

Vital records

Vital records are critical documents that are essential for operation of ACT Government business. Vital records play a significant role in maintaining essential functions, supporting decision-making, and complying with legal and regulatory requirements. Identifying vital records, and establishing practices for their management helps ensure the resilience and sustainability of agency business during disruptions.

Vital records are those records that:

- establish and protect the rights and interest of the organisation and its employees, customers and stakeholders
- are needed to re-establish the organisation's functions after a disaster, or operate the organisation during a disaster.
- are irreplaceable, or would require significant resources to recreate.

Identifying vital records

Identifying vital records should be part of a broader analysis of agency recordkeeping requirements. Identification may help with the allocation of appropriate resources to recordkeeping processes and will form a central part of business continuity planning.

Vital records may be temporary, or permanent (RTA). They may exist throughout an organisation, from core business and recordkeeping systems, to form and transaction data that is yet to be processed and captured in a business system. It may be useful to discuss key business processes with line areas to identify records that may be overlooked.

Most vital records will be in active use, although records that establish the structure and authority of an agency, or protect the rights and interests of clients and staff may represent a significant proportion.

Vital records may be in any format. Records required after a disruption may be a combination of digital records, business system data, and legacy paper records.

When considering disaster preparedness, the public, or clients of an agency may require access to services and information that differs from the 'business as usual' of an agency.

Categories of Vital Records:

- Core Business Operations - Vital records, such as financial documents, contracts, and customer data, are essential for day to day business operations. These records provide critical information necessary for making informed decisions and conducting business activities.
- Compliance/regulatory - Agencies are subject to legal and regulatory requirements that mandate the retention and proper management of specific records.

- Disaster Recovery/Business continuity - Vital records are vital components of disaster recovery and business continuity plans. They provide the necessary information to efficiently restore operations after a disruption and ensure the continuity of key functions.

Different categories of vital records may require specific approaches to their access, protection and integrity within a business area.

Vital records and business continuity

Vital records are essential to the immediate needs of ACT Government Agencies following significant business disruption or disaster. Within a Business Continuity Plan, there should be provisions to prioritise access to this distinct subset of records, in the event of its activation. This prioritisation should be separate from any timeline for the resumption of usual recordkeeping activities. Planning processes may identify the need to provide additional protections to offset or mitigate risk, or training to ensure line areas are prepared for disruptions.

The following points should be considered in a business continuity planning process:

1. Identify and Prioritise Vital Records - Conduct an analysis of the organization and identify records that are vital for business continuity. Prioritize the most critical records based on their impact on business operations and decision-making.
2. Business Continuity Plan input – A business continuity plan should include specific procedures for the protection and retrieval of vital records during a disruption. Assign clear responsibilities to staff and regularly update the plan to reflect changes in business processes.
3. Only a portion of records may be vital for business continuity. Some may be copies of records held securely by other agencies and entities, or may be able to be recreated within a reasonable timeframe. Identifying the records most critical to business function will allow the best allocation of resources towards business continuity efforts.
4. Secure Storage - Use secure records storage solutions for vital records to ensure accessibility, redundancy, and protection from physical damage.
5. Training – Relevant staff should understand the importance of vital records and their role in business continuity, including required recordkeeping practices, data protection requirements, and the steps to follow during a disruption.
6. Documentation – Plans and procedures for disaster recovery, the retrieval and access of vital records, as well as supporting documentation such as staff contact lists should be regularly updated and audited.

References & information

<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/records-management-advice-vital-records>

https://archives.un.org/sites/archives.un.org/files/RM-Guidelines/guidance_vital_records.pdf

<https://www.informationstrategy.tas.gov.au/Records-Management-Principles/Document%20Library%20%20Tools/Advice%2052%20Identifying%20and%20Managing%20Vital%20Records.pdf>

[What are vital records? - Records Archives \(monash.edu\)](#)



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