.org/electronic-records/serp-framework/>. This is just one of many frameworks available and the Massachusetts Archives Digital Archives staff is available to discuss this with you.

Other Digitization Resources

The Council of State Archivists *Guide to Managing Digitization Projects*

https://www.statearchivists.org/files/6015/0272/2035/COSA_DigitizationProjects_final.pdf

Wisconsin Historical Society

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15428>

Library of Congress Digital Preservation

<https://www.loc.gov/preservation/digital/>

National Archives and Records Administration

<https://www.archives.gov/files/preservation/technical/guidelines.pdf>

Are you considering digitizing permanent records? The State Archives staff is available to discuss special considerations.