



How do I assess the quality of my office's records systems?

The implementation and maintenance of a strong and effective records management programme is an ongoing effort, not a short-term project. Sustainable records policies and procedures need to be implemented and maintained, regardless of the format or medium of the records in question.

All personnel across the United Nations need to manage their information and records, whether those materials are in paper or electronic form, so that official records systems are of high quality, which means they are effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent.

To support improved records management across the UN, the records specialists at UN ARMS have developed a records management programme evaluation tool to help offices assess the quality and effectiveness of their record-keeping programmes. As explained in this self-assessment tool, the ideal record-keeping system is one where all personnel follow formal, effective, and measurable records management processes. The evaluation tool outlines six core requirements for quality records management, as described below.

1. Establish and maintain a sustainable records management programme.
2. Formalize and control the process of creating and keeping quality records.
3. Establish robust day-to-day records maintenance procedures.
4. Establish specific measures for protecting records in non-traditional media.
5. Dispose of records effectively and in accordance with policies and procedures.
6. Manage vital records so they are protected and available in the event of emergencies.

Below is a description of each of these six record-keeping requirements. Each operation, as well as more tools to assist offices in managing their information and records, can be accessed online at: <https://archives.un.org/?q=content/un-records-resources-and-tools>.

Requirement 1: Establish and maintain a sustainable records management programme

An effective records management programme begins with a clear definition of programme objectives, responsibilities, and authorities. The programme has sufficient resources; provides effective, ongoing training for personnel; and conducts regular evaluations to monitor effectiveness and compliance. The benefits derived from such a programme include improved economy and efficiency through easy access to complete and accurate information; a reduction in unnecessary records storage costs; the protection of the rights of the UN, its personnel, and citizens; and the sustainability and continuity of operations.

Requirement 2: Formalize the process of creating and keeping quality records

The establishment of clear record-keeping requirements ensures that official records are complete, accurate, reliable, and authentic. Record-keeping requirements outline how the office creates and maintains quality records so that personnel can: document office operations and activities; record actions and decisions; facilitate daily work; support continuity and consistency in administration; implement and sustain policies and procedures; and protect the rights of the UN, its personnel, the citizens of Member States, and others affected by UN activities.

Requirement 3: Establish robust day-to-day records maintenance procedures

Effective day-to-day management of records ensures that: records are complete and easily found; that personal papers, non-record materials, and reference materials are managed separately from official UN records; and that

records with ongoing value are identified and protected. Good records maintenance procedures need to be followed for both paper and electronic records, including keeping file folders and computer drives clean, removing obsolete information, and storing official records securely. These steps help the office run effectively and efficiently by requiring the appropriate disposition of all records, regardless of medium, including ensuring the destruction of obsolete and superseded records and the preservation of records with ongoing value.

Requirement 4: Establish specific measures for protecting records in non-traditional media

Daily records management also involves protecting records in formats other than traditional paper documents. Examples of records in non-traditional media include electronic, audiovisual, cartographic, and architectural records. The physical properties of these materials – such as film, microfilm, maps, plans, and digital files – requires that personnel follow specific measures to ensure the records are well managed. UN ARMS can provide specific guidance on how to manage these non-traditional media materials.

Requirement 5: Dispose of records effectively and in accordance with policies and procedures

A successful records management programme incorporates records disposition as a critical element. Disposing of records appropriately saves money on storage, improves the retrieval of important information, and reduces the risks associated with lost or damaged records. When offices regularly dispose of records that are no longer needed, and maintain only those active records needed for current business, efficiency improves significantly across the UN, and staff can perform their duties more effectively. Comprehensive, up-to-date, and properly implemented records retention schedules form the basis for a sound records disposition programme. All offices should work with UN ARMS to develop, implement, and maintain records retention schedules.

Requirements 6: Manage vital records so they are protected and available in the event of emergencies

A well-developed and up-to-date vital records programme helps offices to identify and protect those records essential to maintaining operations during an emergency or in any abnormal conditions. Vital records are essential to protecting the rights of the UN, its personnel, citizens, and other individuals directly affected by the UN's operations.

What to do next?

In order to determine the state of your office's records systems and develop strategies for achieving these six key record-keeping requirements, you should assess the state of your records systems against the UN ARMS self-assessment tool. As you conduct that assessment, you can identify where improvements can be made and then develop an office-wide strategy for taking all steps necessary to ensure your records systems are effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent.



This Record and Information Management Guidance Sheet is one of a series of introductory guides to records and information management. To learn more about how to manage your records effectively, contact the professional record-keeping experts at UN ARMS for help. To learn more about the importance of records and the value of records management, see the resources at <https://archives.un.org>.