INTRODUCTION TO RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Records and information management (RIM) is the systematic control of organizational information throughout its life cycle. Records are information assets and hold value for the organization. Local governments have a duty to all stakeholders to manage records effectively in order to control cost, maximize resources, and ensure the vitality of the organization. Effective records management ensures that the information needed is retrievable, authentic and accurate. This requires

- Setting and following organizational policies and best practices,

- Identifying who is responsible and accountable for managing records,

- Creating, communicating and executing procedures consistently, and

- Integrating best practices and process flows with other departments.

When trying to decide who is responsible for managing records and information, the answer is everyone. Each employee has an important role to play in protecting the future of the organization by creating, using retrieving and disposing of records in accordance with the organization's established policies and procedures.

Records are defined as recorded information, made or received by an organization that is evidence of its operations, and has value requiring its retention for a specific period of time.

Records Life Cycle – Records management is controlling the life span of records. Most records will go through four lifecycle stages:

- **Creation:** as correspondence, reports, forms, etc.

- **Active Life:** the records are being managed by each individual department for decision making, classifying and filing. During this stage, records are usually located in or near the offices of personnel using the information.

- **Semi Active Life:** records that have a reference of less than one time per month, have a retention rate of less than 20 years and are non-permanent should be locked in the Record Storage Center.

- **Inactive stage**: storage, preservation or disposal. The key to controlling inactive records is a good indexing system to aid in accessing and retrieving needed information. Records that have met or exceed the retention period should be destroyed. Permanent records are to be stored in an appropriate environment. In order to conserve storage space permanent and long-term records may be imaged for future reference.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT BASICS

After a record is created, it goes through three different stages in its life cycle. Each stage requires different storage and handling by the record owners.

Active Use	Semi-Active	Inactive
The record is being used by employees on a regular basis. Records are kept in a local filing system and/or computer	The record is used as a reference less than 3 times a month. The records may be indexed and moved to departmental storage or transferred to the County Record Storage Center if the retention period is less than 20 years.	If a record is no longer being used, past the retention period and has no historical value, destruction should be requested.. If permanent it may be imaged and the paper can be destroyed.

A Records Retention Schedule is a list of records series titles or categories, indicating the length of time each record series is to be maintained. The purpose of records retention schedules is to protect information while it has operational/administrative, legal, fiscal, regulatory and/or historical value.

Records Disposition: Records can be disposed of through shredding, burning, discarding or recycling.

Records Processes: The process of controlling records starts by classifying the records for easy access and retrieval. If records have not been classified, it may be necessary to identify or inventory existing records.

Once identified, it is recommended that a departmental index be created for all records. Standard record series titles are available by using the DORES records retention schedules available at http://www.nj.gov/treasury/revenue/rms/retention.shtml.

Conducting an annual record review identifies records that are considered inactive and eligible for storage. By moving inactive records out of active office areas, space becomes available for new or incoming records.

Cape May County's County Records Storage Center (RSC) provides storage, retrieval and disposal services to all County departments to help manage their inactive or archival records.

Active Records: Active records are required for current use by the department to conduct business.

Inventory: Active files should be reviewed annually to identify records that can be moved to inactive or semi active storage locations or those eligible for destruction.

Semi Active Records: Semi active records are still accessed; however they are not accessed as frequently as an active record, usually less than once a month. Semi active records are usually stored in a departmental or county storage location to conserve space for active records.

Inactive Records: Inactive records are those that the department no longer or rarely uses. If the record has met or exceeded its retention period, the department can begin the destruction process. If the record doesn't meet its retention period or it is considered to be a permanent record series, the department should contact Records Management to discuss alternatives for conserving office space.

Electronic Records: Records that have a long-term life span or require constant access should be considered for inclusion in Cape May County's enterprise-wide electronic imaging system, ApplicationXtender. These records will be scanned into the computer system to allow them to be easily accessible through the intranet or web access.

Departmental Storage Areas: Each department has access to a storage area for it's semi active records. Indexing is the key to controlling inactive records that are maintained in or near active office areas. An index must be maintained identifying the stored records, where they are located, the storing department, etc. Using a computer program, such as Microsoft Excel or Word, can make the indexing process much easier.

- All drawers and boxes should be labeled with the contents.

- Each box should have a unique identifier or number.

- Boxes should be properly stored on shelves.

- The inactive records and/or index should be reviewed annually to identify records eligible for destruction or transfer to the County's Records Storage Center.

CAPE MAY COUNTY RECORDS STORAGE CENTER (RSC)

Contact: Phone: 463-6449
                  Fax: 465-1022
                  Email: RIM@co.cape-may.nj.us

Location: Ground floor of the Cape May County Courts Complex
                  9 Main Street, Cape May Court House

The Records Storage Center provides off-site storage for non-permanent semi-active departmental records. Records remain in the department's ownership and control and may be removed from the Records Storage Center at any time. Department or division heads will be contacted for approval prior to the destruction of any of their records.

Submitting a Records Storage Request

Records that 1) have a reference rate of less than once per month, 2) have a retention rate of less than 20 years, and 3) are non-permanent, are candidates for transfer to the RSC. Departmental records should be reviewed on an annual basis to identify records of this type. The Coordinator is responsible for overseeing storage requests and verifying the validity of worksheets and index information.

The process for transferring records to storage is as follows:

1. Use the Records Retention Schedule to identify which boxes (or file drawers) potentially hold records that may be moved off-site for storage.

2. If necessary, transfer the records into standard-sized storage boxes that can be obtained from the Records Storage Center. Check each box to ensure that all files are the same records series and are eligible for transfer. Different record series should not be stored within the same box. Also remove items from the box that do not need to be stored, such as copies or items that have passed their retention period.

3. Assign an internal box number to each box. With a marker, write the box number on the end of the box.

4. Create an index of the items in each box so that they can be located at a later date. Place a copy of the index in the box. *Please inform the Records Center Clerk if any box contains confidential information or has archival value.*

5. Coordinators must complete all pertinent information on the Records Transfer Request for each box and sign the request before sending it to the Records Storage Center at DN 109 or submitting electronically through the County e-Forms Server.

6. Once a decision has been made to transfer the boxes to the RSC, labels for the boxes will be generated and forwarded to the department. The coordinator will place the identification labels on the upper right side of the corresponding box and retain a copy of the transmittal form for future reference.

7. RSC staff will contact Facilities & Services to arrange for the transfer of the records. F&S Coordinator must have a work order to transfer these records to the RSC. The Coordinator must accompany F&S to the location of the boxes to verify that the correct records are removed. Remember boxes can not be transferred without a Records Storage Center bar-coded label on each box.

SUBMITTING A RECORDS RETRIEVAL REQUEST

Permission must be granted by the storing department head or departmental coordinator in for records to be accessed by other members of the department. Permission can be done by via telephone, faxed, or in writing and must specify which records are to be made available.

1. Record retrieval requests should be submitted early in the day or no later than 3 p.m., so that they will be available for pick up the following day. Emergent retrievals may be made at any time during the workday.

2. Requests must include clear identification of the records to be retrieved and the assigned RSC box number where the records can be found.

3. Requested records will be made available in one of the following ways:

   - The entire box will be retrieved for pick up or delivery. Unless permanently withdrawn, the box should be returned to the RSC for re-shelving.

   - The requested file folder or document will be removed from the box for pick up or delivery. Unless permanently withdrawn, the records should be sent back to the RSC for return to the storage box.

   - The requested document is retrieved, a photocopy or fax is made for the department's use, and the original document is immediately re-filed in the

   - Storage box. The copy can be picked up, faxed or delivered and need not be returned to the RSC.

   A *'Request Tracking Memo'* will be generated by the records management system and must remain with the requested records until their return.

   When the records are returned to the RSC; sign and return the Tracking Memo as well.

SUBMITTING A RECORDS DESTRUCTION REQUEST

Records that 1) are no longer used, 2) have no legal, fiscal or historical significance, or 3) have completed their required retention periods as stipulated by the Records Retention Schedules are eligible for destruction. By law, all New Jersey government units must request and receive permission to destroy public records regardless of the medium in which the information is maintained. Records designated as permanent may not be destroyed.

When obsolete records are in the possession of the department that controls those records, the Coordinator is responsible for overseeing the request and verifying the destruction process. The process is as follows:

1. Use the Records Retention Schedule to identify which boxes (or file drawers) potentially hold records that may be destroyed.

2. Check each box to ensure that all files are the same records series and are eligible for destruction. If the box contains more than one records series, the destruction date is calculated from the record series with the longest retention period. Remove items from the box that are not eligible for destruction.

3. Assign a number to each box so that you can identify it at a later time.

4. Create an index of the items to be destroyed, if necessary.

5. Complete a *Request for Records Destruction Worksheet*. This worksheet can be found on the e-Forms Server. All required information must be included on the form.

6. Submit the form to the Records Manager at DN 109 for review and processing. The Records Manager may need to contact the Coordinator for corrections or modifications. After ensuring that the files are not required for litigation and may be legally destroyed, the Records Manager will create a Request and Authorization for Records Disposal form for Department Head signature.

7. Once this form is signed and returned to the Records Manager it will be forwarded to County Counsel, the Auditor, and the State to obtain the necessary approvals

8. When approvals have been received, the coordinator will place a work order for the records to be picked up from their departmental storage location and destroyed.

9. The coordinator must accompany F&S staff to the location of the boxes to verify that the correct boxes are removed. Each box should be checked off the worksheet as it is removed.

10. Once the records have been removed for shredding, it is the coordinator's responsibility to notify the Records Manager so the destruction request can be finalized.

11. After receiving verification of destruction, the Records Manager will send the completed forms to the State, to the Auditor, and the Requesting department to complete the process.