

Appraisal Standard Consultation

We are seeking your views on **why** records should be kept forever, or not.

The draft Appraisal Standard defines general principles and criteria for deciding what records are kept forever. It also sets out requirements for South Australian government agencies to follow when undertaking appraisal of records for disposal schedules.

It will replace our guideline *Appraisal of Official Records – Policy and Objectives* dated February 2003.

Appraisal is the term we use for the process of deciding what records should be kept, and how long they should be kept for.

Criteria for determining what records are kept permanently

The criteria to be used by government agencies are grouped under eight themes:

1. Records that support Aboriginal people and tradition
2. Records that impact on people
3. Records supporting rights and entitlements
4. Records that document impact on place
5. Records of events and changes in society
6. Records documenting public policy
7. Records of governance and accountability
8. Records documenting government authority

Making Records

Everyone makes records. You may record events in a diary, send email messages or create a file of receipts for your tax return.

State government agencies and local councils do something similar every day. When you apply for a drivers licence or write to your local council, information is recorded about your interaction with government. Government also makes records through everyday business such as ordering stationery supplies or documenting a Cabinet meeting.

Government makes records when there is a need to retain evidence of actions and decisions. The need to make records may sometimes come from legislation and government policies.

Keeping Records

The length of time agencies and councils keep records can vary from days or months to very long periods of time, over 100 years. For example, under Work Health and Safety legislation records of working with asbestos need to be kept a minimum of 45 years in case workers develop signs of disease.

A very small volume of records (less than 5%) have permanent value and we keep these forever. We call these records *archives* and put effort into preserving them and making them accessible.

Why not just keep all records?

Records have many uses yet most of them are destroyed when no longer needed because:

- the business purpose for the record has been fulfilled, all legal and accountability reasons for keeping them have been met, and there is minimal risk to the agency and community if the records are destroyed
- the cost to store and manage records outweighs the benefit of keeping them just in case the information may be needed. This applies equally to both physical and digital records. For digital records there are costs for media storage, back up, migration, cataloguing, and providing access.
- all records degrade over time and they may have been created on formats which have become obsolete. The cost and effort to preserve these records would be unrealistic and put considerable strain on government resources.