

Managing State Records in Alabama

The Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) is the official repository for historically significant government records, a special-collections library and research facility, and home to the Museum of Alabama, the state history museum.

ADAH staff work with state and local agencies to organize, manage, and preserve their records for long-term access. This work is vital to maintaining accountability and transparency by the government on behalf of current Alabamians and future generations.

Records Law in Alabama

Anyone elected, appointed, or hired to work at any level of state or local government, as well as anyone paid in whole or in part by government funds, is responsible for creating accurate records as part of their work (Code of Alabama 1975 36-12-1 through 36-12-2). Because these records are created in part or in whole with taxpayer money, government employees have a responsibility to be good stewards of records.

Moreover, no state officer or agency head shall cause any state record to be destroyed or otherwise disposed of without first obtaining approval of the State Records Commission (Code of Alabama 1975 41-13-21).

Records Disposition Authority

The Records Disposition Authority (RDA) is a document approved by the State Records Commission that identifies which agency records must be maintained permanently and when temporary records are eligible for destruction. Employees must retain records for at least as long as specified in the RDA but may opt to retain them longer.

RDAs for each state agency may be found under "Retention Schedules" on the "Manage Records" section of the ADAH website (www.archives.alabama.gov).

Permanent Records

Most permanent records listed in an agency's RDA are eligible to be transferred to the ADAH for preservation. Agencies should transmit permanent paper records when they are no longer actively referenced, while permanent electronic records can be transmitted at any time.

State agencies initiate the permanent records transmittal process by contacting the ADAH Records Management Section. Archivists will work with agency staff to transfer records and are available to answer questions during the process.

Electronic Records Storage

The most significant risk to the proper management of electronic records is saving them in improper locations.

Records should be saved in network locations that multiple employees can use. User-specific locations, such as computer desktops, "My Documents" folders, or OneDrive, are often deleted or inaccessible after employees leave an agency.

While software such as Microsoft Teams facilitates collaboration, shared files are often automatically deleted after a Teams channel becomes inactive. Employees should ensure that records exchanged in Teams are also stored in a designated network location to ensure that electronic records remain accessible for their retention period.

Agencies should use shared file storage with an organizational structure that all staff understand. This enables ongoing accessibility and mitigates risk of records loss. Additionally, for records to remain accessible over time, agencies may need to migrate electronic records from one user, computer, database, server, or cloud to another.

Electronic Records Retention

As with paper records, electronic records must be maintained for the timeframe specified in the RDA. Retention requirements are determined by the content of a record, rather than its format or storage location. For example, a work order submitted on paper and a work order submitted electronically must both be maintained for the same amount of time.

Records Destruction

An approved RDA constitutes your legal authority to dispose of eligible temporary records. Employees must report the destruction of paper and electronic temporary records to the agency's records liaison who, in turn, reports all agency records destruction to the ADAH annually.

Training

State employees may learn about training opportunities and sign up for free virtual training on the ADAH website (www.archives.alabama.gov/manage/training).

Stay Connected

An expanded Managing State Records in Alabama guide may be found on the "Manage Records" section of the ADAH website under "Publications" (www.archives.alabama.gov/manage/publications).

The ADAH's records management blog, For the Record (www.fortherecordalabama.blog), provides updates, news, and guidance about records retention, disposition, and preservation.

Contact Us

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