



*New York State
Archives*

Guidelines for Storage of Inactive Government Records

November 2021



The University of the State of New York
The State Education Department
New York State Archives
Government Records Services
Albany, New York 12230
www.archives.nysed.gov

Guidelines for Storage of Inactive Local Government Records

Archives Technical Information Series #42, 48 and 65 1993, rev., 1996, 2006, 2021

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Evaluating Potential Storage Facilities**
- 3. Shelving Recommendations**
- 4. Determining Space and Other Considerations**
- 5. Offsite Storage Facilities**
- 6. Checklist**

1. Introduction

Local governments and state agencies in New York are required to maintain their records until they can be legally disposed. Legal disposition is authorized through records retention and disposition schedules issued by the State Archives. While they are actively used and needed for day-to-day activities, records are typically maintained in office space where they are readily accessible. However, many records become less frequently used and are not actively needed to conduct business, but still must be retained for a period of time for legal or business purposes. These are inactive records.

This publication focuses on the administration and storage inactive records in an inactive storage area or facility, outside of active office space. There is an emphasis on physical records, paper, electronic storage media, and microfilm, rather than digital records.

Separating active from inactive records and transferring the inactive to storage provides several benefits:

- Allows additional space for active files
- Reduces staff time necessary for access and retrieval
- Decreases the chances of misfiling
- Increases efficiency of records disposition
- Avoids the purchase of costly new equipment
- Cuts storage costs dramatically

Once a local government or state agency identifies inactive records through a records inventory and determines their legal retention periods according to relevant schedules, it can formulate policies and procedures for their transfer to proper storage.

This publication focuses on the task of setting up inactive records storage facilities, it also discusses what to do if a government needs to use a non-governmental offsite storage facility. State agencies are encouraged to utilize the [State Records Center](#) for low-cost, secure storage of their inactive records. The State Records Center facility is located on the Harriman Office

Building Campus in Albany and provides a secure, climate-controlled environment with policies and procedures for the storage, retrieval, and disposition of inactive records.

2. Evaluating Potential Storage Facilities

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Frequently, a local government has few options when settling two questions: "Will the inactive records storage area be in-house or off-site?" and "Where will the site be located?" The answers are usually dictated by budget, local needs, and availability. The New York State Archives provides grant funds through the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF) to help local governments develop or improve records storage. This includes purchase of boxes, folders, shelving units and storage cabinets. Purchase or construction of a records storage facility is not eligible for funding.

There are five possibilities for sites for storing inactive records:

- Rooms within an existing local government facility
- Separate building, rented or leased
- New construction
- Commercial storage
- Storage facility that is shared with another government

Ideally the location might be a large, secure, environmentally sound area on the ground floor of the government's office building, adjacent to a loading dock and with access to a freight elevator. If the site must be outside the local government building, it should be close enough to permit 24-hour turnaround time for records retrievals. The location should have Internet service, parking for vehicles, adequate security, and access via passable roads.

Regardless of where records are stored, the same concerns must be addressed:

- Costs
- Physical Structure
- Security
- Space Requirements
- Environmental Conditions
- Safety
- Operation

COSTS:

There are costs associated with a records storage area or facility depending on the size, level of sophistication and operational need. Regardless, the minimal requirement for a storage facility is the ability to make it secure, a simple door lock, basic environmental protections such as air conditioning can make the storage area a safe, effective facility. A simple, low-cost facility requires boxes, labels, and shelving. If the facility is larger, equipment such as pallet jacks, ladders, barcode scanners, microfilm scanner/printers, or fire and flood resistant vaults are

additional options. However, it is almost always the case that it is less expensive to store records in a dedicated storage facility than in an office.

Within an office, the normal ratio of stored files to floor space is 1:1 (cubic foot/square foot). In a records storage area, the ratio will be much larger and may range from 2:1 to 5:1 or much higher, depending on the type of shelving, ceiling height, and live floor load, this is the weight capacity the floor can support. In addition, records most center storage equipment costs almost a third less than traditional office cabinets and shelves, and records center floor space costs two thirds less than office floor space.

To gather hard data for illustrating storage facility cost savings, an important factor in justifying budgets, grants and in writing annual reports, the following methods can be employed.

Standard file drawer cabinets hold 5,000 pages or 1.5 standard/cubic foot records boxes with room for growth.

Based on current estimates, vertical files may cost:

- Two-drawer vertical files - **\$20 to \$150**
- Five-drawer vertical files - **\$250 to \$1,000**
- Fire and water resistant- Two-drawer models - **\$1,000 to \$1,500**
- Fire and water resistant- Five-drawer models - **\$1,500 to \$4,000**

Governments should not only examine short term cost savings of inactive records storage but also the long-term savings that is possible. For example, a basement room with empty shelving in the local government facility may suffice for the next couple of years and greatly reduce storage costs as well as provide quick easy access and retrieval. However, leaking pipes, high humidity, rodent infestation, and mold can be common in these areas. Each of these issues will negatively affect the stored records.

Commercial storage may provide a solution for inactive storage, but governments must consider all the costs associated with commercial storage. In addition to the cost for storage, there may be costs for transporting records to and from the site, charges for retrieving and replacing or destroying records, staff time taken up with reference requests to the storage facility, and the time necessary to receive requested material.

There are pros and cons to each of the five site categories. When examining the options available, have a checklist on hand delineating all aspects to consider, not only costs.

(See **Checklist** for a sample list)

PHYSICAL STRUCTURE:

This section will focus on the requirements to ensure a safe structure for records and staff.

Involving the building maintenance supervisor and a contractor or engineer early in the site selection process will prove very helpful.

They can help determine the following:

- Floor strength of the site
- Location and strength of area's fire walls, preferably rated for safety for four hours
- Live load requirements for the roof if it is a one-story structure
- Soundness of the structure
- Location and condition of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system
- Location and soundness of electrical and plumbing systems
- Feasibility of installing internet or network lines
- Configuration of light fixtures and switches
- Existence of loading docks and elevators to ease transfer of records
- Sprinkler or other fire suppression system

Basements and attics are commonly used for records storage space. However, unless these spaces offer the proper environment to store records long term, they are not typically an effective option. The moisture and humidity that is usually found in basements help promote mold growth as well as insect or rodent infestation. Basements are also prone to flooding compared to the rest of the facility. Attics have massive temperature fluctuations that can damage records as well as increased possibility of water damage due to proximity to the roof of the structure. Having information like this ahead of time will eliminate costly problems and surprises down the road as well as aid in site selection, when there is a choice.

Records custodians have many options for protecting records and archives. A combination of passive and active security measures such as a fire-suppression will provide the highest level of protection. Making the right decision means assessing your unique situation, researching your options, consulting with State Archives staff, your government's code enforcement department, and the [New York Department of State's Division of Building Standards and Codes](#)

SECURITY:

The records stored in any location must be secure from unauthorized viewing or disclosure. To protect records, the facility should have restricted access.

A government can help restrict access by the following:

- Doors should have locks
- Number of keys should be limited
- Only authorized personnel should have access
- There should be no windows, particularly on ground floor facilities
- If funds are available, alarm systems should be installed
- Random ordering of boxes to prevent unauthorized access
- Some governments may want to use RFID tags on valuable items/records

3. SHELVING RECOMMENDATIONS:

Shelving is a vital part of records management and storing inactive records and choosing units that support your needs will help your government or organization use space efficiently and avoid frustration.

Recommendations:

- **Heavy-duty steel shelving**
 - Best choice is powder-coated or baked enamel metal shelving.
 - Painted or wooden shelves are not recommended
- **18-gauge or lower**
 - Smaller the gauge number, the stronger the shelving
 - Over time weaker shelving may buckle
- Calculate **weight capacity** needs and select shelves that meet or exceed them
 - To choose what shelving would work best for you
 - First determine the number of boxes you will be storing per shelf
 - The estimated weight of a standard records storage box when full is approximately 35 pounds
 - A 42"-wide shelf 16" deep holds one row of boxes (three across) which is approximately 105 pounds
 - A 42"-wide shelf which is double-deep (30" or 32") and stacked two- high will hold twelve boxes and approximately 420 pounds
- **42 inches wide**
 - Allows for a row of three standard records center cartons
 - (12" wide x 15" long x 10" high)
 - Large records centers may consider steel shelving that is 8 feet (96") wide
- **16 or 32 inches deep**
 - 16"-deep shelving will hold a row of boxes one-deep; 32" allows for boxes two-deep on each shelf
 - These depths prevent boxes from hanging over the edge of the shelf

Height varies with needs and height of room

- The appropriate height for shelving will depend on your records storage needs and the size of your records storage facility.
- Standard heights range from 5 to 10 feet, with 3 or 4 inches added to keep the bottom shelf off the floor.
- Shelving 6 or 7 feet high is the most common.
- Always allow for at least 1 foot between the cartons on the top shelves and lighting fixtures or ductwork.

- Sprinkler heads should be at least 1½ feet above the cartons to allow the sprinklers to distribute water evenly.

Other Considerations

- Shelving arrangement
 - Arrange shelving in the most cost-effective scheme possible.
- Number of shelves per unit
 - Small number of long rows of shelving is more economical than many short
- Placement
 - Shelving should run parallel to the direction of airflow and perpendicular to ceiling light fixtures
 - Leave a few inches of free space between the shelving unit and the wall to allow for circulation
 - Bottom shelves should be approximately 4 to 6 inches from the floor for protection against flooding
- Access
 - Shelving arrangement should allow for aisles between 36-48 inches wide
 - Satisfies requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act
 - If shelving height requires platform ladders, aisle width may need to be increased
 - Bays should be a maximum of 50 feet
 - at least one and a half feet away from any walls to meet Federal standards
 - Consider mobile shelving to save space and allow quick access
- Safety
 - **Never** place directly beneath overhead water pipes
 - Pipes should parallel the aisles and do not hang above your shelving
 - Consider other items in the room
- **Tipping may also be caused by an uneven floor to stop this, do the following:**
 - Inspect shelving after assembly but before anchoring
 - Use a shim to fill any gaps beneath posts.
 - After view rows from both ends and from above

If this is confirmed then shelves should be anchored to the floor, particularly if the top shelf is eight feet or above.

To choose the best shelving for your needs, determine the number of boxes per shelf. Based on the approximate weight of 35 pounds per box, check the weight capacity of the steel shelving and choose accordingly.

4. Determining SPACE REQUIREMENTS:

The space necessary for a government's records needs to be determined prior to moving the records to a location or building a facility. A records inventory is key to determining space requirements for a records storage facility. The inventory forms document the volume of inactive records as well as their formats: paper, microfilm, electronic physical media, maps, blueprints, and so forth. More information about conducting an inventory and examples of inventory forms

can be found in the following publication: [Inventory and Planning: The First Steps in Records Management](#).

If the storage facility includes archival records, the inventory will also indicate the volume and format of these. Keep in mind that archival records, which need to be kept permanently, have different storage requirements from the remaining inactive records.

When determining the volume of records for storage, governments should plan for cumulative growth of approximately 30 percent. When tracking of facility activities is established, the average annual growth can be better determined. A government also needs to keep the idea of converting their paper records to digital images to improve access and simultaneously increase available space as an option.

Standard records center cartons are designed for inactive records storage with their one cubic foot capacity, easy assembly, side openings for handles, and shallow yet snug lids.

DETERMINING SPACE REQUIREMENTS:

Here are two methods for figuring **space requirements** for the facility

First method:

- $\frac{\text{Volume of Records}}{\text{Height} \times .365} = \text{Floor Area Required}$
- $\frac{\text{Volume of Records}}{\text{Floor Area} \times .365} = \text{Ceiling Height Required}$
- $\text{Floor Area} \times \text{Height} \times .365 = \text{Volume Capacity}$

This first method accounts for aisle space but **not for workspace**.

Second method:

- Calculate the cubic feet of inactive records
 - Increase by 30 percent for cumulative growth
 - Then divide the total by the relevant factor listed below:

Cartons Shelved	Factor
8 high	3.00
10 high	3.75
12 high	4.50
4 high	5.25

- Remember to allow for space to work with the records.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS:

The records need to be stored under the proper environmental conditions to facilitate their preservation. Without proper conditions, records can become damaged and the possibility of mold increases. To ensure this governments should work with maintenance when applicable and follow the guidelines suggested below:

- Temperature and humidity should fluctuate as little as possible
- Temperature should and fall between 65-72 degrees Fahrenheit
- Relative Humidity should be between 40-55 percent.
- Area should be cleaned thoroughly before transfer of records
- HVAC system must have adequate air circulation
- Consult with conservators for best methods to
 - Reduce dust
 - Prevent mold
 - Avoid insect and rodent infestation
 - State Archives staff can help identify conservators
- Windows should have blinds or shades to protect records from damage from sunlight
- Purchase ultraviolet filter shields if light fixtures are near archival records

SAFETY:

Records storage areas must be protected. Keep [these in mind](#) when examining sites.

- Be aware of local fire regulations and building codes
- The facility should include a smoke detector/sprinkler system
- Facility should have fire extinguishers located at strategic points

Governments must also protect their records from water damage.

- Check for leaks through the roof or overhead pipes and of potential flooding
- Consider installation of floor water alarms
- Avoid any potential facility that is in a flood plain

Disaster prevention and planning will greatly reduce any potential damage

Disaster prevention and recovery information for governments including appropriate plans for [disaster preparation and recovery](#) can be found on the New York State Archives website. This includes names and contact information for [disaster recovery vendors](#).

Government staff can always contact State Archives staff for help via email at RECMGMT@nysed.gov or call us at 518-474-6926. We will respond as soon as possible.

OPERATION:

Even after addressing all the above, a government's records storage facility will fail unless there is a plan for administering inactive records.

- There must be staff available to:
 - Transfer and process records
 - Arrange records on shelves
 - Develop retrieval and locator systems
 - Answer reference questions
 - Follow disposal policies
- Responsibility for managing staff records management activities falls to
 - The Records Management Officer or (RMO)
- One of RMO's primary duties
 - Ensure staff compliance with operational policies and procedures

For additional information on administering an inactive records facility as well as forms to assist with this see: [Administration of Inactive Records](#).

5. OFFSITE STORAGE FACILITIES:

Governments lacking sufficient storage space for their inactive records may wish to consider storage in a facility other than space they own or lease, such as storage with a commercial storage facility or with another local government. This storage is referred to as off-site storage in this publication. State agencies can always store their records offsite at the [State Records Center](#).

Records stored outside of the government's own facilities continue to be the legal responsibility of the local government. The government must ensure their preservation, accessibility, and retention as required by The Local Government Records Law which is part of the [Arts and Cultural Affairs Law](#). The Local Government Records Law states that records may be transferred and stored offsite with the consent of the Commissioner of Education (the Commissioner has authorized the State Archives to act on his/her behalf).

The regulations of the Commissioner of Education (8 NYCRR Part 185) states that contracts for storage of local government records outside of the local government's facilities must meet criteria established by the Commissioner and be approved by the Commissioner (the Commissioner has authorized the State Archives to act on his/her behalf).

- **Criteria for off-site storage suggested by New York State Archives:**
 - State Archives must approve records being stored offsite
 - Written agreement must be prepared and approved by the government
 - Before transfer of records
 - Facilities should be secure and equipped with steel shelving
 - Guidelines written for
 - Transfer
 - Withdrawal
 - Disposition of records
 - Procedures for access

Please note that the Office of Court Administration has issued a policy statement that governs the off-site storage of court records. The policy statement discusses conditions for off-site storage and provides guidelines. Local governments considering storing court records off-site should

follow this policy statement and seek guidance from the Office of Court Administration, 25 Beaver Street, New York, NY 10004.

SELECTION OF FACILITY:

Governments should consider several factors when selecting a nongovernment records facility:

- **Services**
 - Does the facility provide all the services required at the present?
 - And those likely in the future?
- **Location**
 - Is the facility reasonably close to the government?
 - How long will it take to retrieve and transport records?
 - Is the facility located near any potential hazards, natural or man-made?
- **Security**
 - What security does the facility provide against unauthorized access?
 - What is in place to ensure that records are not
 - Misplaced, mislabeled, damaged, altered, or stolen?
- **Reliability**
 - How likely is the service to be dependable?
 - Ask for references, preferably other governments
- **Cost**
 - How much will the storage cost?
 - How much will other services cost?
 - Transporting, retrieving, and copying
 - Will costs increase as time passes?

WRITTEN AGREEMENT:

In developing an agreement for storage with a commercial records center or another government, the guidelines listed below should be followed.

Legal requirements for the maintenance and accessibility of records must be met if records are stored off-site. The balance of responsibilities between the government and the storage facility must be spelled out in a written agreement, discussed below.

Local governments should give special attention to the following in the written agreement:

- **Custodial responsibility.**
 - The off-site facility exercises only **physical** custody
 - The local government retains legal custody and legal responsibility for the records
- **Records management responsibility**
 - Arrangements for off-site storage must coincide with the RMO's responsibilities

- **Security and preservation**
 - The facility must be built of fire-resistive materials
 - Have a fire detection and alarm system
 - Have provision for fire suppression
 - Have environmental controls which regulate temperature and humidity
 - Should have a security system including cameras
- **Accessibility**
 - Provisions for access must be worked out before records are sent to storage
 - Records in storage must be accessible to the office and to authorized users
 - Offsite facility makes records available to the local government
 - Within the time constraints imposed under NY Freedom of Information Law (FOIL)
 - Must safeguard records that are confidential
- **Disposition**
 - Provision should be made for the eventual disposition of the records.
 - Disposal in line with appropriate schedules
 - And disposition requirements for confidential records such as shredding specifications
 - Provisions for permanent retention, management, preservation, and use.
 - Destruction of obsolete records authorized only by RMO

The local government's counsel should be involved in developing the agreement and/or should approve it before it is finalized.

The following issues should be addressed in the written agreement:

- **Names of parties involved**
 - The agreement includes the name and address of the government, the RMO or other official responsible for the records
 - The name and address of the storage facility
- **Duration**
 - For a period of five years or less
 - Subject to review and renewal
 - Periodic review of both the records and the storage services by the government
- **Costs**
 - The agreement should spell out
 - Storage costs
 - Cost of retrieving records
 - Cost of transportation
 - Costs of any special services
 - Such as storing microfilm and physical electronic media

- **List and description of the records**

- The agreement should include a complete list of the records
 - Including the name of the records series, according to retention schedule
 - Inclusive dates
 - Quantity/volume
 - Number of volumes, boxes, or cubic footage
 - Type
 - Paper files, bound volumes, physical electronic media, microfilm rolls or video tapes
 - Physical condition of the records

Approval of the agreement by

- Legal custodian of the records
- Records Management Officer
- Government's Counsel
- Chief executive and governing body by formal resolution
- Vendor

CONCLUSION:

State Archives staff can assist organizations in assessing their records storage needs and developing plans to meet them, including considerations for storage in inactive records facilities whether offsite or their own facilities.

For further information, contact the State Archives:

State Archives

State Education Department

Room 9A47 Cultural Education Center

Albany, New York 12230

www.archives.nysed.gov

(518) 474-6926

RECMGMT@nysed.gov

Appendix

INACTIVE RECORDS STORAGE SITE SELECTION

CHECKLIST

I. GENERAL SITE INFORMATION

- NAME OF BUILDING: _____
- AGE OF BUILDING: _____
- ADDRESS: _____
- NO. OF FLOORS: _____
- CURRENT USE: _____
- ORIGINAL USE: _____
- DISTANCE FROM LOC.GOV'T OFFICES: _____
- DIMENSIONS OF STORAGE AREA:
 - length: _____ ft;
 - width: _____ ft;
 - height _____ ft;
- CAPACITY OF STORAGE AREA: _____ cubic ft

II. GENERAL BUILDING FEATURES

- IS THE RECORD STORAGE AREA ON ONLY ONE FLOOR? YES ___ NO ___
- DOES THE BLDG HAVE A LOADING DOCK? YES ___ NO ___
- DOES THE BLDG HAVE A FREIGHT ELEVATOR? YES ___ NO ___
- WOULD THE BLDG BE USED SOLELY FOR RECORDS STORAGE? YES ___ NO ___

- IS BLDG WITHIN TOLL-FREE DIALING AREA FROM LOCAL GOVT? YES ___
NO ___

- IS THERE ADEQUATE PARKING SPACE? YES ___ NO ___

III. STORAGE AREA FEATURES

- DOES FACILITY HAVE SUITABLE AREA FOR OFFICE(S)? YES ___ NO ___
- ARE THEIR REST ROOMS AND DRINKING WATER NEAR STORAGE AREA?
YES ___ NO ___
- IS THERE SPACE FOR RECORDS PROCESSING AND DISPOSAL? YES ___ NO ___
- IS THERE SPACE FOR MICROFILMING/FILM PROCESSING? YES ___ NO ___
- IS THERE SPACE FOR RESEARCHERS, IF APPLICABLE? YES ___ NO ___
- IS THERE ADEQUATE LIGHTING FOR RECORDS ACTIVITIES? YES ___ NO ___

IV. SAFETY/SECURITY FEATURES

- IS THERE A SECURITY ALARM CONNECTED TO LOCAL POLICE STA.? YES
NO
- IS THERE A FIRE ALARM CONNECTED TO LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT? YES
NO ___
- DOES THE BLDG/STORAGE AREA HAVE A SPRINKLER SYSTEM? YES ___ NO
- IS IT A DRY PIPE SPRINKLER SYSTEM? YES ___ NO ___
- ARE THERE WATER PIPES IN AREA OTHER THAN SPRINKLER PIPES? YES
NO ___

- DO DOORS TO STORAGE AREA HAVE DEADBOLT LOCKS AND/OR ALARMS?

YES ___ NO ___

- ARE THERE SMOKE OR HEAT DETECTORS? YES ___ NO ___

- ARE THERE WINDOWS? YES ___ NO ___

- HOW MANY? _____

- SECURE FROM UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY? YES ___ NO ___

V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

- IS THE STORAGE AREA HEATED? YES ___ NO ___

- IS THE STORAGE AREA AIR-CONDITIONED? YES ___ NO ___

- IS THERE AIR VENTILATION/CIRCULATION? YES ___ NO ___

- DOES THE AREA HAVE A SEPARATE HVAC SYSTEM? YES ___ NO ___

- ARE THERE TEMPERATURE/HUMIDITY CONTROLS? YES ___ NO ___

- ARE LIGHTS ADEQUATE DISTANCE FROM SHELVES? YES ___ NO

- ARE LIGHTS OFF WHEN AREA NOT IN USE? YES NO

- IF THERE ARE WINDOWS, DO THEY HAVE SHADES/BLINDS? YES NO

- ARE THERE POTENTIAL WATER LEAKS? YES NO

VI. EQUIPMENT

- IS THERE SHELVING IN THE STORAGE AREA? YES ___ NO ___

◦ IF SO, DESCRIBE: (FIXED,MOBILE,ETC./DIMENSIONS)

- ARE THERE FILE CABINETS (PAPER,MICROFORM)? YES ___ NO ___

- IF SO, HOW MANY AND WHAT SIZE: _____
- ARE THERE MAP CASES OR OTHER STORAGE FURNITURE?
 - IF SO, DESCRIBE: _____
- ARE THERE LADDERS (STEP/PLATFORM),PALLETS,DOLLIES? YES ___ NO ___
 - IF SO, DESCRIBE: _____
- **STRUCTURAL SOUNDNESS - (section for qualified professional)**
- WHAT MATERIALS WERE USED IN CONSTRUCTING WALLS/FLOORS/ROOF? _____

- CAN FLOOR SUPPORT MINIMUM LOAD OF 300lbs/sq.ft.? YES ___ NO ___
- IS THE ROOF NON COMBUSTIBLE CONSTRUCTION? LEAKPROOF? YES ___ NO ___
- ARE COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS PRESENT (FURNACES,BOILERS, TRANSFORMERS...)? YES ___ NO ___
- IF THE STORAGE AREA IS BELOW GRADE, IS THERE EVIDENCE OF, OR FAVORABLE CONDITIONS FOR, SEEPAGE? YES ___ NO ___
- IS THE SURROUNDING TERRAIN/ENVIRONMENT SUCH THAT FLOODING OF THE BUILDING IS POSSIBLE? YES ___ NO ___

- IF FLOODING IS POSSIBLE, IS A SUMP PUMP CONNECTED TO AN
ANCILLARY POWER SUPPLY? YES ___ NO ___
- IF PRESENT, ARE SPRINKLER HEADS INDEPENDENTLY DISCHARGEABLE?
YES ___ NO ___