



Retention Schedule Basics for State Agencies

PURPOSE

Maintaining an up-to-date records retention schedule is crucial for managing records effectively. Whether creating a new schedule or updating an existing one, this guide will help Records Officers understand the steps involved and what to expect during the process.

UNDERSTANDING RETENTION SCHEDULES

Definition

A records retention schedule outlines how long records must be kept before either being destroyed or transferred to the State Archives for permanent preservation. Retention can range from a few days to permanent. A schedule is designed to ensure the preservation of public records for legal, fiscal, administrative, tribal cultural, and historical purposes. The schedule lists the records which may be found within agencies in groupings called “series.” On a schedule, each records series is listed with a title, the retention period(s) related to it, and the final dispositions (destruction or transfer). On some schedules the series will also include a brief description of what types of records may be found within it.

Types of Schedules

1. General
Applies broadly to all government entities of a given type (state agencies, cities, counties, etc.). These schedules are standardized and help simplify the management of commonly held records.
2. Special
Designed for records that are unique to a state agency, and which may



not fit into a general schedule due to their specialized nature or significance to the agency or require a different retention period than the General Schedule.

Legal Compliance

Retention schedules play a critical role in mitigating legal risks by ensuring compliance with statutory requirements. Under the Oregon Revised Statutes ([ORS Chapter 192](#)), public agencies are required to manage records appropriately, which includes following established retention schedules.

The Oregon Administrative Rules ([OAR Chapter 166](#)) outlines the responsibilities of agencies regarding the retention of records that have not yet met their retention periods. This includes ensuring the prompt destruction of records that no longer hold value. The Oregon Secretary of State's Archives Division is responsible for developing and maintaining retention schedules for both state and local government records, thereby supporting compliance with these legal requirements. Retention schedules must be approved by the State Archivist for them to be authorized for use by government entities.

Benefits of Using Retention Schedules

State agencies can optimize their records management practices by applying records retention schedules, increasing their efficiency and meeting legal obligations. By using these schedules, agencies can:

- Retain records for the appropriate time, reducing the risk of non-compliance and legal issues.
- Legally destroy records once their retention period has reached.
- Reduce clutter by disposing of records that have met their retention periods, making it easier to locate information and respond to records requests.



- Eliminate the expense of storing obsolete records, whether physical or digital.
- Enhance public trust and agency credibility by ensuring transparency in records management practices.
- Identify and preserve records of historical significance for long-term or permanent preservation.

USING THE RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULE

Using a Special Schedule and the State Agency General Schedule

Agencies can manage their records by relying on two types of retention schedules: State Agency General Records Retention Schedule and your agency's Special Records Retention Schedule. It is important to note that state agencies can only use the State Agency General Schedule and NOT the other general schedules that are designed for local government or other entities. While all agencies must use the State Agency General Schedule, not all have a special schedule. Here's how each works:

1. ***State Agency General Records Retention Schedule***

The purpose of this schedule is to cover common records shared across all state agencies, such as administrative, financial, and personnel records, ensuring consistency across agencies of retention of standard record types.

2. ***State Agency Special Retention Schedule***

These are tailored to your agency's specific needs and designed to handle the unique records of your agency that are not included in the State Agency General Schedule. If you can't find records listed on your special schedule, look in the State Agency General Schedule to see if the



record type is covered there. If the record isn't listed in either schedule, don't guess! Contact the State Archives for guidance.

Record series format in the State Agency General Schedule

When reviewing record series in the State Agency General Schedule, it's important to understand the structure and what each part represents. Example:



Types of Retention Periods

1. Standard
Specifies a flat retention period, where records are kept for a defined length of time before being destroyed or transferred to the Archive. The retention starts ticking from the time of creation of the records. Example language: *Retain 6 years.*
2. Conditional
This retention depends on a condition or specific event. Once the condition is met, the retention period begins. Example language: *Retain until superseded or obsolete*



Records Disposition

1. Secure Destruction

Secure or defensible destruction refers to the ability to prove that records have been securely and completely destroyed after meeting their retention period. For paper records, use secure shredding instead of recycling. For electronic records, deleting ensuring that data is irretrievable. To create a clear audit trail, keep a log of what was destroyed, including record series title, retention series citation, date range, and destruction date. Generally, destroyed records can be tracked at the folder level, rather than the individual document or file level; use your best judgment as to when to be more specific.

As a Records Officer, you are responsible for overseeing the destruction process and ensuring that the destruction report is created and retained per the State Agency General Schedule.

2. Transferring to the Archives

Permanent, historically valuable records should be transferred to the Archives after the period specified on the retention schedule. You can check the [Records Eligible for Transfer](#) page on the Oregon State Archives website and follow the next steps.



ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING STATE AGENCY SPECIAL SCHEDULE

Records Officer

The Records Officer (RO) is a designated individual responsible for overseeing the proper management of records and serving as the key liaison between the agency and the Archives Division, including facilitating updates and maintenance of their agency's special records retention schedule. The RO ensures smooth communication and coordination, facilitating the process of revising, adding, or removing programs and record series. All state agencies are required by statute to designate a Records Officer.

To learn more about your role, refer to [Naming an Agency Records Officer](#). To establish a special records retention schedule, first check if an approved schedule already exists for your agency with the Oregon State Archives. You can review the list of schedules on the [State Agency Special Schedules](#) webpage. If your agency does not have a schedule, determine whether your agency's records require a unique retention schedule. In some cases, the [State Agency General Records Retention Schedule](#) may adequately cover your records, meaning a separate, special schedule may not be necessary. If you are unsure if a schedule is needed, reach out to us for guidance on beginning your analysis. Please contact us prior to beginning work on any updates.

Revising Existing Retention Schedules

Over time, these schedules may need to be updated to reflect changes in business operations, regulations, and standards. Revising existing retention schedules involves regularly reviewing recordkeeping practices at your agency to determine if the series on your schedule are still relevant and compliant with regulatory and business requirements. Regular reviews ensure that the retention is aligned with the current business structure, policy changes, and operational needs. There are typically two main approaches you can take: full revision or an addendum.



1. Full Revision

A full revision of an existing retention schedule is a comprehensive review and update to schedules that are 5 years or older, or sooner if the agency has undergone a significant reorganization or change in responsibilities. Over time, laws, regulations, and operational needs can change, affecting how records are created and managed. A full revision involves evaluating all records series, retention periods, and program descriptions, as well as incorporating any regulatory updates, organizational changes, or obsolete records series. This will ensure the schedule remains relevant and is up to date.

2. Addendum

An addendum is a focused update that occurs when an agency needs to make minor changes to a single or limited number of existing series or to add or remove a program. An addendum allows agencies to modify, add, or remove series from their existing schedule without conducting a full revision. Please note that addendums still require coordination with a Records Management Analyst and approval from the State Archivist in order to be valid.

Creating or updating a schedule

1. Inventory Records

It is important to identify and document all the records your agency holds and to gather the necessary information for building or updating a records retention schedule through the process of creating an inventory. We have a [Records Inventory Template](#) that you can download and use to get you started. Remember to include both physical (paper) and electronic records.

You may need to talk with agency staff who create records, subject matter experts, and IT application administrators to complete your inventory.



Do your best to identify all possible records, though you will be able to ensure you have a complete inventory when you review the list of proposed series with agency managers and/or records coordinators during the special schedule development process.

2. Analysis and Appraisal

Once the inventory is complete, you will analyze each record type to determine an appropriate retention period. Retention is determined by some combination of assessing the administrative, fiscal, legal, tribal cultural, and historical value of the records. Administrative value is the easiest to determine for most people, but other values may require greater deliberation. The examples below illustrate how these different values may be reflected in the retention schedule.

a. Administrative

Records that support day-to-day functions and operations of an agency. In short, "how long do you need these to do your job."

b. Fiscal

Records that document financial transactions, public funds, expenditures, or the fulfillment of financial obligations. Records with fiscal value will typically, but not always, reside with an agency's financial units.

c. Legal

Records with legal value holds evidence of the legal rights or obligations of the government and its citizens. They demonstrate compliance with laws, regulations, or agreements. Required retention periods for records with legal value can often be found in statute, administrative rules, or applicable case law.

d. Historical

Records documenting the history of government and community capture significant events, decisions, and landmarks. This value is ultimately determined and approved by the State Archivist. Fewer





than 5% of all records are designated as historically valuable enough for permanent retention in the State Archives.

e. Tribal Cultural

Records with tribal cultural value preserve aspects of the heritage, identity, and traditions of tribes in Oregon. Your agency's tribal liaison can help you in the process to determine potential tribal cultural value.

As you complete each appraisal, you will suggest a retention period based on the analysis of your records and determining the appropriate duration.

3. Obtaining Approval

Records retention schedule review steps:

- a. Records Officer will contact Secretary of State Archives Division (records.management@sos.oregon.gov)
- b. A Records Management Analyst sends preparatory materials (draft and guidance documents)
- c. Records Officer gathers feedback from agency, collects proposed changes on draft
- d. Records Officer sends draft back to Records Management Analyst with edits and comments
- e. Records Management Analyst reviews and identifies follow-up questions
- f. Initial review accepted.
- g. Manager, Reference, Audits, and State Archivist review.
- h. Final review accepted
- i. Final schedule or addendum is sent to Agency for approval
- j. Final signature from State Archivist
- k. Schedule takes effect and is posted online by Records Management Analyst

Please refer to the [Creating or Revising Special Records Retention Schedules](#) for more guidance.