



Adequate Records Management in Perspective - Finding Official Records

What does finding official records mean?

Finding official records refers to the ability of an agency or authority to locate and access required official records upon demand.

By ensuring that its official records can be found, an agency will satisfy the requirements of Outcome 5 of the *Adequate Records Management -Meeting the Standard*.

What can be done to ensure official records are found?

Key steps that ensure state government agencies and local government authorities can locate records include:

- **capture records** (see *Recordkeeping Advice 006, Capturing Official Records* for further information) - capturing records into corporate records systems ensures records are organised and located in a manner that facilitates future access
- **describe records** (see *Recordkeeping Advice 007, Classifying Official Records* for further information) - descriptive information about records will provide an accessible short cut to the records. Such descriptive information is needed for all official records and is best developed to suit agency needs
- **make descriptive information widely available** - access across the agency by all staff to such valuable information or metadata enables quicker and easier retrieval of official records when and as required
- **dispose of records** (see *Recordkeeping Advice 012, Disposal of Official Records* for further information) – routine disposal of official records, whereby permanent records are sent to State Records and temporary value records are destroyed (if time expired) or sent to secondary storage, and associated documentation (e.g. consignment lists, destruction registers, etc) assists in the location of records
- **appropriately store records** (see *Recordkeeping Advice 008, Storing Official Records*, for further information) – effective storage of active, semi-active and inactive records assists in more easily locating records.

What tools are available to help my agency find its official records?

A number of tools exist to help staff find an official record. These tools are either manual or automated and usually search through the summary descriptive information. Such tools include:

- records management software packages
- spreadsheets developed by specific business teams or by a central point in the agency
- manual registers - such as ledgers or index cards
- document management software packages.

State Records recommends the procurement of an EDRMS to manage all official records based on business needs. Agencies should develop strategies to ensure existing manual and/or automated systems are phased out and where warranted, the data migrated to an EDRMS.

All the above tools require the entry of data into the system. Authority manuals, policies and procedures concerning data entry need to be developed and implemented so that the data is consistent across the agency. The benefits of such an approach means a standardised approach and no confusion amongst staff.

What are the benefits of being able to find official records on demand?

The benefits of being able to find official records on demand include:

- greater agency confidence in the recordkeeping system
- efficient customer service
- reduction in time spent searching
- reduction in costs in searching and retrieval
- improved agency accountability
- improved agency efficiency.

What are the costs of not being able to find official records?

Agencies unable to find official records on demand face:

- wasted resources
- costly searches
- costly retrieval of records from storage
- making decisions based on incomplete information - with potentially serious consequences
- political embarrassment
- possible disciplinary action from higher authorities within Government
- loss of legal proceedings if the agency is involved in a court action.

Further information

- State Records of South Australia, *Adequate Records Management – Meeting the Standard* (2002).
- State Records of South Australia, Records Management CD ROM.
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- State Records of South Australia, *Recordkeeping Metadata Standard, (SARKMS)* (2003).
- State Records of South Australia, *Developing a Functional Thesaurus Guidelines* (2002).
- State Records Authority of New South Wales, *Standard on Full and Accurate Records* (2004).

- Standards Australia, Australian Standard *AS ISO 15489-2002, Records Management* (2002).

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