ARIZONA STATE
LIBRARY, ARCHIVES AND PUBLIC RECORDS
A DIVISION OF THE ARIZONA SECRETARY OF STATE

Joan Clark, State Librarian & Director

ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Establishing an Essential Records List

Criteria and Reporting Essential Records to the Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records

October, 2013

RECORDS MANAGEMENT CENTER
1919 West Jefferson Street • Phoenix, Arizona 85009 • Home Page: http://www.azlibrary.gov/records
Phone: (602) 926-3815 • FAX: (602) 256-2838 • E-Mail: records@azlibrary.gov
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ESTABLISHING AN ESSENTIAL RECORDS LIST

What are Essential Records?

Essential records, sometimes called vital records, are those records necessary for the continuity and/or resumption of operations of an organization during and following a disaster. Business continuity, disaster preparedness, and Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) depend on identifying essential functions and records in order to restore the key functions of these organizations.

Essential records are any records, regardless of format or archival value, that are necessary for the daily functions of government during and after an emergency. They are those records you will need restored within 72 hours or less if you have a disaster. These records are also necessary to protect the rights of individuals and the interests of government agencies.

Some records are generally accepted as essential records, and will be designated as such on future retention schedules. Although records may be designated on a general retention schedule as essential, this does not mean it applies to all state agencies or local government agencies. Essential records are specific to each agency, as the business of each agency determines what is essential to its particular operation.

Why is it Important?

Identifying your agency's essential records is simply good business practice. While there are up-front costs involved with identifying and protecting essential records, the costs are far less than those incurred recovering damaged records after a disaster.

Identifying essential records and their locations allows you to:

- Respond to a disaster affecting records
- Minimize disruption of operations after an emergency
- Rapidly restore government services
- Reduce the economic impact of a disaster

When disasters occur, government agencies do not have the luxury of closing their doors and shutting down. In many cases, the agency is the first responder to the disaster. Emergency responders need some types of essential records to respond to the situation and to continue operations. The loss of essential records would jeopardize the agency's operations and ability to provide immediate assistance to the individuals directly affected by its activities.

If a disaster occurs, the loss of essential records could:

- Result in the disruption of essential public services
- Incur unplanned expenses of financial settlements or loss of revenue
- Increase the agency's risk to litigation
- Reduce productivity due to gaps in information

Types of Disasters

Disasters come in all forms, shapes and sizes, and can range from the extreme example of the September 11th, 2001 tragedy, to smaller local disasters such as a burst water pipe over a file room. There are two basic types of disasters - natural and man-made.

Natural disasters may include flood, fire, wind, and earthquakes, while man-made events may include sabotage, terrorism, arson, mechanical failure, and nuclear events. Small disasters are more likely to strike than major ones—a water

pipe break is more common than a city-wide flood.

Electronic records pose special problems since both hardware and software protection, as well as systems documentation, need to be considered when evaluating essential records. Damage to electronic records can include power failure, equipment failure, software problems, virus infections, and human error.

Responsibilities of the state or local agency

It is the responsibility of the head of each state and local agency to establish and maintain an active, continuing program for the economical and efficient management of the records of the agency. As part of that responsibility, the head of each state and local agency must submit lists of all essential records in the custody of the agency to the State Library every five years (ARS §41-151.14 a.5).

Although ARS §41-15.15 a.5 requires the state or local agency to submit a list of essential records every five years, it is recommended that the list be reviewed at least annually for any changes that may have occurred. Essential Records Lists should be updated whenever records are added or deleted from retention schedules, moved from the physical location, or the designation changes

Role of the State Library

The State Library is tasked by statute (ARS §41-151.12.A.4) to establish criteria for designating essential records within the following categories:

a) Records containing information necessary to the operations of government in the emergency created by a disaster
b) Records containing information necessary to protect the rights and interests of persons or to establish and affirm the powers and duties of governments in the resumption of operations after a disaster

The State Library will maintain all essential records listings for state and local agencies submitted pursuant to ARS §41-151.14.A.5, and protect the listings from disclosure. If a state or local agency is involved with a disaster, the Records Officer may request a copy of the listing. The State Library also offers training on disaster preparedness, and will consult with agencies on their essential records listings and programs.

Identifying Essential Records

Identifying essential records may seem like a daunting task, but in actuality only a small portion of the records at an agency are usually essential. The criteria listed below should be used as a guide to help identify your essential records.

When analyzing record series to designate essential records it is important to look at each state of the record's life cycle. For instance, an accounts receivable record may be essential until payment is received, or a contract may contain essential information until the termination of the contract, after which it is no longer essential.

A common misconception is that essential records are archival or have long term retentions, but this is not always the case. Essential records are not necessarily permanent records, nor are archival records necessarily essential. Some essential records are permanent, and may include minutes of governing boards, policies and procedures.

The Records Officer or staff member tasked with the essential record review should work

with the personnel most knowledgeable with the records in each section of the agency.

The first step is to do an on-site survey of records. The survey should include exactly which record series are in what physical locations, which servers they reside on, and which staff members oversee them. All records, regardless of physical format or media, should be evaluated for essential records status.

The second step in identifying an agency's essential records is to review all applicable general and custom retention schedules that exist. Each record series listed on custom retention schedules should be located, as well as all applicable general retention schedule series. Knowledge of the record series location will aid in the retrieval of the records when disaster occurs. If you find that records on your custom schedules cannot be located, or if there are records found on neither the custom nor general schedules, contact the Records Management Center.

After the on-site survey and retention schedule review has occurred, a decision must be made following the criteria below to determine the agency's essential records. All records, regardless of format, and including those not found on current schedules, need to be reviewed in this process.

Criteria for Identifying Essential Records and Prioritizing Recovery

There are five criteria, or categories, that essential records fall into:

1) Records necessary for emergency response.
2) Records necessary to resume or continue operations. This could include evidence of existence; powers, duties and functions of the agency; records that are necessary to the operation of that agency's program; funds owed to or from a government agency or program.
3) Records that protect the health, safety, property, and rights of residents.
4) Records that would require massive resources to reconstruct. This would include records that are unique or irreplaceable.
5) Records that document the history of communities or families.

The following is a sample list of records which may be essential to an agency or program:

- Disaster recovery plans
- Minutes of official boards, commissions, municipal councils, boards of supervisors
- Property ownership records
- Accounts payable receivable records
- Licensing records
- Municipal incorporation or charter documents
- Policies, directives, and orders
- Unique computer programs
- Employee lists or rosters
- Payroll records
- Employee benefit records including survivor benefits
- Annual financial reports and general ledger summaries
- As-built drawings, plans and specifications for government owned infrastructure
- Active contracts, compacts and agreements
- Product warranties, maintenance agreements, and insurance policies

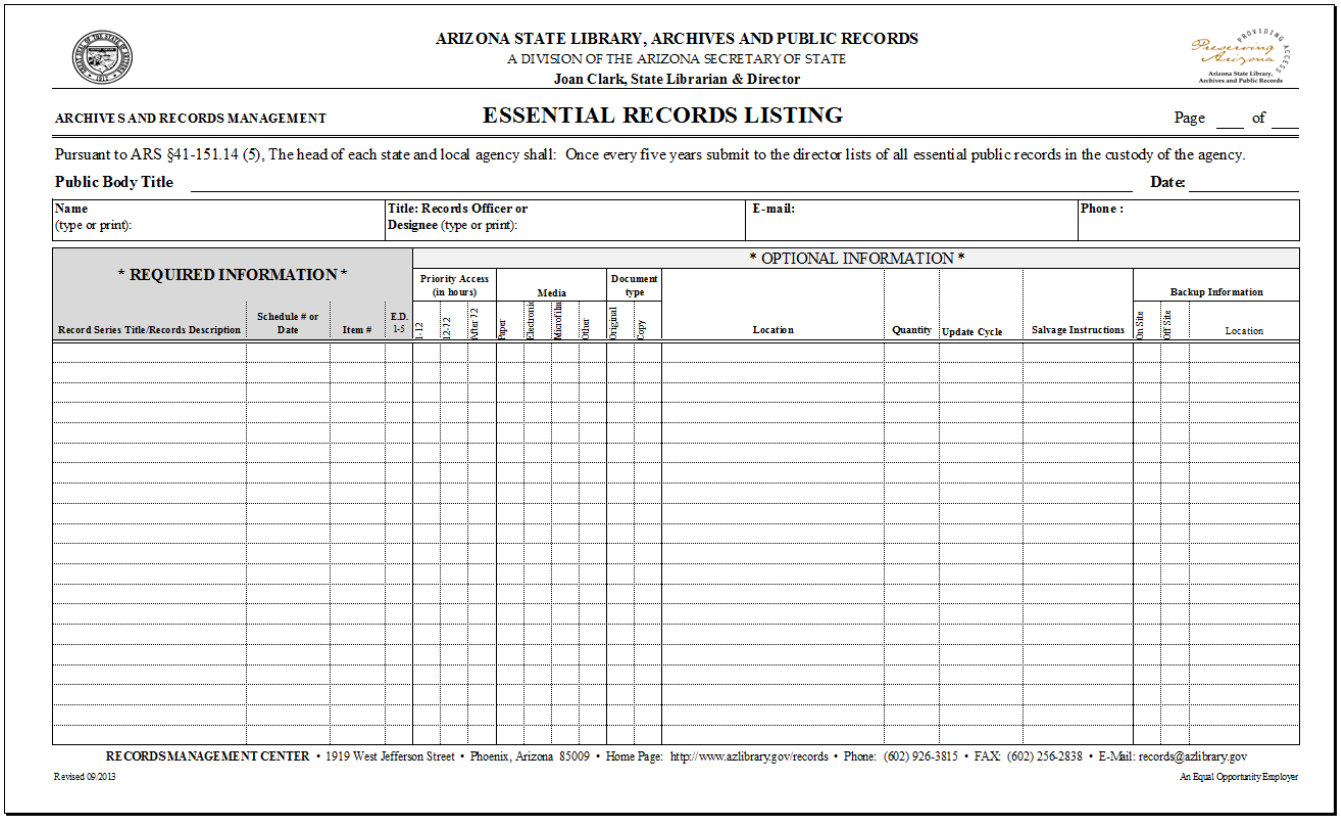
When designating essential records using the categories listed above, you should also delegate the priority for recovery. Below is a listing provided by the Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER), which lists the criteria from the five categories used to identify essential records, and shows the priority time frame for accessing the records after a disaster has occurred.

PRIORITY FOR ACCESS	ESSENTIAL RECORDS ARE RECORDS THAT:	EXAMPLES INCLUDE:
Priority 1: First 1-12 hours	Are necessary for emergency response	• Copy of emergency and/or Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan • Disaster recovery plan • Infrastructure and Utility plans • Maps and building plans • Emergency contact information
	Are necessary to resume or continue operations	• Employee lists or rosters • Delegations of authority • Contracts and leases • Payroll • Prison, jail and parole records • Insurance records • Accounts payable and receivable records
Priority 2: First 12-72 hours	Protect the health, safety, property, and rights of residents	• Deeds, mortgages, land records • Birth and marriage records • Medical records • Active court proceedings or police investigations • Education and military service records • Voting records • Professional licenses • Hazardous substance files
	Would require massive resources to reconstruct	• Geographic information systems data • Tax records • Unique computer programs
Priority 3: After fist 72 hours	Document the history of communities or families	• Historical documents • Photographs • Identity records • Property ownership records • Municipal incorporation/charter documents

I'VE IDENTIFIED MY ESSENTIAL RECORDS, NOW WHAT?

Completing the Essential Records Listing

Once your essential records have been identified, your agency needs to submit a listing to the State Library every five years per ARS §41-15.15 a.5. It is recommended that the list be reviewed at least annually for any changes that may have occurred and a new listing submitted whenever there are updates.



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ESSENTIAL RECORDS LISTING

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Pursuant to ARS §41-151.14 (5), The head of each state and local agency shall: Once every five years submit to the director lists of all essential public records in the custody of the agency.

Public Body Title _____ **Date:** _____

Name (type or print):	**Title: Records Officer or Designee** (type or print):	**E-mail:**	**Phone :**

* REQUIRED INFORMATION *				* OPTIONAL INFORMATION *												
				Priority Access (in hours)			Media				Document type					Backup Information		
Record Series Title/Records Description	Schedule # or Date	Item #	E.D. 1-5	1/2	2-72	After 72	Paper	Electronic	Microfilm	Other	Original	Copy	Location	Quantity	Update Cycle	Salvage Instructions	On Site	Off Site	Location

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The following information is required:

- Public Body Title
- Submitter Name, Title, E-mail address, and Phone #
- Record Series Title/Records Description
- Schedule # or Date
- Item #
- Media
- Document Type
- Location
- Quantity
- Update Cycle
- Salvage Instructions
- Backup Information

The following information is optional:

- Essential Designation
- Priority Access (in hours)

Following are the directions to complete the form:

1. In the top section enter the name of the Public Body transferring the records and the body receiving the records, and include any subdivision breakdown for division, department or unit.
2. Fill in the contact information of the submitter including name, title, e-mail address and phone number.
3. Record Series Title/Records Description: List the Record Series titles using the exact record series name(s) found on the approved Retention Schedule being followed, the schedule number or date approved, and the record series item #. If the records are unscheduled, write the terminology used in your office in the first column.
4. **E.D**. (Essential Designation). Enter the corresponding number of the designation for the record series listed. The number will show the essential records criteria chosen to designate this series as essential:

1	Are necessary for emergency response.
2	Necessary to resume or continue operations.
3	Protect the health, safety, property and rights of residents and the government.
4	Would require massive resources to reconstruct.
5	Document the history of communities or families.

5. **Media**: Check the box designating the format of the records in this series: paper, electronic, microfilm, other.
6. **Document type**: Check the box designating if the records are the original documents or copies.
7. **Location**: For the record series listed, put the physical location of the records or the server (could include building, floor, room, file cabinet number, drawer number, etc.)
8. **Quantity**: List the quantity of the records in the series listed. This could include the number of boxes, book shelves, file cabinet drawers, cubic feet, linear feet, megabytes, etc.
9. **Update Cycle**: Describe how often records are updated at this location (i.e. weekly, quarterly, annually, etc.).
10. **Salvage Instructions**: Briefly describe the necessity of salvaging this series (i.e. immediately, if necessary, etc.)
11. **Backup Information**: If there are copies of the record series listed and you do not use a separate line to describe them, note if the copies are on-site or off-site, and the location of the records.
12. **Submitting form**: Mail or e-mail this form to the address below [on form]. Fax copies will not be accepted.

Establishing an Essential Records Program

It is not mandated that the head of each state and local agency set up an essential records program, but it is a natural progression after creating the essential records listing, and simply good business practice. As stated previously, the up-front costs involved with identifying and protecting essential records are far less than those incurred recovering damaged records after a disaster.

An essential records program is often part of a business continuity, disaster preparedness or COOP plan. Planning for disasters highlights the services necessary to an agency after a disaster, including emergency treatment of people, repair and reconstruction of infrastructure, replacement of necessary equipment and furnishings, and protection of public records. An active, essential records

program will help insure the records you need most will be there when you need them.

For Executive branch state agencies, consult the Arizona Strategic Enterprise Technology (ASET), as they are responsible for developing a statewide disaster recovery plan for information technology (ARS §41-3504 A.1 (c)).

When putting together an essential records program, many issues must be considered. For instance, is the location of the records free from water and sewage pipes? Is the temperature consistent in your storage areas? Is access monitored by video cameras or is there a controlled key log? Are there multiple copies of these records? If so, where are they and in what format? Are the records truly unique and valuable only in their native format, and if so, should they be sent to an off-site location for secure protection? Should copies be made and retained for on-site use?

Duplicating records and maintaining them in separate locations or buildings should also be considered. When deciding to duplicate records, format stability, duplication costs, and physical storage location should be considered. Duplication methods depend on the native format of the original records and may include the following:

Paper	Microfilm	Electronic
Paper copies	Diazo microfilm copy	Mirrored off-site storage
Microfilm	Silver microfilm copy	Computer Output Microfilm
Digital images	Digital images	

If creating copies is part of your essential records program, it is important to disperse the records to other physical locations so they are not involved in the same potential disaster as the original records. Also, when disposing of records according to the custom and general retention schedules, remember to dispose of your copies at the same time.

Protecting Essential Records

Although there is no perfect solution to protecting essential records, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Protecting records from minor disasters is less costly and easier to accomplish than protecting them from major disasters. Being pro-active on building maintenance and not storing records in basements, or under water or sewage pipes, helps mitigate the amount of minor disasters an agency might have to handle. It also limits the costs and recovery time if a disaster does occur. Here are some steps that should be included in protecting essential records:

- Be pro-active on building maintenance—fix leaks, roofs, and window seals
- Don't store records under water or sewage pipes, in basements, or in storage sheds
- Store permanent records at least 3" off the ground according to state standards (http://www.azlibrary.gov/archives/documents/pdf/Standard%20for%20Permanent%20Records_April%2023%202013_Signed.pdf)
- Duplicate records and store in off-site locations

I'VE HAD A DISASTER, HELP!!

When a disaster does occur, your business continuity, disaster recovery or COOP plan goes into effect. If you have not created salvage instructions already, you should coordinate with first responders and upper management regarding essential records priority recovery.

The Standards for Permanent Records set by the State Library, per ARS § 39.101, requires agencies to recover and mitigate damage to the records as soon as possible:

Standards for Permanent Records
5.1 For all permanent records
D. Disaster Recovery
All records formats are susceptible to degradation, corruption and destruction during emergencies, disasters and environmental changes. Steps must be taken to ensure all essential and permanent records are protected during these events.

1. Disaster recovery and continuity of operations plans must specifically include permanent and essential record series in order to safeguard and preserve the record series.
2. Steps must be taken as soon as possible to recover and mitigate damage to the records.

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Recovering from a Disaster

Recovering from a disaster, large or small, can be a huge concern. Burned paper, microfilm, or computer media may not be recoverable. Smoke or water damaged records on most media can be restored, but may require specialized methods and equipment. Bio-contamination from raw sewage or chemical contamination can cause even greater problems. At any rate, recovery can be very expensive and the records may not be available for extended periods of time.

Commercial companies specializing in recovery processes are available, but they respond to prior contracted clients first in the case of a wide-scale disaster. Contact commercial companies before a disaster occurs to find out about their services and response times. Also, check the State Procurement Office to see who is listed on state contract for recovery services.

For assistance prior to or following a records disaster, contact Archives and Records Management staff at 602-926-3720 or archives@azlibrary.gov