

Introduction

Electronic records have transformed the way Virginia's state agencies and localities create and share information. From databases to email to social media, electronic records have largely replaced their paper predecessors. While the landscape has changed, the requirement remains to properly manage records in accordance with public records law.

Virginia's state and local agencies are required to manage all public records, including electronic records, according to the Virginia Public Records Act, or VPRA (*Code of Virginia* § 42.1-76–§ 42.1-91). The VPRA outlines the recordkeeping responsibilities of government employees, defines the scope of public records, and describes requirements for securing, retaining, and disposing of public records. The VPRA defines public records as follows:

"Public record" or "record" means recorded information that documents a transaction or activity by or with any public officer, agency, or employee of an agency. Regardless of physical form or characteristic, the recorded information is a "public record" if it is produced, collected, received, or retained in pursuance of law or in connection with the transaction of public business. The medium upon which such information is recorded has no bearing on the determination of whether the recording is a "public record."

- *Code of Virginia* §42.1-77

The value of information is determined by *content*, not its *format*. The content determines the value and how long the information must be retained. The same applies to electronic records. The value and retention period are determined by the informational content of the electronic record, rather than the specific format (Word, spreadsheets, databases, etc.). An agency's electronic records can have various retention requirements depending on the information they contain.

These guidelines describe general principles for managing electronic records, as well as specific guidance for common types of electronic records. Furthermore, these guidelines identify critical issues for public officials to consider when designing, selecting, implementing, operating, and maintaining an electronic records system.

The guidance is applicable to all state agencies, local government entities and regional authorities within the commonwealth as defined by the Code of Virginia.

[Electronic Records Guidelines \(Full Text\)](#)

Chapter-by-Chapter:

- [Trustworthy Electronic Records](#)
- [Managing Unstructured Records](#)
- [Managing Structured Records](#)
- [Managing Email](#)
- [Managing Web and Social Media Records](#)
- [Managing Instant Messages](#)
- [Destroying Electronic Records](#)