HOW TO DEVELOP A RECORDS PROCEDURES MANUAL

New York State Unified Court System
Division of Court Operations
Office of Records Management

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PURPOSE OF THIS PUBLICATION:

This publication is developed as a tool to demonstrate how simple it is to create a Records Procedures Manual for your court or office. It describes who should develop the manual, the basic steps needed in developing a Manual, featured items that should be included in the Manual, and what to do after completing your Manual. It also provides the names of persons that you contact from the Office of Records Management if you have any questions or need further assistance in developing your Manual.

PURPOSE OF THE MANUAL:

In order to smoothly continue the operations of an existing records program, a good thing to do is to create a Record Procedures Manual for your files. Many courts/offices have developed a records program for their files but have failed to document their records program. And, as result, a common problem occurs when a fully trained records person is not available and a not so fully trained records person is left in charge of the filing system and does not know where files can be found, retrieved and maintained in the existing filing system. A major tool that can be developed and used to alleviate this problem is to create a Records Procedures Manual which can later be used to train all records staff on the existing records program.

A Records Procedures Manual should describe all the features of the records program of the court/office that will guarantee that the records program can be continued smoothly into the future. These features should include information on where and/or how records are stored, retrieved, and destroyed. It should also include any policy and procedures that may effect the records operations of the court/office. And, it should document the steps that will be needed to implement the UCS Records Retention & Disposition Schedules for the disposing of records that reached their retention and the preservation methods needed for permanent records.

After the Records Procedures Manual is developed and records staff has been fully trained with the use of the Manual, the records staff should be able to take charge of the record operations for those instances when other fully trained records staff are not available.

WHO SHOULD DEVELOP THE MANUAL:

The primary candidate for developing a Records Procedures Manual should be the employee who is fully knowledgeable and responsible for creating, preparing, processing, storing, and disposing of your records. The Manual should be developed and applied to all records that are used and maintained by your office.

BASIC STEPS FOR DEVELOPING A RECORDS PROCEDURES MANUAL:

1. **List the names and positions of personnel that are assigned the responsibility of managing the records.**

2. **Describe the relationships and responsibilities between records management staff and the court/office.**

3. **Write a description that precisely defines the established uniform policies and procedures that are in place for the creation, processing, retention, and destruction of the records for the court or office.**

4. **Describe the general instructions and guidance that will act as a source for all personnel who create, use, and maintain the records.**

5. **Encourage an understanding among the records staff of the basic principles of good records management and a recognition of the advantages that will result.**

6. **Promote constructive suggestions for improving the existing records program from staff.**

7. **Describe clearly in the Manual and to staff any changes that are made to the records management policies and procedures.**

8. **Provide a precise and complete description on how staff is to implement the UCS' Records Retention & Disposition Schedules and Records Management Policies.**

9. **Train all new personnel on how records are to be managed using the Records Procedures Manual.**

INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN THE MANUAL:

1. RECORDS INVENTORY:

A complete physical inventory of all records is to be created. The inventory must contain the names/types of records retained, years these records were created, locations of where records are stored (whether it is a file cabinet, shelf, building, floor, etc.), medium stored on (paper, electronic, microfilm, etc.), and years for records that were destroyed.

2. FILING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

Filing polices and procedures must be written precisely and clearly so records management staff can easily understand and implement them. The filing system must be clearly defined whether it uses color coding systems, bar coding systems, rubber stamps, file codes, etc. for managing the records. A copy of the Office of Records Management Guidelines is to be included with these policies and procedures.

3. RECORDS RETENTION AND DISPOSITION SCHEDULES:

A copy of the appropriate UCS Records Retention & Disposition Schedules for the court/office must be included.

4. RECORDS DISPOSITION REQUEST FORMS:

A copy of all approved Records Disposition Request Forms must be included and maintained permanently. These Forms document which records were destroyed.

5. RECORDS STORAGE HOLDINGS LIST:

If records are stored off-site or at a remote part of the same building, a records storage holdings' list must be created and be included in Manual for all records that are stored. The records storage holdings' list must include names of records being stored, range of years, box identification letters/numbers, and locations of where the stored records can be found and/or retrieved. Make sure the List is updated when boxes have been added and permanently removed from storage.

6. RECORDS SEARCH AUTHORIZATION/ACCESS LIST:

A Records Search Authorization/Access List if created for files should be included and maintained in the Manual. The List should include the names of all authorized personnel who are allowed to retrieve records from storage sites and/or at the court/office. Make sure the List is updated with the changing of staff.

7. RECORDS DISASTER PREVENTION & RECOVERY PLAN:

A copy of the current Records Disaster Prevention & Recover Plan if created should be included and maintained in the Manual.

8. VITAL RECORDS SCHEDULE & RECOVERY PROGRAM:

A copy of the current Vital Records Schedule & Recovery Program if created should be included and maintained in the Manual.

9. RECORDS STAFF PASSWORD/IDENTIFICATION ACCESS CODES:

Passwords/Identification Access Codes if generated for electronic filing systems for Records Staff should be surrendered when an employee leaves service.

10. MICROFILM AND ELECTRONIC RECORDS CERTIFICATION FORMS:

A copy of all Microfilm and Electronic Records Certification Forms if generated for records maintained in selected microfilm or electronic formats should be included and maintained in the Manual.

AFTER COMPLETING THE MANUAL:

Retain one master copy of the Records Procedures Manual permanently. This master copy should include all updates/revisions that are made to the Manual. These updates will document the history of changes made in the past of the court's/office's records program. The updates or revisions to the Manual must be distributed to all persons involved with the records and the records staff.

The master copy of the Manual should be maintained on-site at the court/office. A second copy of the master should be made and be maintained off-site at a remote location in the case of a disaster at the on-site location. All updates must be sent to the off-site location and kept with the second copy to make sure that the second copy matches perfectly the master copy of the Manual.

A copy of the Records Procedures Manual should be distributed to all persons involved with the records and the records staff. An easy way to distribute copies is to create an electronic version of the Manual and place it on your court's/office's homepage if you have one, or you can e-mail copy to persons.

For Further Assistance: please call the Office of Records Management at 212-428-2875.