



# GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

&

## RECORDS/INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

### General Procedures and Recommendations

***“Any Freedom of Information legislation is only as good as the quality of the records to which it provides access. Such rights are of little use if reliable records are not created in the first place, if they cannot be found when needed or if arrangements for their eventual archiving or destruction are inadequate”***

- Draft UK Code of Practice on the Management of Records

## **I. RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR INFORMATION AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

These Recommendations, while being of a general nature in the context of acceptable records management standards, are intended to provide a necessary support for the provisions of the Access to Information Act. This, it is believed, is necessary, given the seminal importance of good records management to the entire Access to Information Initiative.

They have been prepared with the approval of the Government Archivist who under the Archives Act, 1982, and the Archives (Official Records) Regulations, 1988 has statutory responsibility for the care and control of official records. Assistance has been obtained from practicing Information Management specialists, and is based on accepted records management guidelines and best practices.

Compliance with these Recommendations will not relieve a Public Authority from any additional duties which it may have pursuant to statutory provisions on Information and Records Management contained elsewhere.

Additional information can be obtained from:

**The Manager**  
**Government Records Centre**  
**57-63 Church Street, Kingston**  
**Tel: (876) 922-3705-6**  
**E-mail: [grecords@jard.gov.jm](mailto:grecords@jard.gov.jm)**

### **A. Responsibility for Records Management**

Under the Regulations to the Archives Act, the head of each government entity is responsible for the records of the entity. The records management function should be recognised as a specific corporate programme within a Public Authority and should receive the necessary levels of organisational support to ensure effectiveness.

The person(s) responsible for the records management function should maintain a collaborative, functioning relationship with the person(s) responsible for the administration of the provisions of the Access to Information Act.

## **B. Human Resources**

Staff responsible for records management should have the appropriate skills and knowledge necessary for the achievement of the aims of the records management programme. Human resource policies and practices of Public Authorities should address the need to recruit and retain quality staff.

Such policies and practices should support the records management function in the following contexts:

- the provision of adequate resources to enable the records management function to be maintained;
- the regular analysis of training requirements;
- the creation of a programme for the professional development of records management staff;
- the inclusion of an awareness of records management issues and practices in induction training programmes for new staff.

## **C. Main Components of a Records Management Programme**

A Public Authority's Records Management Programme should contain the following elements that are relevant to both paper and electronic records:

- **A Records Management Policy Statement**

An overall policy statement on how an entity manages all its records should be in place. It should be endorsed by senior management and made available to staff at all levels in the organisation. The policy should set out a commitment to create, keep and manage records which document principal activities.

It should also contain an outline of the role of records management and its relationship in general to the entity's overall strategy and in particular, to the administration of the Access to Information Act. Roles and responsibilities should be defined including the responsibility of ATI personnel to document their actions and decisions in the Public Authority's records. The Policy should include standards, procedures and guidelines.

The Policy Statement should be reviewed at regular intervals and amended as necessary to ensure its continued relevance.

- **Maintaining a Current listing of Records**

Each organisation should establish a system for the organisation and maintenance of its records. It is recommended that a database be created. An Inventory of the Records should therefore be kept to establish the exact number and title of records in the organisation. The system established should make provision for the movement of the records within the organisation.

- **Establishing a Tracking System**

Records created by a Public Authority should be arranged in a record management system which will ensure maximum benefit from the quick and easy retrieval of information. Paper and electronic record management systems should provide metadata (descriptive and technical documentation) to enable the system and the records to be understood and operated efficiently, and to provide an administrative context for effective management of the records. These systems should include a set of rules for referencing, titling, indexing and security marking of records.

The tracking system should be used to control the movement and location of records. This should be able to ensure that a record can be easily retrieved at any time, any outstanding issues can be dealt with and there is an auditable trail of record transactions.

Storage accommodation should be clean and tidy and it should prevent damage to the records. Equipment used for current records should provide storage which is safe from unauthorised access and which meets fire standards, but which allows maximum accessibility to the information commensurate with its frequency of use.

A contingency plan should be in place to provide protection for records which are vital to the continued functioning of the Public Authority

- **Records Retention and Disposition**

The disposal of government records when they cease to have value for the purposes for which they were created are governed by the Archives Act and Regulations. These state that records should not be destroyed without the approval of the Archives Advisory Committee. Records for which Public Authorities have no further use should be listed and the lists sent to the Government Archivist who is the Secretary of the Archives Committee.

- **An Appraisal System**

The first step in establishing a records retention/disposition programme is to undertake an appraisal of the records. Appraisal is the process of evaluating an organisation's activities and records to determine which records should be kept, and for how long, to meet the needs of the organisation, the requirements of Government accountability and the expectations of researchers and other users of the records.

Critical to this exercise is the development of a Selections Policy which should state in broad terms, the functions from which records are likely to be selected for permanent preservation and the periods for which other records should be retained (retention schedules). The policy should be linked to disposal schedules which should cover all records, including electronic records.

A record of the records for which permission had been obtained for their destruction should be maintained and preserved, and should show their reference, description, the reason for and the date of their destruction

- **Disposal Schedules**

- These schedules should be based on Selection Policies, indicating the appropriate disposition action for each record;
- A permanent record of any records destroyed, showing why they were destroyed, when and on whose authority should be maintained;

- Adequate storage for current, semi-current and historical records following appropriate building, environmental and security standards should be provided.

## **II. POINTS TO NOTE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND RETENTION/DISPOSAL SCHEDULES**

- a. The ATI Act is applicable to official documents created by or held by a Public Authority not earlier than thirty (30) years immediately preceding the appointed day (January 5, 2004). The Act is therefore applicable to official documents dating back to 1974.**
- b. It is to be noted, however, that within this period, the application of the Archives Act and Regulations regarding the development and use of retention/disposal schedules will still apply.**
- c. If an official document due for destruction is known to be the subject of an application for access to information under the Act, the destruction must be delayed until the application is processed and a decision made in whatever regard.**
- d. Where access to an official document has been deferred and the date for the destruction of the document falls within the period of deferment, the document must not be destroyed until access has been given.**
- e. Where access has been denied, or partial access only has been given, it would be prudent to further suspend the planned destruction of the document (s) for at least another 90 days or such other period as will facilitate a possible decision by the Applicant to pursue his right to internal review and/or appeal to the Appeal Tribunal or for Judicial review.**

## **D. The Challenges and Management of Electronic Record Keeping**

***“New technology poses opportunities for managing records well and making information readily available to larger numbers of people than ever before, but electronic record-creation and storage also throws up complex challenges. Paper based systems are tangible and relatively easily centralised. Increasingly though, official communication is becoming virtual and being done via email. Communication is faster, but more records are created and more are stored in personal spaces rather than common work areas. Details of sequencing, opinions and decisions can be easily distorted or lost unless modern systems of storage and retrieval are in place.***

***The authenticity of records can be seriously compromised if electronic records and paper records do not correlate. If not managed carefully, institutional memory will be severely harmed and governments’ ability to remain accountable to the public can disintegrate. Electronic records are increasingly being accepted in courts as evidence. Therefore, if systems are not in place to guarantee integrity of these documents, justice could be the casualty.....”***

**- COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE 2003 REPORT:  
Looking For The Right To Information In The Commonwealth**

The principal issues for the management of electronic records are the same as those for the management of any record. They include the creation of authentic records, the tracking of records and final disposition arrangements. Effective electronic record keeping requires:

- A clear understanding of the nature of electronic records;
- the creation of records and metadata necessary to document business processes and this should be part of the systems which hold the records;
- the maintenance of a structure of folders to reflect logical groupings of records;
- the secure maintenance of the integrity of the electronic records;

- the accessibility and use of electronic records for as long as required (which may include their migration across systems);
- the application of appropriate disposal procedures, including procedures for archiving;
- the ability to cross reference electronic records to their paper counterparts in a mixed environment;
- audit trails should be provided for all electronic information and documents.