Electronic Records Management Guidelines
Introduction

You have likely heard the old saying, "the more things change, the more they stay the same." In many ways this saying reflects the increasing reliance on technology by government agencies to create and manage records. As a government employee, you use computers to send e-mail, create spreadsheets, compose letters and reports, publish information on the Internet, and manage databases. The information that you create, store, share, or reference often results in records that document important agency activities. By performing your job, you generate records. Although the technology you use to create records has changed, the responsibility to manage the records you create has not.

Records come in many varieties including paper, electronic, audio, video, and microfilm. To support a wide range of formats, an agency may need to manage several distinct recordkeeping systems. For example, an agency might conduct its official business in paper; yet rely on a computer information system to create the paper and to provide a quick and easy electronic reference. Keep in mind that electronic systems require the same or, in many cases, larger effort to manage the records you create and maintain on them.

South Carolina law and federal rules mandate that, regardless of format, much of what you create must be treated as **official records**. Determining what is important requires some deliberation.

Records management is a collaborative process involving different members inside your organization including records creators, information technology administrators, the legal and audit departments, and senior management. South Carolina Department of Archives and History staff are available to advise public entities on best recordkeeping practices and must be consulted before any **public record** is destroyed. Careful planning and administration of your valuable electronic records allows you to find information more easily, lowers the costs of upkeep, decreases your legal risk, and provides significant historical information for agency research. The following series of guidelines will assist you in realizing these and other long-term benefits of effective recordkeeping.

Purpose
The South Carolina Department of Archives and History has created these guidelines for use by state and local government agencies in South Carolina; however, other organizations

including businesses and non-profit organizations might find them useful as well. These guidelines should serve as a reference as you review your electronic records management practices and develop an electronic records management strategy. Although you can consult them in order, we suggest that you read the chapter entitled *Records Management in an Electronic Environment* before moving on to the other chapters. The chapter includes important concepts in electronic records management and provides an overview of current South Carolina policy regarding electronic records in state and local government agencies.

Scope of the Guidelines

These guidelines apply to the records of all public bodies as defined by Section 30-1-10 (B) of the *Code of Laws of South Carolina*, *1976*, as amended. They extend the policies and practices as applied to paper-based recordkeeping to electronic information.

You can use these guidelines to learn more about:
- Extending existing policies and practices for electronic records
- Preserving historical records created or stored electronically
- Limiting legal risk associated with electronic records
- Reducing your costs associated with maintaining electronic records

Guidelines in the Series

Guidelines in the series include:
- *Records Management in an Electronic Environment*. Read this guideline first for a basic overview including key concepts in electronic records management.
- *File Naming*. Learn about the importance of including a file naming policy in your electronic records management strategy.
- *File Formats.* Review descriptions of common file formats and a summary of the issues regarding converting or migrating files.
- *Digital Media*. Review digital media storage options (e.g., optical disk, flash drive) for your electronic records.
- *Digital Media Storage- Facilities and Procedures*. Learn about physical storage space options and access procedures.
- *Electronic Document Management Systems.* Introduces electronic records issues that may arise as you integrate and manage the records management process with an electronic document management system.
- *Digital Imaging*. Introduces digital imaging, its uses, and legal considerations. Reviews recommendations for implementing digital imaging projects.
- *Web Content Management*. Develop a policy for managing your web content that meshes with your electronic records management strategy.
- *Electronic and Digital Signatures*. Addresses the distinction between electronic and digital signatures, and the legal considerations surrounding their use.
- *Trustworthy Information Systems*. Learn how to evaluate your recordkeeping systems for authenticity and reliability. Includes checklists and appendices.
- *Glossary*. Provides key terms in the guidelines.