



ARCHIVES & HISTORY

General Commission on Archives and History

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Records Management Guidelines

Guidelines for Managing Records of the Local Church 2024 Edition

The United Methodist Church General Commission on Archives and History
www.gcah.org

**GUIDELINES FOR
MANAGING RECORDS OF
THE LOCAL CHURCH**

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Purpose of this Manual

This manual is for the local church historian; the one who must implement these plans and perhaps even assist in designing them.

This is a manual of examples and ideas. It is not meant to provide an exhaustive or comprehensive records management plan; that only can be done at the local level. The intention is to provide enough material and ideas, and some examples, to assist in starting a records management program for the your local church. Some of the ideas mentioned here can be used directly in a local program, while others just offer a place to begin.

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What is Records Management?

Records management is the attempt to systematically control the growth and disposition, or destruction, of office, committee and other official records. Its basic purpose is to help answer that nagging question of what do I keep, for how long do I keep it and when can I remove it from my office.

Now we need to define some terms. In every office there are a variety of records which are related because they result from the same filing process, or the same function or the same activity, or have a similar form or contents. This group of related documents we will call a *series*. For example file folders of bank statements from different banks would be a series. A collection of check requests would be another series. Staff memos are yet another series. For each series there are two important concepts, or questions to be asked. The first is "for how long are these records used?" - this is referred to as the *records life cycle*. The second is "how significant are these records?" - this is referred to as *appraisal*. Understanding these two concepts are key to understanding the nature of records management.

What is Records Management

The essence of records management can be summarized as follows: The task of managing our office records so that we have the records on hand to conduct today's ministry, to dispose of those we no longer need, and to see that valuable records are preserved. Its basic purpose is to help answer that nagging question of what do I keep, for how long do I keep it and when can I remove it from my office.

Records Life Cycle:

Records can be considered like a living organism; they are born, or created, mature during their use, and then are retired or removed. In records management the task is to recognize when a record has reached the end of its life cycle. That is to say that there comes a time when every record **no longer serves a useful administrative function**. In general, the less a record is consulted, the less useful it is administratively. There are some significant exceptions to this rule, but the main focus is on those records occupying important space in an office and when can they be removed from that office. There are some records which will always have value, and which need to be kept, but which don't need to be in the main office files occupying valuable space. When a records has reached the end of its *useful administrative purpose* it is ready to be retired from the office. It is the function of *appraisal* which helps us determine when to retire the

record and what to do with the record once it is retired.

Records Appraisal:

Appraisal is the process which identifies the administrative, legal, and fiscal value (primary value), and the historical and long-term research value (secondary value) of records. Once the value of a record series has been determined, a realistic retention period can be assigned to it. Appraisal can take place at any point during a record series' life cycle, but is most frequently done when the records become inactive.

There are several questions to be asked when appraising a series: How frequently is the record used by those who created it? If the record is still frequently consulted then it should probably remain in the office. But even for records which are not consulted frequently, is there still a consistent, although low, demand for the record? Is there some legal or fiscal need to hold on to the record even though it is no

longer consulted or used? An example here might be financial information. What is the historical significance of the record? Always consider records as historical when they contain information about the institution which created the record. An example here might be Charge Conference records or staff or board minutes.

Disciplinary Responsibility

Who is responsible for keeping records in our denomination? At what level are decisions made which affect our records keeping policy? The *Discipline* allocates the responsibility for records at four different levels. Probably additional levels and complexities could be discerned, but for our purposes there are four levels: the local church, the annual conference, the jurisdictional conference and the General Conference.

The local church, the first level, is responsible for its records. The relevant section from the *Discipline* is from ¶247.5a)

It is strongly recommended that the charge conference elect a church historian [The historian will] keep the historical records up to date; serve as chairperson of the committee on records and history, . . . provide an annual report on the care of church records and historical materials to the charge conference; and also provide, with the pastor and the committee on records and history, if any, for the preservation of all local church records and historical materials no longer in current use. Records [are anything] . . . made or received pursuant to any provisions of the *Discipline* in connection with the transaction of church business by any local church

The Book of Discipline is the basic body of administration and law for our denomination. It is reviewed, revised and edited once every four years by the General Conference. The General Conference is the only body which can speak for the entire denomination. It is composed of representatives selected from every annual conference. This means there are delegates from within and without the United States.

The local church historian, and the history and records committee, are the ones to implement a records policy. The records of the local church would include everything from the charge conference down to the papers generated in the church office. Some examples of local church records are: records from the trustees, administrative board and any other committee structure of the local church. Also included are any official publications of the local church. The creation of a records policy requires working closely with the pastor, as well as with various leadership groups within the local church.

The annual conference, the second level, is responsible for its records. The relevant sections from the *Discipline* are ¶ 641. 1 and ¶2549.4.

In each annual conference there shall be a conference commission on archives and history. . . . It shall be the duty of the commission to collect, preserve, and make accessible the historically significant records of the annual conference and its agencies, establish retention and disposition schedules for annual conference and local church records under standards or guidelines developed by the General Commission on Archives and History;

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All the deeds, records, and other official and legal papers, including the contents of the cornerstone, of a church that is so declared to be abandoned or otherwise discontinued shall be collected by the district superintendent in whose district said church was located and shall be deposited for permanent safekeeping with the commission on archives and history of the annual conference.

The conference commission on archives and history is to implement a records policy for the conference. The commission also assists the local church in developing its records policy. The records of the annual conference would include everything from the annual conference meeting down to the records generated in the conference office. Some examples are: the conference journal, records from the conference trustees, minutes of the various boards and agencies or committees of the conference and any official publications of the conference. This would include conference newspapers and publications from camps, district committee reports and reports from the district superintendents. It also includes records from closed and abandoned churches. While it does include records from the conference office, it does not include episcopal office records.

The General Commission on Archives and History, the fourth level, is responsible for implementing a records policy for the general agencies and for the episcopal area offices. It is also responsible for advising jurisdictional agencies, annual conferences and local churches on their records (See ¶1711 in the *Discipline*).

This manual will focus on the issues related to the first two levels. The third level - the jurisdiction - is described in the *Agency Records Guidelines*.

Reasons for Records Management

There are a variety of reasons for local church to deal with records management; other than the obvious one that the *Discipline* requires it. Every office is faced with problems of storage space, as well as decisions about which records to keep and which to discard. This manual was designed to

It must be made clear at the outset that this is a manual of **guidelines** only. Every effort has been made to provide reliable and accurate information. However, records management policy, rules and regulations, can vary from state to state. Before you put any records management program into place please check your plans with your local counsel.

assist offices with these problems and decisions. A records management program strives to achieve economy and efficiency in the creation, use, maintenance, and disposal of church records.

Preservation of the Important and the Historical:

In order for our future to have a past we must be concerned for the records of today. The development of a records management policy is the first step in preserving our past by deciding what needs to be kept today. A concern for the historical, the legal and the fiscal needs of our church motivates us to faithfully preserve our important records.

The Effective Use of Space & Time:

It is estimated that after personnel costs, records keeping is one of the largest expenditures in the church. Record creation, maintenance, filing, office storage space, filing supplies, and equipment all contribute to the high cost of keeping records. In our usually limited office space we are often faced with the question of what can we remove in order to have room for what we need.

We need to be aware of certain factors which can help us make the most effective use of space:

- Dispose of records as soon as legally possible. It is estimated that between 90 to 95 percent of all records are non-permanent; an estimated 85 percent have a retention period of less than eleven years.
- In comparison to government, the church has fewer restrictions on what we are required to keep. For the majority of the records we produce we can set our own guidelines. There are laws affecting financial, personnel and legal files. But the majority of the material in our files falls outside these regulations.
- Having a controlled filing system means a smaller system. This can save time by making record retrieval and refiling easier and faster, and reduces the number of misfiles.

Legal Protection:

If an office or local church is ever faced with legal action, having a records management program in place is one way to assure courts and litigants that records are being cared for and disposed of properly and in a routine manner, not maliciously or in a capricious way.

Church's Attitude to Openness:

The denomination has committed itself to openness. The relevant section from the *Discipline* is ¶ 722.

In the spirit of openness and accountability, all meetings of councils, boards, agencies, commissions, and committees of the Church at all levels of the church, including subunit meetings and teleconferences, shall be open. . . . Portions of a meeting may be closed

Three Reasons for Records Management

1. Preservation of important and historical documents

2. Removing older records from the office means less time spent filing/searching for files and fewer storage requirements

3. Financial and legal concerns - will have the documents necessary for audits or for legal needs

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for consideration of specific subjects if such a closed session is authorized by an affirmative public vote of at least three-fourths of the voting members present. The vote shall be taken in public session and recorded in the minutes. Documents distributed in open meetings shall be considered public.

Great restraint should be used in closing meetings; closed sessions should be used as seldom as possible. Subjects that may be considered in closed session are limited to real estate matters; negotiations, when general knowledge could be harmful to the negotiation process; personnel matters; [See Judicial Council Decision 751,869, 1173] issues related to the accreditation or approval of institutions; discussions relating to pending or potential litigation or collective bargaining; communications with attorneys or accountants; deployment of security personnel or devices and negotiations involving confidential third-party information. Meetings of the committee on pastor-parish or staff-parish relations are to be closed meetings pursuant to ¶ 258.2e. While it is expected that the General Conference, the Judicial Council and the Council of Bishops will live by the spirit of this paragraph, each of these constitutional bodies is governed by its own rules of procedure.

A report on the results of a closed session is to be made immediately upon its conclusion, or as soon thereafter as is practicable.

We need to remember that all have a right to view various documents. A well managed record environment enables the retrieval and reviewing of our public documents with greater ease and efficiency.

Vital Records

Vital records are those records necessary for basic church operation. They are the records which can not, or should not, be lost. While it is true that all records created by a church are important it is also true that some records are more important and significant to the operation and well-being of the institution. The best way to understand the importance of vital records is to ask the question, if the building was destroyed which records would be most important for getting the church back into operation? Some of those vital records are identified in the *Discipline* while others are identified by state or local laws. A few records which need to be included in any list would be membership records, baptism records, and marriage records. These need to be more than just current or recent records; requests for transfer of membership can happen for years as well as questions about baptism and marriages. In addition to these basic church records, there are also financial records, such as records of membership tithing, and records relating to the financial management of the church, its staff and programs. Deeds and contracts are other important records.

Copies or originals of these records should be stored offsite of the church, perhaps in a local bank or other secure place. Some of these records may well exist in electronic format (such as membership databases). Copies of these electronic records should be stored offsite and frequently updated by replacing the older files with the most recent copies.

Having copies of your institution's vital records stored in a safe place will assist in the transition back to normal operations (or at least basic operations) after a disaster.

Electronic Records Issues

What follows is a summary overview of electronic records issues. Please consult our *Guidelines for Managing Electronic Records* for a more detailed discussion of this important topic. The management of electronic records usually revolves around word processing documents. There are other types to be considered however. Most of the examples given will relate to word processing. To gain an idea of the complexity of the problem one only needs to consider the different number of word processing formats in use. A popular program which converts one type of word processing format to another currently has conversion routines for around 48 different formats. Without such a program, and if an archives wanted to maintain the electronic files in their native format, an archives would need more than 40 different word processing programs to deal with all of these formats. Not only would they need the programs, but also the operating system on which the program was designed to run. In the past twenty years there has been at least six different operating systems and a variety of versions under those six. It quickly becomes obvious why an archives cannot maintain electronic files in their native format. Electronic files, in order to be used, are dependent on software and hardware. This dependency makes them extremely vulnerable over time to loss due to changes in technology and the market. And this doesn't even touch the issue of the stability of the medium on which electronic records are stored. To preserve an electronic file for the future it either needs to be converted to some standardized electronic format or printed. While there are standardized formats for both electronic document files and for databases which are supported by the archival and technological communities, they are minimalist file formats, which means that much of the formatting of a document will be lost and some of the flexibility of complex databases will also be lost. The most secure way to deal with most electronic documents is to print the document out on paper. The document can then easily be managed under records retention guidelines.

With that said it must also be admitted that the use of electronic records in the office are vital to its smooth operation. Without the ease of use electronic records affords the office today much of our productivity would be lost. So, while electronic records in their native format are not useful, and in fact detrimental, for long term storage they are essential to today's productive office environment. In using electronic records there are several points which must be kept in mind.

- The first is migrating the records when operating systems or software are upgraded. This is one of the most easily overlooked issues. Most offices have a variety of records on their hard drives, servers and backup media like CDs. Many of the records are not used on a daily basis but need to be near by for routine occasional use. When a computer's operating system or software is upgraded the data files need to be migrated as well. This usually isn't a problem for the files stored on the computer or server and which are probably used on a regular basis. But files on backup media, diskettes, Zip drives, and CDs may be overlooked and could be found inaccessible when they are finally used. This could especially be the case if the files were created more than two upgrades ago. When software or operating systems are upgraded you want to make sure that all of your files can be accessed by the new system. Take the time to open and access files especially on your backup media and if necessary open them all and save them in the new format. And don't assume that the upgrade of the same product will mean that your files are always accessible. It is well known that a popular word processing product cannot read files from earlier versions. A person has to go back to an earlier version of the product, open and save the files and then they can be accessed by the most current version. If you are going to keep records in an electronic format always make sure that you migrate them along with each upgrade.

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- Organizing your computer's file system is another important element. The same retention guidelines apply to electronic files as it does to paper files. Many users just store files on their hard drives without any planning. Some with just minimal planning. This has negative consequences in several areas. The first is a degradation of your computer's performance. Folders (or directories) which contain a large number of files are inefficient for the computer. It takes more memory and time to manage a large amount of files in a single folder. It is also takes longer to search a large folder or directory, either visually or with a search engine. As much as possible replicate your paper filing structure on your computer. This will make it easier for the computer to manage itself and for you to manage your files. Where appropriate make sure you can distinguish between files which do not need to be kept from those which have a longer or permanent retention. You can do this either by creating appropriate folders or by a naming convention. This makes backup easier and it makes management of your files easier. Copying entire directories is much faster than hunting through a long file list.
- Making backups is probably the most important task to be done. Computers do wear out and cease to operate and all information on them will be lost. Offices are damaged during storms and vandalism happens. Where are you keeping copies of your data? Backing up data is the most difficult thing to do, as it takes time and seems unproductive. But without it, after an accident, productivity will really cease. In a networked environment it is a little easier to backup data. Files can be stored on the server and the server automated to make backups on a regular basis. But in the small office the single-user computer also needs to be backedup. That may be as simple as copying files to a CD-RW on a daily basis, or using a backup program. And for very important files you will want to store the copies somewhere else than at work, just as you do for important papers. This has been touched on in the Vital Records section.

It is worth mentioning, as a final note, the longevity of some electronic media. None of the electronic storage media has as long a shelf life as does acid-free paper. Disks, diskettes, and hard drives all have about a twenty-five year life expectancy. Zip drives also fall into this category. There have been several claims about CDs. Different claims actually apply to different types of CDs. The ones purchased in stores, such as music CDs and games, are usually pressed CDs which means that their data is actually pitted into the surface of the CD. That might be fairly stable. CD-Rs and CD-RWs use a heat sensitive dye which changes color when data is written to it. Both are encased in plastic and there are questions about the stability of the plastic. There are questions about what happens to heat sensitive dye when subjected to temperature extremes. There are questions about the stability of the CD if the plastic surface is scratched allowing air in to oxidize the metal. And finally, and more importantly, there are questions about stability as the technology that allows the CDs to be read. Just as there are hardly any computers which can read 8-inch floppy disks, the next generation of CD readers won't be able to read earlier CD versions. This is another way of emphasizing the importance of migration. Not only must electronic records be migrated as operating and software systems change, but they must be migrated as storage system change as well. It doesn't matter how long the media lasts if there is no equipment left which can read the media.

A Responsible Person - The Records Officer

Every office ought to have at least one person who is responsible for seeing that the records management polices are carried out. This person should see that the files are weeded at the proper time, and see that the files are then disposed of in the proper fashion for each series. If a new series appears, which can be a frequent occurrence in some offices, then that person should also be responsible for bringing the situation to the attention of the records committee (either the local church history committee) so that an appropriate action can be taken.

The records committee, along with the appropriate advisors, should then assess the new series and create a new schedule for those records.

Storage of Records

In some cases records might be able to stay in their office of origin until they are destroyed or transferred to the archives. But in the case of small offices, another solution may be necessary. If office space is at a premium, then it may not be advisable to retain records which aren't used for seven or 20 years in the office. So, another step in the retention schedule concept is to determine how many years a record should remain in the office and then, if it still has some years to go before it can be destroyed, move it to some other storage location where it will remain until it can be destroyed. Permanent records could be immediately sent to the archives once they are removed from the office.

As an example of the procedure let's consider the case of some financial records which have no permanent value, but need to be kept for five years before they can be destroyed. However, let's say that the records are not used after their second year and so are taking up valuable space in the office. Yet the records can't be thrown out. The answer is to remove the records from the office, packed in a box, and store them in another safe location, either on the premises or at some rented space. The box could be labeled with the date of destruction for the records, and when that date rolls around the records officer removes the box, verifies there is no historical value to the records and/or no pending legal or financial actions and then appropriately disposes of the contents. Financial and other records which contain personal or financial information should be securely shredded or pulped. In the mean time the office has not been crowded with unnecessary records.

In a case like this always make a list of the material which is removed from the office and keep the list in the office. Be sure the list notes where the material is located, just in case the records are needed.

Before disposing of your records be sure that there is nothing of historical value or no legal actions pending on those records.

In today's world there is no reason not to have a shredder in the office. A secure shredder will help to protect sensitive information from prying eyes.

Destruction of Records

In today's world of identity theft it is important to thoroughly destroy the records which your institution is not keeping. Any record which contains personal information, financial information or any type of information which can be considered private should be thoroughly destroyed when permanently removed from the office. This means either shredding the document or having it pulped. Secure shredders are affordable and within the budget range of most churches and all conferences. There is no reason not to have one. A single cut shredder, one which cuts the paper into strips, is no longer satisfactory. Multi-cut or screening shredders, ones which cut the paper into random sizes, should be used. Be sure to get a shredder which can cut credit cards and CDs as well. If you store your church's sensitive files on a CD-R once that CD is full and no longer useful it should be shredded. Even with shredding the institution should consider turning the paper over to an organization which pulps the paper. Almost every major city has one or more records management companies which provide secure shredding and pulping as one of its services.

Shipping Records

For the local church a policy should be written which describes how to prepare records for temporary storage or for transfer to the archives. This should include :

information on which type of boxes to use, and how to pack the boxes; the creation of a list of the material in the box - this may be to list each file folder, or photograph or whatever the items are - without the list the items are as good as lost; and to whom to send the boxes.

Summary

Your committee is charged with a large task. It will take the commitment of your committee and the collaboration of others on the local church level to make the process a success. Basically you need to meet; decide which records need to be managed (via a survey if necessary), what is the use and value of the records; how long they should be kept; what legal requirements affect the keeping of certain records; and how they should be stored. Once done your schedule is not finished. As offices change so must the schedule. It is a never-ending task. Yet the results are a more efficient office and more appropriate records, preserved in the archives. Don't forget to include your legal counsel in on this process.

Suggested Retention Periods

Listed below are some examples of retention schedules for the local church. There is not one correct form for a records schedule. So we have prepared each schedule in two different formats; one more descriptive and one more tabular. The idea is to create a format which works best in your own office or organizational environment.

Again, these are not comprehensive schedules. In many cases the time factors and suggestions may be relevant for your situation. But always be sure to show your completed schedule to your local counsel in

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order to be sure that any legal requirements specific to your locale are adequately reflected in your document.

Arrangement of the record series can be in any style which is easy and convenient for you. For the sake of these examples the series have been arranged in alphabetical format, though they could just have easily been grouped by topics such as financial, personnel, and administrative. The two types of schedules shown are descriptive and tabular. The descriptive schedule has a general title on the left and on the right are listed some examples which fit under the descriptive title. Next comes a description of the material. At the bottom of the entry is the office or person responsible for the record and how long the record should be kept. The tabular schedule follows the descriptive. The title of the series is in the first column and its description in the second column. The total number of years that the series should be kept is in the third column, the number of years to be kept in the current office files in the fourth and whether or not to send the series to the archives is in the last column. If the item is not sent to the archives it is to be destroyed.

Local Church Examples

ACCIDENT AND INJURIES RECORDS

*Workers Compensation
Claims Records*

This series documents claims made by employees for occupational injuries, accidents, or illnesses; insurance coverage and related reimbursement issues; and safety analysis and compliance inspections. This series may include but is not limited to Report of Accident forms; Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Form 200; OSHA Form 101; incident logs; employer payroll reports; hearing transcripts; notices of claim disposition; determination orders; opinions and orders; appeal letters; claim adjustment documentation; medical reports; cost statements; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: 6 years after case settlement.

Destroy the Official Copy 6 years after case settlement.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE RECORDS

*Claims and Disbursements Records, Expenses,
Accounting, Bookkeeping, Paid Invoices,
Finance, Purchasing*

This series documents expenditures and purchases. The series may also be used to research, evaluate, and monitor prior transactions and/or track the budget. This series may include but is not limited to Purchase Orders; Contract Release Orders; Balance Sheets; bills; invoices; Invoice Vouchers; Journal Voucher/Entry Forms; price quotes; Departmental Requisitions; justifications of purchases; payment authorizations; reports of receipt of goods or services; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 7 years.

Destroy the Official Copy after 7 years.

Other copies used in offices

Retention: 2 years.

Destroy other copies after 2 years.

ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE RECORDS

Membership contributions, offering records

This series is used to provide a record of collections and offerings for the local church that are summarized in a general ledger. Offering envelopes need to be kept until the end of the year, when the statements are sent out to the local church members. Afterwards they may be disposed.

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Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: 7 years.

Destroy the Official Copy after 7 years.

Other copies used in offices

Retention: 2 years

Destroy other copies after 2 years.

Offering envelopes

Retention 1 year

Dispose after sending out yearly financial gift statements to local church members.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Charge Conference reports, Administrative Board Reports, Council on Ministries reports, or Administrative Council Reports

This series documents the annual activity of the local church and its subdivisions. Final annual reports may be printed and bound or they may be less formal unpublished documents prepared for limited distribution. Report sections may include but are not limited to administrative activities; goals and objectives achieved; fiscal status; project work performed; personnel activity and accomplishments; facility changes; and related sections. This series may include but is not limited to local church charge conference report; administrative board and Council on Ministries reports, or Administrative council reports.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: Permanent

Other copies: Receiving units

Retention: Until superseded or obsolete.

Destroy all other copies when superseded, obsolete, or no longer needed for reference.

ANNUAL FISCAL REPORTS

Closing of the Books Records, Financial Reports, Balance Reconciliation Records

This series documents annual fiscal year-end status of accounts and is used to provide the office with summary information relating to its programs which may be used for planning or review. The series includes annual operating statements; schedules of rates; and related correspondence.

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: Permanent

Send official copy to Local Church Archives on regular basis.

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Other copies used in offices

Retention: 3 years.

Destroy other copies after 3 years.

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS, BLUEPRINTS, AND MAPS

This series provides a detailed graphic record of land and buildings of the local church. The series is used as a primary source tool when working on projects to improve or maintain existing buildings and/or land and also when working on new construction. These records are largely created as part of individual construction projects but may include drawings, maps, and photographs worked up independently by the office and from various sources. This series may include but is not limited to architectural blueprints; sketches; aerial photographs; preliminary planning drawings; as built drawings; drawings reflecting changes to the original plans; soil testing maps; any other type of graphic representation produced relating to buildings, systems, and land; and related documentation.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: Permanent.

Transfer the Official Copy to the local church archives when superseded or inactive.

Other copies used in offices

Retention: 3 years after contract completion.

Destroy other copies 3 years after contract completion.

NOTE: Check with the Local Church Archives before destroying any other copies of records in this series.

AUDIT RECORDS

This series documents the unit's response to internal and independent management, operations, and fiscal audits. This series may include but is not limited to audit reports; written responses showing how recommended changes will be implemented; and related documentation and correspondence

Official Copy used in offices

Retention: Permanent

Send official copy to Local Church Archives on regular basis

BANK DEPOSIT RECORDS

Official records of bank deposit transactions

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Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 7 years

Destroy official copy after 7 years

BANK DEPOSIT SLIPS

Receipt from bank of deposit transaction

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 3 Years

Destroy official copy after 3 years

BANK STATEMENTS

This series documents redeemed checks and other financial matters related to local church bank accounts.

Official Copy: Church Office or treasurer

Retention: 7 years.

Destroy the Official Copy after 7 years.

BENEFITS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES RECORDS

This series documents policy and procedure decisions and important events in the operations history of the office and includes contracts and formal documents which state or form the basis for policy or set precedents. This series includes but is not limited to records concerning dependent care flexible spending account program records; early retirement programs; employee orientation program; injured worker benefits; medical, dental, life/disability insurance program records; open enrollment records; Retirees; tax deferred investment programs; US Savings Bonds; Volunteer Insurance; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: Permanent

Transfer superseded documents to Local Church Archives

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BEQUEST AND ESTATE PAPERS

*Wills, gift agreements, bequests and other grants
of real property or assets.*

This series relates to gifts, financial or otherwise, to the church. These papers document the origin, transfer and requirements or restrictions of the gift

Official Copy: Church Office/Trustees

Retention: Permanent

Transfer to Local Church Archives for permanent safe keeping

BUDGET RECORDS

Annual Budget

This series documents the annual budget; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: Permanent.

After 2 years, transfer the Official Copy to the local church archives.

BULLETINS

*Sunday worship bulletins,
Special local church occasion bulletins*

Bulletins provide a resource for ministers as well as document the worship practices of the church. They often also include special news of interest for the local church. Special local church occasions could be a church anniversary, mortgage burning service, or dedication service.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: Permanent, transfer to Local Church Archives after 2 years.

BYLAWS

*Bylaws, procedural regulations, meeting policies,
constitutions*

Organizational bylaws and other regulations relating to the conduct of meetings or organizations

Official Copy: Church Office/committee chair

Retention: Permanent

Transfer previous version to Local Church Archives after amendment

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CANCELED CHECKS

Cashed Checks

This series documents redeemed checks written on church accounts. Information on each check may include check number, date, amount, endorsement, account number, validation date, and related documentation.

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 7 years.

Destroy the Official Copy after 7 years

CERTIFICATES OF DEPOSIT, CANCELED

Redeemed or canceled certificate of deposits

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 3 Years

Destroy official copy after 3 years

COMMITTEE RECORDS

Church Committee Records

This series documents the activities of standing and ad hoc committees, agencies and boards of the local church. They may function as steering committees, activities committees, standards committees, planning committees, awards committees, councils, etc. This series may include but is not limited to agendas; meeting minutes; reports; notes; working papers; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy: Committee secretary

Retention: Permanent for agendas, minutes, reports, and correspondence; 4 years for all other records
Transfer the Official Copy of permanent records to the Local Church Archives after 4 years; destroy the Official Copy of all non-permanent records after 4 years.

CONTRACTS

*Repairs and Maintenance, Lease Agreements,
Loans and Notes*

This series contains contracts that have either been completed or terminated. This includes Repairs and Maintenance, Lease Agreements, Loans/Notes and Service type of contracts

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Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: 4 Years for Service contracts

Destroy after 4 years

Retention: 6 Years for Repairs/Maintenance, Lease, Loans and Notes

Destroy after 6 years

Retention: Permanent for contracts on new construction, betterments/improvements

Transfer to Local Church Archives for permanent safekeeping.

CORRESPONDENCE

Transitory correspondence,

Subject correspondence

A large amount of correspondence should be considered transitory or routine general correspondence. Correspondence of this type might include responses to inquiries concerning time of services or other functions at the church; information about assistance programs run by the church or in which the church is involved and other routine correspondence which reflects a normal part of the local church's program. Special or subject correspondence may focus on a special program or service in which the church is involved, such as special worship services or specific assistance program or some other program which has a specific beginning and end. Transitory correspondence should be reviewed and destroyed on a yearly basis, which subject correspondence should be kept, as it documents a special event in the local church's life.

Transitory correspondence

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: 1 year

Destroy after one year

Subject correspondence

Official Copy: Church office or program secretary

Retention: Permanent; transfer to Local Church Archives on a routine basis or after end of program

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DEDUCTION AUTHORIZATION RECORDS

Deductions Input List

This series documents deductions from salary checks authorized by employees. These records include lists with notation of authorized deductions as well as actual deduction forms. This series may include but is not limited to deduction information on medical, dental, life, and disability insurance; United Way and Foundation contributions; and miscellaneous deductions.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: 4 years after authorization expires or is superseded.

Destroy the Official Copy 4 years after authorization expires or is superseded.

DEEDS

*Deeds, conveyances, covenants, easements,
certificates of title to property*

This series is comprised of documents which deal with ownership and related correspondence.

Official copy: Church Office

Retention: Permanent

DIRECTORIES

*Local church directory, church
photographic directory*

The church directory lists the members of the local church and photographic directories not only illustrate the people but often have scenes from church life.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: Permanent. Transfer a copy to the Local Church Archives.

Other copies used in offices

Retention: Destroy when superseded

**EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION
FORMS**

I-9s

This series documents information used to establish the identity and to verify the employment eligibility of employees to preclude the unlawful hiring of persons not authorized to work in the United States. This series includes completed I-9 forms and copies of documents that establish the identity and the employment eligibility of the employee.

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Official Copy: Church office

Retention: 1 year after employee separation or after 3 years, whichever is longer.

Destroy the Official Copy 1 year after employee separation or after 3 years, whichever is later.

EMPLOYMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES RECORDS

Employment Policies

This series documents employment policies and procedures administered by personnel offices. This series may include but is not limited to information on appointments; employment of handicapped persons; family employment program; interviewing; job sharing; nepotism; temporary appointments; transfers; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: Permanent.

Retain the Official Copy in Church office until superseded and then transfer to the custody of the Local Church Archives.

GRIEVANCE RECORDS

This series documents grievances brought forward by employees against the institution concerning affirmative action; equal opportunity; policies and procedures; or articles contained in the Collective Bargaining Agreement. This series may include but is not limited to notices of grievance; informal discussion notes; grievance responses; formal hearing records, including tapes; transcripts and tapes of individual interviews; logs of persons interviewed; action(s) taken; settlement agreements; case histories; final summary statements; appeals documentation; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy: Church office and Legal Advisor

Retention: 3 years after grievance is settled.

Destroy the Official Copy 3 years after grievance is settled.

INSURANCE POLICIES

This series is comprised of inactive insurance policies and related correspondence.

Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: Permanent

Transfer inactive policies to the Local Church Archives

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INSURANCE ELECTION RECORDS, EMPLOYEES'

This series is comprised of the forms filled out by employees when they make their insurance options elections

Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: 6 years after termination of employment

Destroy official copy after 6 years

INVENTORIES OF PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT

This series consists of lists, both written and photographic, of the property and equipment of the church.

Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: Until superseded by new version

Transfer old copies to Local Church Archives for review.

INVOICES

This series contains invoices and paid bills

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 7 years, except for major building construction/alterations - Permanent

Destroy official copy after 7 years (transfer construction records to Local Church Archives)

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MEMBERSHIP RECORDS

*Membership register, baptisms,
marriages, transfers*

These are permanent records which list the names of each person of the local church. They reflect the membership and the activities of the local church.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: Permanent

NEWSLETTERS

*Local church newsletters,
Sunday School newsletters, UMW,
UMM or UMYF newsletters*

Newsletters document many of the basic activities of the local church. Not only the church newsletter should be kept, but newsletters of the various groups within the local church.

Official Copy: Church office for newsletter, group secretary for others

Retention: Permanent; transfer copies to the Local Church Archives after 2 years

PAY AUTHORIZATION RECORDS

PBs

This series consists of pay documents which substantiate and, in part, authorize the issuance of payroll checks for particular amounts. This series may include but is not limited to Payroll/Budget Request Forms and time cards.

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 5 years.

Destroy the Official Copy after 5 years.

Other copies used in offices

Retention: 1 year.

Destroy other copies after 1 year.

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PERSONNEL RECORDS

Personnel Files

This series documents the employee's work history and includes routine, non-evaluative information such as job title, rank, full-time equivalency (FTE), dates of employment, salary, employing department, education and employment background. Some of the documents comprising this series include confidential information such as social security number, birth date, and marital status. This series may include but is not limited to copies of Affirmative Action Compliance Data Forms; Applications and Contracts for Sabbatical Leave; Conditions of Employment; Memoranda of Agreement; Notices of Appointment; Pay/Budget Action Forms; Personnel Action Forms (PAs), including Salary Adjustments Requests for Approval for Outside Employment; resumes or curriculum vitae; Retirement Agreements; Sick Leave Accrual Forms; and related documentation and correspondence, such as letters of resignation and memos confirming appointments.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: 7 years after termination.

PROPERTY FILES

deeds, title papers, repair history, permits, lease agreement and correspondence

This series contains records dealing with the ownership and maintenance of property.

Official Copy: Church Office.

Retention: Permanent

Transfer to Local Church Archives for permanent safekeeping

PURCHASE ORDERS

This series documents purchase of items, or repair of items and related correspondence

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 7 years

Destroy after 7 years

REAL ESTATE SURVEYS

Real estate survey, plots plans

This series contains real estate surveys, plots plans and related correspondence.

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Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: Permanent

Transfer to Local Church Archives for safekeeping

REJECTED APPLICATIONS

*Rejected and Incomplete
Employment Applications*

This series documents employment applications that were submitted for jobs with the church and for reasons of incompleteness or inadequate qualifying experience/training are rejected.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: 2 years.

Destroy the Official Copy after 2 years.

SEARCH RECORDS

This series documents the selection process for advertised management service and classified positions. This series may include but is not limited to applications; curriculum vitae or resumes; academic transcripts; samples of writing or publications; approvals of recruitment proposals; Certificate of Eligibles; candidate lists; position announcements; position advertisements; position descriptions; copies of Affirmative Action Compliance Data Forms; interview materials such as rating sheets, tallies, screening and interview notes, review committee notes and memoranda; telephone conversation notes; and related correspondence such as cover letters and reference letters.

Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: Place record with the personnel file; 5 years after search completed for all other records.

Retain application materials of successful candidate in the Personnel Files; destroy the Official Copy of all other records 5 years after the search is completed.

SHIPPING AND FREIGHT RECORDS

This series documents the shipping receiving of material , either by freight carrier or by such carriers as UPS or FedEx, and related correspondence

Official Copy: Office of origin

Retention: 3 years

Destroy after 3 years

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STAFF MEETING RECORDS

This series documents the meetings of the staff of a department, or office which sets policy and procedures for the unit. Participants at meetings may be composed exclusively of or a mixture of staff, administrators, and managers; specialized and task oriented sub-committees composed of unit personnel are also documented as part of this record series. These meetings may concern routine matters of procedure and topics such as program development, planning, administrative and personnel management, and assessments of future needs. This series may include but is not limited to meeting notes/minutes; reports; working papers; agendas; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy used in offices

Retention: Permanent.

TAX-EXEMPT CERTIFICATES AND FORM 990

This series documents the tax-exempt status of the church and its functions.

Official Copy: Church Office

Retention: Permanent

TAX RETURNS

Tax returns, tax filings

This series comprises tax returns, supporting documentation and related correspondence

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 7 years

Destroy 7 years after filing period provide no legal action being taken

TAX WITHHOLDING AUTHORIZATION RECORDS

W-4s

This series documents amounts withheld by Payroll from employees' checks for taxing authorities. This series may include but is not limited to the Statement for Claiming Benefits Provided by Section 911 of the Internal Revenue Code; Withholding Allowance Certificates (W-4s); and Non-resident Alien Request for Exemption from Tax Withholding (CO-477). Individual forms may include employees' names, addresses, social security numbers, and tax identification numbers.

Official Copy: Treasurer

Retention: 7 years after authorization expires or is superseded.

Destroy the Official Copy 7 years after authorization expires or is superseded.

TIME SHEETS

This series contains time sheets and related correspondence and memoranda.

Official Copy: Office of origin

Retention: 3 years

Destroy after 3 years

TRAVEL RECORDS

This series documents approved travel by employees and is used to monitor travel expenditures and for planning purposes. This series may include but is not limited to travel request forms indicating purposes, itineraries, methods of travel, funds from which travel is to be paid, and estimated expenditures; Travel Reimbursement Requests (employee and non-employee); receipts; authorizing signatures; and related documentation and correspondence.

Official Copy: Church office

Retention: 5 years.

Destroy the Official Copy after 5 years.

Other copies used in offices

Retention: 2 years.

Destroy other copies after 2 years.

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LOCAL CHURCH RECORDS SCHEDULE				
RECORD SERIES TITLE	DESCRIPTION	Total	Current	Local Church Archives
Accident and Injuries Records	Workers Compensation Claims Records	Settled+6.	Active	NO
Accounts Payable Records	Claims and Disbursements Records, Expenses, Accounting, Bookkeeping, Paid Invoices, Finance, Purchasing	7	2	NO
Accounts Receivable Records	Membership contributions, offering records	7	2	NO
	Offering envelopes	1	1	NO
Administrative Reports	Charge Conference reports, Administrative Board reports, Council on Ministries report, or administrative council reports	Permanent	2	YES
Annual Fiscal Reports	Closing of the Books Records, Financial Reports, Balance Reconciliation Records, State Accounts Reports	Permanent	4	YES
Architectural Drawings, Blueprints, and Maps		Permanent		YES
Audit Records		Permanent	4	YES
Bank Deposit Books		7	2	NO
Bank Deposit Slips		3	3	NO
Bank statements		7	3	NO
Benefits Policies and Procedures Records		Permanent	Active	YES
Bequest and Estate papers	wills, gift agreements, bequests	Permanent		As Necessary
Budget Records	Annual Budget	Permanent	4	YES
Bulletins	Sunday worship bulletins, special local church occasion bulletins	Permanent	2	YES
Bylaws		Permanent	Active	YES
Cancelled Checks	Cashed Checks	7	1	NO

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Certificates of Deposit, Canceled		3	3	NO
Committee Records	Local church committee records	Permanent	4	YES
Contracts	repairs, maintenance, lease agreements, loans	4 - service contracts 6 -Repairs, Lease, Loans Permanent - new construction	4	NO - expect for those going to Archives
Correspondence - subject	Correspondence on special or topic interest	permanent	Active	YES
Correspondence - transitory	Routine correspondence	1	1	NO
Deduction Authorization Records	Deductions Input List	Active + 4	Active	NO
Deeds	Deeds, Conveyances, Covenants, easements	Permanent		As Necessary
Directories		Permanent	Current	YES
Employment Eligibility Verification Forms		Active +1 (3 yrs Min.)	Active	NO
Employment Policies and Procedures Records	Employment Policies	Permanent	Active	YES
Grievance Records		Active +3.	Active	NO
Insurance Policies		Permanent	Active	YES
Insurance Election Records, Employees		employment +6	Active	NO
Inventories of Property and Equipment		Until superseded	Active	Transfer to Archives for Review

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Invoices		7 (except for major construction)	3	NO (transfer major construction series to Archives)
Membership records	Membership register, baptisms, marriages, transfers	Permanent		YES
Newsletters	Church newsletters, UMW, UMM, UMYF and other church group's newsletters	Permanent	2	YES
Pay Authorization Records		5	2	NO
Personnel Records	Personnel Files	Active+7	Active	NO
Property Files	deeds, title papers, repair history, permits, lease agreement	Permanent		As Necessary
Purchase Orders		7	3	NO
Real Estate Surveys	surveys, plot plans and related correspondence	Permanent		As Necessary
Rejected Applications	Rejected and Incomplete Employment Applications	2	1	NO
Search Records-accepted		Active+7	Active	NO
Search Records - all others		5	1	NO
Shipping and Freight Records		3	3	NO
Staff Meeting Records		Permanent	4	YES
Tax-Exempt Certificates	Certificates and Form 990	Permanent		As Necessary
Tax Returns		7	5	NO
Tax Withholding Authorization Records		Active + 5	Active	NO
Time Sheets		3	3	NO

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Travel Records		5	1	NO
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Other Resources

For those who want to read further on the planning and use of records management below is a list of useful texts. All are available from the Association of Records Managers and Administrators, Inc., 13725 West 109th Street, Suite 101, Lexena, KS 66215 (website: www.arma.org.)

Developing and Operating a Records Retention Program. ARMA International: Prairie Village, KS 1989.

Penn, Ira A., Gail Pennix, Jim Coulson. *Records Management Handbook*, 2nd edition. Gower Press: Aldershot, UK 1994

Skupsky, Donald S. *RecordKeeping Requirements.* Information Clearinghouse: Denver, 1988.

Maedke, Wilmer O., Mary F. Robek, Gerald F. Brown. *Information and Records Management.* Glencoe Press: Beverly Hills, 1974.

Aschner, Katherine *Taking Control of Your Office Records: A Manager's Guide.* Knowledge Industry Publications: White Plains, NY. 1983.

Resources for caring for a local church archives

Caring for Your Church's Heritage: Church Historian (Part of the *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation Series*) Cokesbury: Nashville, TN, 1996.

Memory and Ministry. A 30 minute video on managing a local church archives. EcuFilm : Nashville, TN (800-251-4091)

You can also contact the General Commission on Archives and History, P.O. Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940, 973-408-3195, 973-408-3909 (FAX) with any questions, or your local annual conference archives.

Appendix: Creating a Records Schedule

What is a Records Schedule?

Records, as they reach the end of their life cycle, need to be removed from the office filing system. This should be done on a regular or annual basis. The basic tool to guide the records officer in this task is the *records retention and disposition schedule*. This tool helps remove the old and obsolete records from the office, making room for more recent and active records.

A records schedule identifies record series and prescribes the time period that they must be retained before they reach their ultimate fate or disposition. The disposition of a record, as prescribed in a records schedule, may range from immediate destruction, to destruction after a period of time, or to permanent retention in the archives.

Steps in Creating a Records Schedule:

If a record series is not listed in the existing records retention and disposition schedule (or if no schedule exists at all), the department's Records Officer should contact the appropriate records committee. The committee, after reviewing the existing schedule, may determine that an addition to the schedule is required. These are the steps in the scheduling process:

- * Inventory the record(s) series in question, using the *Record Series Inventory Data Sheet* (see steps below). This is to be done either by the local responsible person, the committee, or by both working together.
- * Retention periods based upon frequency of use and archival value will be agreed upon and incorporated into the records schedule.
- * In the case of a local church the schedule should probably be reviewed by the Conference Commission on Archives and History, so that consistency among the local churches can be maintained.

Steps in a Records Inventory

1. Locate records: they may not only be in offices, but also in basements or homes.
2. Once all records have been located the inventory can begin. Use an inventory sheet similar to the example in Fig 1.
3. In order to help identify your records and how long they should be kept, it is important that you always include the following information in your inventory: Type of record (see Fig. 2); whether

RECORDS INVENTORY SHEET
Type of Record:
Location:
Format
Original/Copy

Example Inventory Sheet

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the original or copy is in your office, the location and the format (e.g. computer, cassette tape, paper)

minutes
annual reports
by laws/charter
incorporation records
annual audits
annual budgets
financial ledgers of final entry
subject correspondence
manuals/handbooks
newspapers/newsletters
brochures/promotional materials
photographs
will, bequests
legal/judicial cases
personnel records/employee records
accounts payable invoices
bank deposit slips
mailing lists
expense reports
invitations
meeting notices
travel plans and arrangements
resource files

Types of records commonly found

periods are based upon usage factors and legal requirements, such as audits.

With the exception of financial and personnel records the records committee, acting in consultation with the office it is surveying, will assign the retention periods. For the most part, most local church and denominational records are not governed by any specific legislation which affects their retention. Always be sure to check your locale for any legislation which might affect financial records or personnel records. While establishing the retention period will be dependent upon the needs of the office or the committee it is should be mentioned here that before actually disposing of any records one should verify that there are no pending legal actions against the church or conference which necessitates keeping the records longer. If a record is needed in a legal case it has, in effect, become an active record again. Its useful administrative value continues until the legal case has been resolved, which could also change the long-term status of the record. In such issues always be sure to consult with your legal counsel.

Calculating Retention Periods:

Retention periods usually begin at a chronological file break, such as the fiscal, calendar, or annual conference year. The retention period applies to all records created during the time period. For example, the official copy of many accounting records has a five-year retention period, by fiscal year. The retention

Retention Periods:

The term "retention period" refers to the maximum and minimum lengths of time that a record must be kept. Once you have identified your records you will need to determine how long they are to be kept. At the end of this manual are some examples of retention schedules. However, it is important to remember that, especially concerning financial records the laws governing retention can vary from state. Before implementing any retention schedule be sure to let your legal counsel see it. What is listed in this manual are examples and suggestions only.

Several different retention period designations can be used, such as: "Permanent", "Until Superseded", "Until Obsolete," or a specific number of years. "Permanent" indicates that the record series will be kept indefinitely. Records with a permanent designation should probably be sent to the archives.

"Until Superseded" is a retention assigned to records that are routinely updated or revised and where the previous version has no continuing value.

"Until Obsolete" is assigned to record series that become valueless on a non-routine basis. Specific time period retention

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period for journal vouchers created during the 1992-93 fiscal year (July 1, 1992-June 30, 1993) begins July 1, 1993. After 5 years, on July 1, 1998, they will be eligible for destruction.

Appendix: Sample Transmittal Form

Copy this form to a blank file and edit it for your conference's use.

**The United Methodist Church
General Commission on Archives and History
Records Transmittal Form**

Directions: Please **type** all information. **Complete sections 1 through 7.** List the box numbers in ascending order in the column marked "Box No." and beside each box number list the titles of all folders or materials as they appear in that container. The transmittal form should contain a folder title listing for each container transferred to the General Commission on Archives & History (See "Records Transfer Procedures" in the *Guidelines*, available from GCAH, for further instructions.) Print this form out when finished and either retain the printout or its electronic version in **your** office. Send a copy of the printout and the electronic file along with the shipment to GCAH. You will receive back from us either a paper copy or electronic version with items 9-14 completed. This is the copy to which you will need to refer when requesting your records or information from your records at GCAH. All previous version of this transmittal form may then be disposed.

To be filled in by the Agency Staff	To be filled in by GCAH staff
1. Agency Name:	9. Accession Number:
2. Agency Address:	10. Date Received
	11. Total Extent
3. Contact Name:	12. Received by
4. Phone Number:	13. Record Group
	14. Location

Use the TAB key to move from cell to cell and the table will automatically add new rows
Each cell will expand to accommodate the amount of material you type into it.

5.Box	6. Folder Title/ Record Description	7. Inclusive Dates

Nothing on this Page