



## WHAT IS RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

### WHAT ARE RECORDS?

We all rely on information to help us work effectively and to help us keep track of our work or provide evidence of our decisions. If we can be held accountable for an action or a decision made as part of our official UN duties, the documentary evidence of that action or decision is a record. We must protect that record as evidence.

#### What is the concept?

**Information** is “data, ideas, thoughts, or memories irrespective of medium.” Information sources are considered “non-records”: they are useful but do not provide evidence. **Examples** include journals, newspapers, publications, or reference sources not created by the UN.

**Documents** are any “recorded information or objects that can be treated as individual units.” **Examples** include works in progress such as draft communications or “to do” lists, and transitory records such as emails confirming a meeting or acknowledging receipt of a document.

**Records** are “information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.” **Examples** include final reports, emails confirming an action or decision, spreadsheets showing budget decisions, photographs or maps of field missions, which need to be kept as evidence.

**Archives** are those records that have been selected for permanent preservation because of their administrative, informational, legal and historical value as evidence of official business of the UN. **Archives** are very small but important subset of the UN’s official records.

**Records management** is the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records. Records management is the process of identifying and protecting EVIDENCE, which comes in the form of records.

#### What does it mean to you?

If the item in question provides information only and does not provide evidence of an activity, decision, or transaction related to your work at the UN, you should destroy the information when you no longer need it.

If a document is superseded by other documents, such as a draft report that is replaced by a newer version, and the first draft is not needed as evidence, or if the document contains information that you need for only a short time – like a confirmation of the location of a meeting – you should destroy the document when you no longer need it.

If you created or received the document in the course of your work and it provides evidence of an activity, decision, or transaction, you need to keep it as evidence, according to established UN retention schedules. That document becomes a record and must be stored safely so it remains accessible.

UN ARMS is responsible for helping you manage your records in order to protect valuable evidence of UN operations. UN ARMS also ensures records with archival value are preserved and made available.

## WHY IS RECORDS MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

- Authentic, reliable records allow personnel to make decisions and perform duties effectively and efficiently.
- Well-managed records provide evidence of UN policies, decisions, actions, and transactions.
- Time is saved because filing systems are easy to use and well-structured.
- Records can be retrieved quickly and efficiently whenever they are needed.
- Records storage costs are reduced because redundant records are removed systematically.
- Duplicates and superseded versions of records are easily identified and destroyed.
- Vital records are identified and protected, supporting business continuity and disaster recovery.
- Those records with enduring value as archives are identified and managed appropriately.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF POOR RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

If records are not managed properly, the UN faces significant risks.

- Poorly managed records prevent personnel from making sound, evidence-based decisions.
- Management cannot provide evidence of policies, decisions, actions, and transactions.
- Time is wasted trying to find records that are misfiled or lost.
- Storage costs soar if obsolete records are kept when they should be destroyed.
- Privacy and security is at risk if sensitive records are not managed appropriately.
- Duplicates, superseded documents, and obsolete records clog records systems, making it difficult to find and use important evidence.
- In an emergency, vital records are not identified, placing personnel at risk.
- The archives of the UN are not protected, leaving the UN with inadequate evidence of its work on behalf of people around the world.

**Remember...** Only 5-10 percent of documents need to be kept as evidence, and only 2-4 percent of records are considered vital in an emergency. Managing records efficiently is critical to protecting the small percentage of records that must be available to support UN operations and provide accountability for actions and decisions.

**Records are the UN's institutional memory. They are essential information resources that help UN personnel work effectively and provide evidence of the UN's vitally important work.**