

Records Management In Museums - What Should You Keep?

Records Management is a set of tools, activities and guidelines to ensure that the **right** person can find the **right** record or information at the **right** time, with the **least** amount of effort.

But what is a **record**? What is not? And what can be thrown out? **Records** are documents (paper and electronic) which provide **evidence** of a transaction, activity, decision or event.

Ask yourself:

- Am I responsible for this, or is it a copy?
- Does the museum need it for operational, legal or historic reasons?
- Do we need it for future work?
- What does it prove?

Examples

Keep

- ✓ signed contracts
- ✓ e-mails containing object information
- ✓ original invoices
- ✓ accession registers
- ✓ e-mails containing decisions
- ✓ curatorial research papers and notes

Dispose

- ✗ e-mails about meeting arrangements
- ✗ outdated equipment catalogues and manuals
- ✗ draft documents (if a final version is available)
- ✗ joining instructions for training and conferences
- ✗ copy invoices

Documents that you don't need for legal, operational or historic reasons are ephemeral - it is estimated that only 15-20% of museum records produced should be kept for the long term. If something you've been storing is ephemeral, don't waste time and space on it!

What to do next

Find out if there is someone in your museum with responsibility for records management, or if someone is doing work in that area. Talk to them about managing the records you need to keep in the long term.

Visit <http://www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/toolkits/RecordsManagement.pdf> for interactive training, detailed guidance on managing museum records, and advice on disposing of records you no longer need.
