

Managing Your Municipal Records The Right Approach

Part One

Prepared By:
The Municipal Training and Development Corporation

In Cooperation with:

Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Office - The Department of Justice
The Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archives
Records Unit - The Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador
- The Rooms Corporation

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Preface

This manual is a guide to the establishment of a centralized Records Management System that would be suitable for use in small to large municipalities. The principals and guidelines can be adapted to multi-departmental operations that are characteristic of larger centres that have de-centralized filing systems.

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- Mr. Sandy Hounsell
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- Mr. Paul Kenney
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- Ms. Ruby Piercey
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- Ms. Rosemary Smith
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The Importance of a Systematic Approach to Managing Municipal Records

Every municipal council in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has documents and information in a variety of forms that are an official "picture" or "record" of the affairs and business of the municipality. Some of these records are historical in nature, documenting past decisions and activities; others reflect the present state of affairs; while still others represent the municipality's future thinking. Records that one keeps are meant to be used and should be available, in good condition and easily accessible as the need arises.

Benefits of a Systematic Approach

A systematic approach to managing the records of a municipality would have the following benefits:

- Quick and easy retrieval of information when required;
- Protection of records from premature destruction;
- Scheduled disposition of records once their value has ceased;
- Reduction in storage space;
- Improved operational efficiency;
- Reduced duplication;
- Cost reduction benefit.

The Legal Responsibilities of the Town Clerk in the Management of Municipal Records and Information

Section 61(1) of the *Municipalities Act, 1999* states, "A clerk is the secretary to the council and is responsible to it for recording the proceedings and decisions of the council and **for the safekeeping of all documents of the council**".

Further, Section 61(2) of the Act states "Notwithstanding subsection (1), a council may delegate responsibility for the safekeeping of documents, which the council may prescribe, to another employee of council."

Therefore, the legal responsibility for the safekeeping of council documents rests with the clerk and/or her or his council authorized designate. This makes establishing and implementing a sound, systematic records management program an important priority.

Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Legal Responsibilities of Municipal Councils

Records management is a key feature of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (ATIPP Act or ATIPPA). **Municipal councils will be subject to the ATIPP Act.**

The ATIPP Act, when proclaimed, will replace the *Freedom of Information Act*. The ATIPP Coordinating Office of the Department of Justice is responsible for coordination and overall administration of ATIPPA. Training for municipal councils is part of their mandate. A Policy and Procedures Manual and other guidance will be provided to municipal councils by the ATIPP Coordinating Office.

ATIPPA supports openness and accountability by public bodies. Its purpose is to:

- give people a right of access to records held by public bodies
- to give people a right of access to records containing their own personal information, with only limited and specific exceptions to that right
- give people a right to request correction of their own personal information
- prevent the unauthorized collection, use and disclosure of personal information
- and provide for an independent review of decisions made under the ATIPP Act

To fulfill their legal obligations under ATIPPA, municipal councils will need to ensure that their records are properly managed. When records are sought under the ATIPP Act, the municipality must be able to identify and locate the records and respond to requests within a 30 day time limit. (There is a provision which will permit an extension of the 30 day time limit in certain circumstances.) The person making the request is entitled to complain to the Information and Privacy Commissioner if the 30 day time limit is not met, or if the records they requested are denied, and for a number of other reasons. Therefore, it is essential for municipalities to ensure that requests for access are not delayed or denied because records cannot be located.

The protection of privacy provisions of ATIPP obligate municipalities to protect all personal information in its custody and/or control, to limit use and disclosure of personal information, and to collect only the personal information they are authorized to collect. These requirements apply to all personal information, held by council, including employees, municipal councillors, volunteers and members of the public, etc. Also see "ATIPP and Access to Municipal Records" on Page 17

Records Management Basics

Overview

What is a Record?

A "Record" is any recorded information, regardless of format

This includes, but is not limited to: correspondence, council minutes and other documents, computer files, assessments rolls, approved financial documents, E-mail, memoranda, forms, papers, maps, plans, drawings, paintings, prints, photographs, videos, audio tapes and magnetic tapes.

In a similar vein, but with an additional advisory, ATIPP defines "record" as

... a record of information in any form, and includes information that is written, photographed, recorded or stored in any manner, but does not include a computer program or a mechanism that produced records on any storage medium

Municipal records can be:

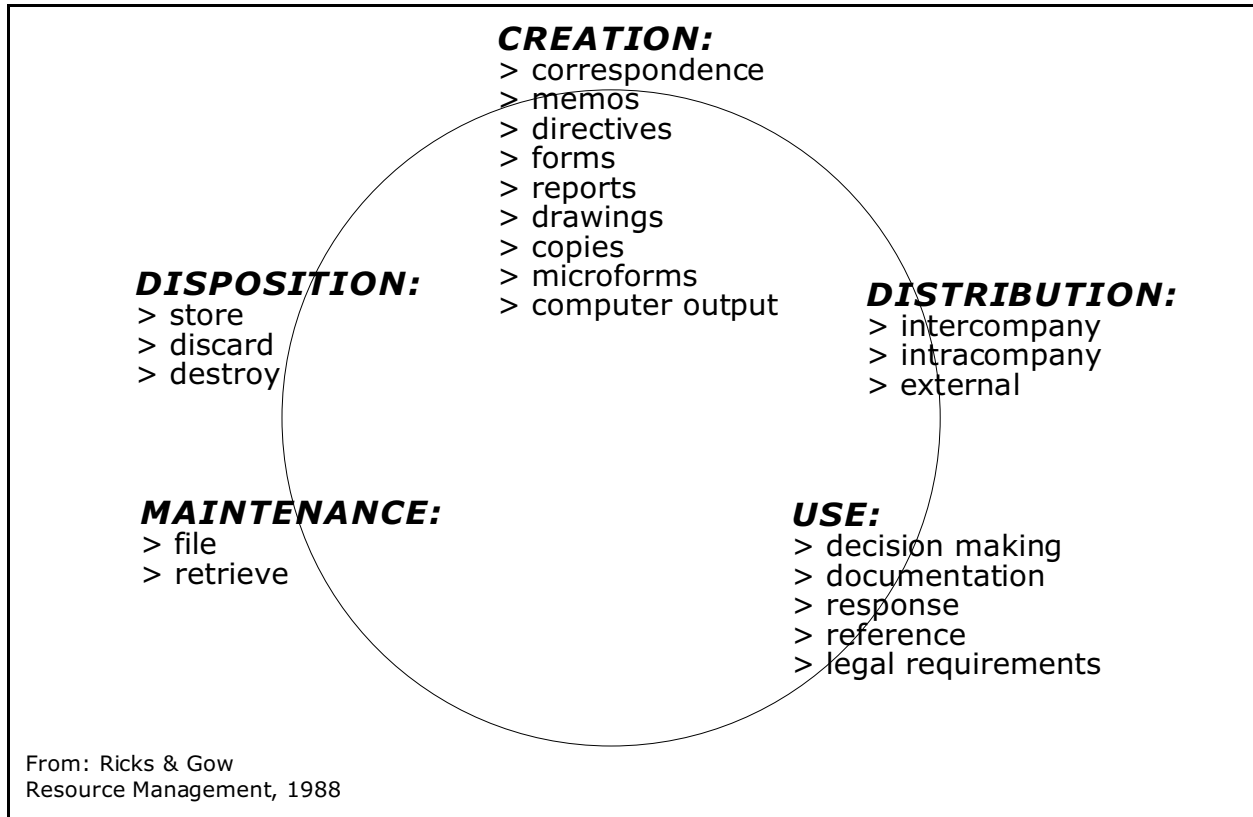
- Active . . . useful to day-to-day operations
- Semi-active . . . useful but infrequent retrieval
- Dormant or inactive . . . useless to council's current operations
- Essential . . . vital to council's continuing operation
- Archival . . . judged worthy of permanent preservation for legal, financial, evidentiary, reference and research purposes.

What is Records Management?

In light of the ATIPP requirements and as a matter of good practice, every municipal council, regardless of the size or complexity of its operation, needs to have an efficient and effective system in place to handle and store the ever growing volume of information and documentation that it receives or creates on a day-to-day basis.

The purpose of an records and information management program is to provide an organized, logical, systematic and cost effective control of **all** records from their creation to their final disposition. Such a program will provide policies and procedures for the control and management of all council records throughout their life cycle: creation; distribution; use; retention; storage; retrieval; protection; preservation, and/or final disposition of records. (see the diagram on the following page)

Life Cycle of a Record



Developing a Municipal Records Management Program

Steps in Establishing a Records Management Program

Council Approval to Proceed

Before proceeding, one should have the support and approval of the council to develop a program. This should take the form of a motion passed at a regular council meeting giving the authority and direction to undertake the project. Council needs to identify a coordinator for the program. In towns with only one administrator, the coordinator will be the Town Clerk. In larger towns with multiple staff, the Town Clerk might manage the work of others in establishing the program.

Any and all staff should be made aware of the program as their support and assistance will likely be needed to achieve the goals and objectives established for the program. The program should also be promoted as widely as possible to ensure cooperation and inclusion of records which may have been taken home inappropriately by former councillors or staff.

Determine Council's Information Priorities

Many councils with no existing program will have a variety of records management issues to resolve. Lack of space to store information is a common problem; inability of staff to locate critical information when required, is another. Sometimes the need for a records and information management program arises from a crisis which occurs - for example, an auditor's report or Municipal and Provincial Affairs finds deficiencies in the record keeping, or a town loses a lawsuit because significant information cannot be located. When municipalities become subject to ATIPP legislation, records management will become a priority.

Conduct an Inventory of All Records in All Formats

After receiving the approval from council, an inventory of ALL records (in active office files or in storage) needs to be done. The inventory takes stock of what records are on hand, to determine the volume (physical dimensions, ie. in cubic metres), location, function, contents, condition, degree of duplication etc. Evaluations and appraisals of records can be made based on this data.

Inventories can be undertaken in a short-term intensive effort of staff and councillors or by using a long term planned approach. Beginning with an inventory of the active records in the council office with a plan to

systematically look at stored records over time, is an example of a long term approach.

An inventory form needs to be developed to capture the information required to make retention and disposal decisions. From the inventory one can determine whether the records are active, semi-active, inactive or essential.

Whether undertaken by the administrator as an on-site physical inventory, done by a committee or by some other means, the inventory will also provide information for the analysis of current and past record keeping practices. Such analysis usually lays the foundation for the development of records retention and disposition schedules, new file classification plans and the identification of both records with permanent value and records which may be destroyed.

See Appendix A for a sample
"Records Inventory and Analysis Worksheet".

Implement A Standard Records Classification System

A standard records classification system is a fundamental principle of records management. In a municipal office where all the records are centralized in one place, this can be accomplished without too much difficulty. In the case of municipalities with multiple departments, possibly in different locations, one standard filing system is essential so that all staff filing records identify and code their records in the same way. For example, all budget information is treated the same way by all departments or individuals responsible. This allows staff to develop a standard approach to things like, retention periods and records disposition.

Filing systems vary from council to council:

- Alphabetical systems are the most common. They can be used for case (source) files and small subject file systems.
- Case files consist of records on a specific person, place, thing, or event (eg. property files arranged by civic addresses).
- Subject files are topical, based on the subject matter of the record.
- Alpha-numeric systems use numbers to identify files controlled by an alphabetical index.
- Straight number systems are suitable for contracts, vouchers, purchase orders, civic addresses and assessment files.

Remember two points:

- Strict alphabetical filing arranges records only by the first letter of the subject. Using a strictly alphabetical system can be confusing and can make retrieval of file problematic for those not familiar with the administrator's methods of classifying files. The reason for this is the only relationship of records next to each other is the letter of the alphabet.

It is easier to retrieve files that are grouped together with others relating to a main function or subject. For example, it would be much more logical to have all the financial records filed under the subject of "Finance".

- **Records filing systems need to be designed to suit the needs of the *organization* not the needs of the *individual*.** The real test of a good logical filing system, simple or otherwise, is if someone, other than the administrator or person responsible for the filing, can actually find information without assistance.

See ***Managing Your Municipal Records- Part Two***, for a sample filing system for small municipalities using a numerical/subject approach.

The numbering system is optional but filing by subject is a solid practice in towns of any size.

What to Keep??? . . . Some Pointers

Once the inventory is complete and all the technical data is captured, the records now undergo an *appraisal process*. Records appraisal is an act of professional judgement. The appraisal process determines the retention values and the final disposition of records. The main focus, when appraising records, is on the *value of the information content*, including administrative, legal, financial or fiscal and historical value.

Administrative Value – records, whether created or received, have value to the municipality if they assist in the performance of current or future activities. Normally these records lose their value shortly after completion of their activity. (E.g. meeting records, excepting council meetings, may decrease in value after the meeting has taken place.) Other records may have longer value. Records related to construction projects will have value for the life of the project or the constructed building.

If the answer to the following questions is "yes", the records of no more administrative value.

- Has the record ceased to contribute to the administrative performance of the function it supported?

- Has the original purpose of the record been fulfilled?
- Is the record being retained as a convenience or because it has been the practice to keep it?
- Has the transaction within each individual record been completed?
- Has the record been kept merely to guard against administrative blame?
- Is the record available elsewhere, i.e. is it duplicated?

Legal Value – the value of these documents usually does not diminish and they are required by legislation. Regulations, contracts, legal decisions, minutes and tax enforcement transactions are examples of documents in this category.

If the answer to the following questions is “yes” the records are of no more legal value.

- Has the specific legal action been completed?
- Has the legal evidence served its original purpose?
- Have the rights of the council been protected?
- Have the rights of an individual involved been protected?
- Is the record available elsewhere, i.e. is it duplicated?

Fiscal Value – records have value in determining the financial position and history of the municipality. The fiscal value of records may be defined as those which a council requires to show how moneys are obtained, allotted, controlled and expended. Financial ledgers, vouchers, accounts payable records, debenture records and financial statements are examples of documents of fiscal value.

In assessing records for fiscal values the following questions must be asked and, when the answers are “yes”, the records will have no more fiscal value.

- Has the original purpose of the record been served?
- Has the specific financial transaction been completed?
- Have the rights of any individual involved in the transaction been protected?
- Is the record available elsewhere, i.e. is it duplicated?

The Historical Value of records are those with informational data, research or statistical information. Historical records usually relate to major events in the history and development of the municipality and its citizens. These records would be transferred to the town's archives for long term retention. Approved council minutes and financial statements would be an example.

Secondary considerations in this category include the utility of the record for third-party research on such topics as genealogy, community history, historical land use and other historical research topics. (It may be helpful to consult other municipalities who may have had experience with historical researchers of this type.)

If the answers to the following questions are "yes", then the records **will HAVE historical value** and must be kept for preservation in the towns archives.

- Does the record show the important aspects of the council?:
 - its origin
 - its organization and organizational changes
 - its administrative role
 - its operational role
- Does the record show the POLICY decisions made by the council?
- Does the record reveal the details of the following activities in which the council was involved during its operation?:
 - economic
 - internal political
 - external political
 - research
 - scientific
 - social
 - statistical
 - any other conditions the council dealt with during its operation?

If the record has no further administrative, legal or fiscal value, you may wish to dispose of the record. If it has no historical value and needing preservation in the town's archives, it may be destroyed.

The next section concerns the development of a Records Retention and Disposition Schedule. Developing and using a schedule makes the decisions about what to keep and for how long much easier.

Develop a Records Retention and Disposal Schedule

Did you know that . . . ?

The disposal of records does NOT NECESSARILY mean the destruction of records . . . Disposal can mean either:

- the destruction of records, or
- transferring records to the town's archives to be held permanently for historical value.

An on-going concern confronting municipal administrators is the accumulation and disposal of records. To deal with the accumulation and disposal of records, administrators have relied on the use of records retention and disposal schedules.

Records are scheduled for two reasons:

- to identify and protect valuable records; and
- to authorize the destruction of records that no longer have value.

Municipalities may determine their own retention and disposal schedules. The only consideration, when a municipal council sets the schedule, is that it **can not supercede any other retention requirements as set out in any other provincial and federal legislation.**

In particular, the ATIPP Act contains several provisions which affect the retention and disposal of records. See page 17 for further information. Another important requirement of ATIPPA is that personal information about an individual (whether employee, council member, volunteer, member of the public, etc.) that is used to make a decision about that individual must be retained for at least one year to permit the person to have access if they choose to do so.

The schedule established by council applies to the records of the municipality and to the records of any board, commission, association, etc. that is established by council.

The benefits of using a schedule are:

- It keeps the volume of records in the office and in storage under control.
- It facilitates the disposal of unnecessary or duplicated materials.
- Documents that should be retained are kept for the appropriate time periods.
- It is a tool for identifying and protecting vital records and records of permanent value.

The records slated for permanent retention should be kept at all times in a secure and suitable environment, and protected as much as possible against accidental destruction or loss. These records must remain in the custody and possession of the municipality.

Assignment of Retention Periods

The establishment of time periods ("scheduling") should be based upon the advice of a number of people to ensure that the correct length of time for municipal needs is met. Frequently, in larger towns, municipal governments will form a committee composed of representatives from various departments and agencies, e.g. Department heads, chairpersons of council committees and the town clerk. The committee reviews each record series and establishes a retention period, prescribing the length of time the record will be required in active office space, the length of time the records will be required, but could be stored, and the final time at which the record will be disposed of. The decision takes into consideration each of the values described and the unique needs of the municipality.

In small towns, the town clerk and a committee of council could do the work described above.

The Retention and Disposition Schedule

Once time periods have been established for all records series, the information is compiled into the document known as the Records Retention and Disposition Schedule. This document, with written policies and procedures, becomes the council's written plan for its records disposition program.

Once prepared, the schedule should be reviewed and approved by all appropriate authorities. Municipal auditors and legal counsel could be asked to review the time periods to ensure that all consideration has been covered. The ultimate approval will be given by the Municipal Council, since all records are the property of the municipality.

It is recommended that the municipality officially adopt, as policy, the retention and disposition schedule of municipal records.

See **Managing Your Municipal Records - Part Two** for a sample Retention and Disposition Schedule.
This is a guide only. Municipalities must develop their own schedules. This sample IS, however, consistent with schedules of small and medium municipalities in other provinces

Implementation

The application of the schedule means the actual physical transfer of records, and preservation or disposal of records according to the written schedule.

Frequently, the implementation period will be chosen to coincide with the commencement of a new operating year.

Material That Does Not Require a Retention Period

Certain material may be disposed of as soon as it is read or kept on file for a very short time. These are called transitory records. If the material has no documentary value, there is no need to file it.

Ask the question, **“Is it worth keeping?”** Examples:

- extra reference copies kept for convenience;
- working papers, preliminary drafts, which are summarized or published in another form, after completion of the action;
- catalogues, trade journals, other published/processed materials from other governments, municipalities, or firms, which require no action;
- publications, informational material or unused forms; routing slips to direct distribution of papers.
- draft documents

To summarize, the Records Retention and Disposition Schedule establishes the life cycle of a record at the time of its creation. It determines when the active life of a record ends and when it may be transferred to an inactive storage area. It dictates when a record is moved out of the council office or department and establishes the time and method of disposing of the record. When established as policy, the schedule will ensure that the administrator and/or departments may regularly remove and dispose of unneeded information. At the same time, important information is preserved as required. The permanent records so identified become part of the Municipal Archives.

Records Transfer and Storage

File Purging

File purging needs to be undertaken when files are removed from active office space to semi-active or inactive storage to remove non-record materials from files and reduce bulk in the folders. Usually this task is undertaken at the beginning of the operating year. For municipalities, the file purging and transfer will take place in January.

According to time periods specified in the retention schedule, records will be retained in the office or moved to storage. As file folders are removed for storage, staff should check for and remove duplicate materials, transmission slips, flyers, brochures, magazines, notices of past events, draft documents which have been superceded, etc.

Transfer lists

Each file folder to be stored must be listed on a two-part form called a transfer list or box inventory list. Two copies of the list are made; one copy is filed in the box to serve as an inventory of box contents, and one copy is retained by the office staff as a record of what was stored in the box, for future reference and retrieval.

See Appendix B for a sample "Records Transfer List"

Storage boxes

All records should be stored in a tote box or storage box, ***especially intended for records storage***. These boxes are a standard size, usually approximately 15" x 12" x 10" , and hold 1.5 cubic feet of files.

General Guide

- The old style vertical file drawer usually required two boxes to store the contents of the drawer
- A lateral filing cabinet drawer takes three or four boxes, depending upon how tightly packed the drawers.

Such boxes are also known as "letter/legal" boxes because folders will fit from front to back if letter size and across the box is legal size. The municipality should specify which type of box to use, and maintain one common box for optimum storage capability.

Important Note . . .

DO NOT use ordinary available cardboard boxes, because the bottom will not bear the weight of file folders when filled.

Such boxes can collapse, and do not protect the records from dust, moisture, etc.

Folders are packed in the box in their filing sequence, and listed on the transfer list in that sequence. Sufficient information must be recorded about each folder to enable later retrieval of information. (Do not list the box contents as "Bill Jones" files, 1993-97, as this will not later enable retrieval of agreements, project information or other specific records which Bill Jones may have been responsible for managing.)

Box Numbering

As the records are packed, assign each box a box number, starting with the number "1" and the year, continuing through consecutively to the last box. Write the box number on the SIDES OF THE BOX, not on the cover. This box number should also be recorded on the transfer lists. The box should also be labelled on the outside with the office/department, name and year.

Records Storage

In the best of all possible worlds, a municipality would have a central facility, other than the council office, for housing and servicing all municipal inactive and semi-active records. Some larger towns might build a warehouse for such a purpose or rent space from a commercial storage centre. Smaller towns generally use available space, such as a warehouse, dry basement or attic or rent space from commercial storage centres, if they are available.

The **IDEAL** requirements for storage space are:

- convenient location
- on one floor only or with an elevator to upper floors
- high ceilings with few support pillars
- wide entrances to facilitate the deposit and removal of boxes
- adequate equipment (eg. sturdy steel shelving, step ladders, carts, a shredder)
- workspace and washrooms
- strong floor to hold weight of records
- adequate ventilation
- relative humidity of 50 to 60 %
- temperature between 17 and 22 degrees Celsius
- area clean and dust free
- adequate lighting

Security for stored files should also be maintained, with restricted access to authorized persons only. Sprinklers and smoke detectors are a benefit. Environmental hazards and proximity to combustible materials and other hazards should be avoided.

Reality Check . . .

It is recognized that the above represents the ideal situation. Every municipality should strive to provide or arrange for the best storage possible given their local circumstances and finances.

Disposal Authorization

In any organization, policies and procedures need to be in place for the proper disposal of records. In a municipal setting, the simplest and easiest method would be to prepare detailed disposal requests and have council approve them at a regular meeting of council.

Approval can be sought for specific records or for specific groups of records. In the case of groups of records, the request for disposition would list the specific number of boxes, their contents and the date range of the records.

As indicated earlier, the most efficient method would be the development of retention and disposition schedules. A schedule would describe a records series or a type of record and list the length of time that type of record should be kept before it could be disposed.

Disposal Methods

Remember . . .

disposal can mean either records are sent to an archives to be held permanently for their historical value OR they can be destroyed.

Municipal governments can develop their own archival holdings or develop deposit, gift or loan agreements with the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador or with community or regional heritage groups.

If records are to be destroyed, they should be shredded and recycled or, alternately, incinerated under carefully controlled conditions.

Important Note . . .

Records must not be thrown out, dumped or left in any condition where any information is still legible

Access to Municipal Records

People will want to access the town's records for a number reasons. Reviewing their tax accounts, checking the assessment roll, researching family histories are only a few examples of records that people might want to see.

Section 215. (1) Of the *Municipalities Act, 1999* provides that the following municipal records be made available by the council for public inspection during the normal business hours of the council:

- adopted minutes of the council;
- assessment rolls;
- regulations;
- municipal plans;
- opened public tenders;
- financial statements;
- auditor's reports;
- adopted budgets;
- contracts;
- orders;
- permits; and
- all other documents tabled or adopted by council at a public meeting.

Recall that the town clerk or council approved designated employee has the legal responsibility for the filing, maintenance and safe keeping of the official documents of the town. **This means that:**

- Councillors and the general public should only have *supervised access* to those official town documents to which they are entitled to view as specified under Section 215(1) of the *Municipalities Act, 1999*.
- Access should be allowed only during regular office hours at the convenience of the clerk or the designate and should not interfere with normal administrative duties..
- The public may take copies of these types of documents away with them. Council can charge a cost recovery fee for this service.
- Council authority is required for an individual councillor or a committee of council to have access to the official documents that are NOT part of the public domain. (i.e. personnel files, taxpayers accounts). Again, access should be supervised and allowed only during regular office hours.
- **The official documents of the town, including the financial records, must never be taken from the town office by anyone, with the exception of:**
 - Municipal Analysts of the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs are permitted access to all the town's records to carry out their job in accordance with the *Municipal Affairs Act*.

- Although NOT a sound practice, council may authorize the town auditors to take the books of accounts out of the town office when conducting an audit.
- Valid court orders can have the documents removed from the town office.

ATIPPA and Access to Municipal Records

ATIPPA provides the public with a right of access to municipal records, subject only to specific and limited exceptions. Municipal councils are encouraged to provide the public with access on an informal basis. However, if a person makes a formal request under ATIPPA for information or records, they are required to pay an application fee and may be subject to further charges. If dissatisfied with the response received to a formal ATIPPA request, the applicant will be able to make a complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

ATIPPA recognizes that the release of certain records may cause harm to a municipal council or to a third party. Exceptions to access in the ATIPPA Act permit municipalities, at their discretion, to deny access to certain records or parts of records when a request is made.

ATIPPA and Retention Schedules . . . ATIPPA must always be considered when developing a retention schedule. The Act contains a number of exceptions to access. Even though ATIPPA gives people a *right* of access to records, the legislation recognizes that some records and information ought to be protected from disclosure. That means that if someone requests a copy of a document or information which the municipal council either *must* protect, or *may* protect under ATIPPA, then the municipal council will invoke one or more exceptions to deny access to the information in those records. Some of these exceptions, however, include a time limit and that has a direct impact on records retention and disposal.

For example, if a member of the public requests, under ATIPPA, copies of records containing information which would reveal a draft of a resolution, the municipality may refuse access to this document citing paragraph 19(1)(a) of ATIPPA. However, the record cannot be protected under this section where the record has been in existence for 15 years or more.

Sections of ATIPPA which include time limits are 19 (local public body confidences); 20 (policy advice or recommendations); and 23 (disclosure harmful to intergovernmental relations or negotiations).

Therefore, it is important that records which would be protected from access under one of these exceptions be kept long enough to enable access once the time limit has expired. Refer to the ATIPPA Act, and especially sections 19, 20 and 23, when developing your records retention and disposal schedule.

Archival Records in the Records Management Process

Some Pointers for Municipal Records Keepers

Archival activities are important components of any records management or administrative program. A well-documented and well-run archival component facilitates access to information, both for internal administrative purposes and by legitimate researchers from outside the administrative unit.

What Are Archival Records?

Archival records are records scheduled for permanent or long-term retention. In the case of in-house archives – like municipalities – records management policies and retention schedules provide important guidance in deciding what will be permanently retained. Maintaining a record in your archival holding is one option for disposal in the records management system. Not every document belongs in your archival holdings -- a study done at the state archives in Minnesota determined that only about 5% of its business record holdings were actually archival.

The Role of the Archivist

The objective of the archival process is to organize and preserve archival materials so that they can be used by researchers, both now and in times to come. Researchers can be internal (eg. council employees or officials) or external.

The primary tasks of an archivist include:

- **Selection and appraisal:** Determining the archival value of materials and their suitability to your institution.
- **Accessioning:** The physical and legal transfer of records to your archives, either as part of the records management process or from outside sources.
- **Arrangement:** Determining, documenting or sometimes creating order within the set of records acquired by the archives.
- **Description:** Recording information, in a standardized format, pertaining to the structure, function and content of the records.
- **Preservation:** Measures designed to minimize damage and deterioration of archival materials

Important Archival Concepts

Intellectual Control Documentation which enhances access to archival materials by describing the context of the archival materials, their arrangement and their informational content. This might include indexes, inventories, file lists, information about filing systems, etc. Record keepers should maintain notes about the filing systems they use. If the filing system changes, this should be noted and any old indexes, codes, etc should be retained. If electronic records are maintained, information about programs and equipment used, when information was migrated, etc, should be saved along with the records.

Original Order The order in which records were arranged by their creator. Archivists maintain original order, even if it seems irrational or inefficient. This is because the original arrangement is evidence of the ways in which the records were used or valued by the creator.

Institutional Guidelines for Municipal Archives

The establishment and operation of an archives, even a small in-house archives, requires thoughtful planning. A policy and procedure manual presents a careful statement of the goals of the archives, a commitment of institutional support, the expectations of the archivist, the types of archival materials acquired, access policies and reference services. Your archives will have its own mandate, goals and procedures, which will form part of your policy document on records management and which should integrate smoothly with those of your records management program.

Time spent on formulating institutional guidelines will result in reduced expenditures of time, effort and money and a reduction in the number of potentially stressful situations. In the case of the management of electronic records, clearly articulated policies and procedures are essential to demonstrate the integrity of the electronic document.

Right now your archival holdings may form a very small part of your records management system. You may find that you do not have much occasion to refer to these files. It may be that once the records are properly arranged, described and stored they will require very little administrative energy. Nonetheless, it is important that policies and procedures for this stage of your municipality's records management program are carefully thought out and properly implemented.

Mandate

A mandate dictates acquisition policies, which in turn dictate the shape and size of the collection and the time, effort and money required to maintain it. Your municipality should have clearly defined goals for its archives.

Points to consider when developing your mandate:

- From whom will archival materials be collected? Will the archives retain only those materials selected for long-term retention by its records-management process? What about the papers of former mayors, councillors and municipal officials? Will you accept other historical records from your community?
- What are the geographical boundaries? What about the individual records of amalgamated communities? What about the records of neighbouring resettled communities?
- What types of records will be collected? Will the archives collect specialized media such as audiotapes, videotapes and computer disks? Can the archives provide appropriate care and access to the materials?
- What services can your archives provide to users? Do you have staff or volunteers to process materials and to provide access?

The mandate must be approved and endorsed by your municipal council as part of your records management program.

Administration

Frequently, archives find that their profile within the parent organization is marginal. It is especially important to have an administrative structure which provides administrative continuity for the archival holdings and a line of communication with council.

- Is there a **designated person** responsible for the archives?
- Does the archives collect **statistics** on research visits, requests by mail, telephone and electronic communications?
- Does the archives **inform** its sponsor institution of use of holdings and priorities/needs? This may be a written report to council or to the appropriate committee of council.
- Does the archives **document** policies and procedures?

Finances

Municipalities must realize that there will be some costs attendant on the retention and long-term storage of records. Archival supplies are expensive and the maintenance of a proper archival environment entails expenditures. Some things to consider:

- At what level can the municipality support an archives (supplies, proper archival space, heat, light)?
- Is there a regular budget item for expenses for maintaining archival holdings?

Staff

Many in-house archives are staffed by volunteers, part-time staff or staff persons with many other responsibilities. Frequently, the institution relies on one individual whose expertise is crucial to the daily operation and practices of the archives and his/her departure or retirement often causes a crisis. To ensure continuity it is important to adopt guidelines for staff:

- Has the designated archivist completed any basic archival training?
- Does the archives staff have any resource books to consult concerning basic practices?
- Does the archives have job descriptions for regular staff (paid and volunteer) and for summer students?

Physical Facilities

Ideal conditions for records storage have been discussed on Page 14. Three distinct areas are needed for archival use: a locked storage area for holdings; a work area with a table to process holdings; and a reading area for researchers. Because archives house unique and irreplaceable materials, special attention should be given to **security and careful maintenance**.

- Has the sponsor provided space for ongoing use of the archives? In most municipal offices space is at a premium and no dedicated area is available for researchers: nonetheless, provisions should be made for the occasional use of a supervised space if one is needed.
- Is access to the archives controlled?
- Is the reading area accessible to the physically handicapped and to senior citizens?
- Are there regular, annual inspections of facilities (plumbing, fire, etc.)?
- Does the archives have an emergency/disaster plan?
- Does the archives have proper humidity and environment controls?

Access – Practical Issues

Access issues for archival holdings should follow the policies and procedures in place for active records. (See Page 14)

- Is there a written access policy specifying **hours of operation** or a **contact person** for appointment?
- Are there **written rules and regulations** for users?
- Do all users have **equal access** and services?

See Appendix C for a sample generic policies and procedures document for a small archival holding

Policies and Procedures

Policies and Procedures Development

Town councils need to develop numerous policies and procedures around many issues and situations. For example: those related to personnel (eg. training, pay rate, leave, overtime compensation), tax collection and remedies for non-payment of taxes, and thawing of frozen water pipes in private homes. *As previously indicated policies and procedures relating to records management are equally important.*

What are policies and procedures anyway . . . ?

Policies are the statements of accepted and approved courses or methods of action to guide and determine present and future decisions. They are like a set of "rules" for dealing with issues and situations that commonly arise in conducting the business of the organization. They tell the employees and the public "what" the organization will do or not do given a certain set of circumstances, now and in the future.

If the policies are the "what" an organization will do, the procedures are the "how" the organization will carry out the "what". They are the specific steps to be taken to follow the policies.

General Guidelines . . .

Policies and procedures should be:

- clearly stated in written form;
- approved by council at a regular meeting;
- reasonable and legal - they cannot allow council or its employees to do anything illegal or override existing laws;
- applied equally and fairly;
- reviewed from time to time to ensure they are relevant and useful

No Policies? Unwritten Policies? Unsure?

Write things down . . .

If there are commonly accepted ways and practices of dealing with municipal records and other municipal matters that are not recorded anywhere . . . write them down in a Policies and Procedures Manual. Council should review the results and decide if they want to continue with the various policies or procedures that have been identified. If so, the written policies and procedures should be approved at a council meeting. If they are no longer relevant, they can be modified for current use and approved or officially rescinded. Additional material can be added if and when required, to complete the manual.

Research the Council Minutes . . .

Some towns have made numerous policy and procedural decisions over time that are "buried" in the minutes of previous council meetings. Some policies and procedures may be in current use or they may have been forgotten as time passes and councils and staff change. Careful research of the previous council minutes will reveal the details of these decisions. The resulting information can then be reviewed and re-approved, adjusted or discarded as the council determines. Approved policies and procedures should be recorded in a manual for this purpose with additional material added, if necessary. (See next section)

The Policies and Procedures Manual . . .

When policies and procedures are approved at council meetings, they become part of the minutes of the meetings. They should also be recorded SEPARATELY in a Policies and Procedures Manual. If not, then council and staff can lose track of these important decisions over time. People can and do forget what policy decisions were made and when. A simple Policies and Procedures Manual can be developed and easily maintained by:

- using a standard format for recording policies and procedures;
- storing them in a three-ring binder. Some municipal administrators prepare such a binder for each councillor for easy reference.

Depending on the number and type of policies and procedures, the binder can be sub-divided or additional binders used. Policies and procedures relating to records management matters, for example, could be stored in one section of a binder or in a separate binder, as necessary.

See Appendix D for a sample template for recording policies and procedures.

Practical Advice for Getting Started

Administrators may be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of records they are holding onto. The work involved for an individual administrator to go back to the earliest records and begin the records management process as described previously would be tremendous and not a very practical solution to the problem. The following ideas and suggestions might prove helpful.

The “Go Forward” Plan

First things first. Get the active records in the office in order before beginning any work on the older records.

1. Get council authority to proceed
2. Conduct an inventory of all records in all formats in the council/department office
3. Establish the file classification system and arrange records accordingly
4. Do a records appraisal, assessing the administrative, legal, fiscal and historical value of the record contents
5. Draft and get council approval of the Records Retention and Disposition Schedule
6. Purge the files for any transitory records that could be shredded, burned or thrown away.
7. Separate “active” files (current year plus one or two years) from those to be transferred to storage as “inactive”.
8. Box the records set for storage, assign box numbers and complete the Records Transfer List. **Make a copy of the transfer list. Keep one in the office and place one in the box.** Also, make a label to place on the outside of the box to indicate the contents.
9. Arrange for the transfer and supervise the proper storage of the records. Keep “inactive” records that may be referenced more frequently than others in an easily accessible place.
10. File the inventory sheets and the copies of the transfer information for future reference.

Once the active records are looked after, the administrator can focus on developing a long term plan to handle the older and historical records.

Get Some Help

As indicated earlier, the task of setting up a management system for all the town's records can be a daunting one. Some municipal councils have kept everything received or created by the town since its inception and the volume of records is staggering. Busy administrators, especially those working part-time can rightly argue that they simply do not have the time to devote to organizing a proper system.

Set Up a Records Management Committee

Under the supervision of the town clerk, a committee of council or a group of volunteers appointed by council could undertake a lot of the work. Retired persons with an interest in the town and its history, for example, might make excellent volunteers to help with the project

The clerk would handle all the confidential and sensitive records but the committee could deal with the rest.

Hire Some Help

There are numerous funding programs that may provide the financial assistance to hire one or more persons to help with the records management project. Again, under the supervision of the town clerk, the bulk of the work of establishing a system can be carried out by the hired staff.

Here are some of the programs:

- SWASP - HR&E (Provincial) - 8 week summer placement - Stipend from HR&E & a tuition voucher - no cost to employer
- Job Creation Partnership - HRDC (Federal) Top-up of EI - 100% funded (available all year) - this program is always looking for ways to employ persons on EI (other than cutting brush)
- Summer Career Placement - HRDC - up to 100% funded - Students looking for summer work
- Targeted Wage Subsidy - HRDC - partially funded - will cost the employer money
- Workterm Students - MUN & CONA - employers choice whether to pay - part of course
- Workterm Students - Private Colleges - employers choice whether to pay - part of course

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Appendix A

Records Inventory and Analysis Worksheet

Office of Primary Responsibility (OPR)		Office of Secondary Responsibility (OSR/Dept)	
Title of Record Series		Contact Person	
Location of Records			
Description of Record Series (content, purpose etc.)			
Dates of Records		Records Still Created?	Volume
From	To	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	_____ Cu. m
Annual Accumulated Volume			
_____ Cu. m			
Record Series Characteristics (check appropriate boxes)			
Type: <input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Card <input type="checkbox"/> Bound Volume <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____			
Size: <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Legal <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____			
Status: <input type="checkbox"/> Original <input type="checkbox"/> Copy			
Format: <input type="checkbox"/> Typewritten <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____			
Arrangement: <input type="checkbox"/> Chronological <input type="checkbox"/> Alphabetical By _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Numerical By _____ Other _____			
Reference frequency (insert numbers and circle appropriate words)			
_____ times . . . daily . . . weekly . . . monthly . . . yearly for _____ months . . . years Never, after _____			
Information available elsewhere?		Are the records indexed?	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If yes, where? _____		<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If yes, explain _____	
How are the records stored?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Filing cabinets <input type="checkbox"/> Shelves <input type="checkbox"/> Boxes <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____			
Condition of the records?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Good Explain any problems _____			
Condition of storage area? (Security, fireproof, alarms, environment etc.)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Good Explain storage problems _____			
Period of active use		Retention and Disposition Recommendations	
		Office: <input type="checkbox"/> OPR <input type="checkbox"/> OSR Storage _____ Total Retention: _____ years	
		Final Disposition: <input type="checkbox"/> Transfer to archives <input type="checkbox"/> Destroy	
Action taken			
<input type="checkbox"/> Records returned to active use, date _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Records sent to inactive storage, date _____			
<input type="checkbox"/> Records destroyed, date _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Retained permanently, sent to archives, date _____			
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain) _____			
Action taken by (please print name) _____			
Name of person completing inventory			Date

Appendix C

Sample Archives Policy Manual

OUTLINE

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I INTRODUCTION

A. Name

B. Definition and Scope

The Archives is the official depository for all documents and records made or received by the Municipality of XXXX in the pursuit of its legal obligation. These documents reflect the conduct of its affairs as a legal corporation. Accounts of the functions, policies, decisions, procedures, formal operations and of all activities which provide information about the municipality shall be deposited in the Archives.

II FUNCTIONAL CONSIDERATION

A. Purpose

The purpose of maintaining Archives is to centralize, organize, preserve, protect and make available the records which pertain to the origin, ongoing history and growth of the Municipality of XXXX.

B. Importance

For the general administration, the Archives is a depository for organizational records that have been selected for long-term retention. The Archives is thus a source from which important data can be retrieved for policy direction, personnel information and legal purposes.

III THE ARCHIVIST

A. Appointment and Qualifications

The Archivist is appointed by Council and works under the supervision of the Town Clerk.

The Archivist's basic qualifications are adequate training, administrative ability and willingness to work with others. The Archivist shall receive proper training and education and be provided with such assistance, budget and space as is judged necessary by Council.

B. Responsibilities

The Archivist shall perform the following services:

1. Maintain inventories of archival materials.
2. Assist researchers in their use of archival material.
3. Appraise, select, arrange, describe and make available those municipal records which have been selected for permanent or long-term retention.

IV POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. Basis for Decisions

(Will be based on policies and procedures for records scheduling and disposal, access policies, etc.)

B. Principle Kinds of Records

1. Vital Records

These records are necessary for the rebuilding of the original structure of the municipality should the existing records be destroyed by some disaster. Such records include the minutes of council and council approved financial records (eg. Budgets, audited financial statements). These records should be duplicated in one or more places outside the Archives building.

2. (Municipalities may wish to include materials other than their operational records in their archival holdings. If this is the case the types of records should be clearly stated here. If only municipal records are to be retained this should also be clearly stated.)

C. Maintenance and Use of Archival Materials

1. Physical Plant

The Archives shall include the following areas:

- a) Stacks, a separate room kept dark and cool for the preservation of retired records and rare books;
- b) Office and records retention area, for filing and everyday transactions;
- c) Area for the sorting, organizing, restoring and describing of materials as they are presented to the Archives;
- d) Area (ideally a separate room) for readers and researchers;
- e) A heritage area where artifacts and heirlooms are displayed. Except at times of visitation, this room should be kept dark and cool for the preservation of materials.

2. Transfer of Records

- a) Records of a given administration are kept in the municipal office for the duration of administration and then transferred to the Archives. They are then classified and filed in the stacks. The original order is maintained as much as possible.

3. Restrictions

- a) Administrative records shall remain closed for a xxxx period. They can be used for reference with permission of council and the Archivist.
- b) Personal records shall remain closed for the legally scheduled period. There may be controlled use of non-sensitive material during this period, as dictated by access legislation ,with permission of the Archivist.
- c) Unpublished material may be made available to a researcher for legitimate use with permission of the Archivist.
- d) Published material may be made available to a researcher for reading.

5. The Use of Archival Material

The following guidelines shall be observed by researchers,:

- a) Permission to use the Archives is obtained from the Archivist. In case of doubt, the decision may be referred to Council.
- b) The use of certain documents may be restricted by statute or by the request of the donor.
- c) No one may enter the stack area except authorized persons; ordinarily the Archivist or assistant will bring requested material to the research area.
- d) The researcher must assume full responsibility for conforming to the laws of libel and literacy property rights which may be involved in the use of manuscripts and other archival materials.
- f) Records shall be handled with care. They shall not be traced over or marked upon. No ink or ballpoint pens are permitted in the research area. Pencils will be available.
- g) No book, document, manuscript or item may be removed from the Archives.

V APPROVAL OF ARCHIVES' POLICY

The Policy Manual for Presentation Archives shall be reviewed by each new Administration. The approval of the policies and procedures shall be renewed at this time either with or without amendments.

Appendix D

Sample Format for Writing Policies and Procedures

Here is a sample of a format that can easily be used or adapted for use in a manual:
 NOTE: Except for the policy statement, point form is suggested for all other sections.

Name of Town
Records Management Policies and Procedures

Policy No.:	Page _____ of _____	
Effective Date:	Revision No.:	Revision Date:
Issued By:		Date of Council Approval:
Policy Topic:		

Policy Statement

>> Write a clear statement of what the policy is here <<

Specific Objectives (optional)

>> Some organizations will include the specific objectives of the policy here <<

>> This is helpful when asked to explain to others, especially taxpayers or clients, why a policy exists <<

Responsibilities

>> If more than one person is involved with carrying out the policy, the details of who is responsible for what should be outlined here <<

>> The council's or department's responsibilities for monitoring compliance should be detailed here <<

Procedures

>> The specific procedures for carrying out the policy should be listed in this section <<

>> If more than one set of procedures is required to carry out the policy then simply use a separate heading for each set of procedures <<

Guidelines

>> Any additional guidelines that help people understand and follow the policy go here <<

Glossary

As with many others, the profession of records management employs a vocabulary which may require clarification for the uninitiated. Here are some definitions for the more commonly used terms in this manual.

Active Record

A record that is referenced or used on a regular basis, and must be retained and maintained in council office space with equipment close to users. The definition of "regular basis" may vary from department to department.

Administrative Records

Records common to all units of the local government and which are distinct from operational records. Administrative records support housekeeping functions such as the management of facilities, personnel, finances or information systems. Administrative records also relate to common management processes, including committees, agreements, legal opinions and other similar functions. Although these records are considered administrative, they may have considerable operational impact.

Archival Record

A record made or received by a municipality which is judged worthy of permanent preservation for legal, financial, evidentiary, reference and research purposes.

Archival Value

Records that have residual administrative, operational, legal, financial, evidential, informational, historical, cultural or commercial value and are worthy of indefinite or permanent preservation.

Destruction

The physical disposal of records by means of burning, pulping, shredding, or by sale as salvage.

File

A collection of papers and documents on a specific person, organization, place or thing within a file folder. Also, a series of file folders which have been arranged with an established system.

OPR (Office of Primary Responsibility)

The department or unit within the municipality designated to have the responsibility for maintenance of records series as designated in the records retention schedule. In most cases it is the office of the Town Clerk.

Records

All recorded information regardless of format. Includes books, documents, maps, drawings, photographs, letters, vouchers, papers any other thing on which information is recorded or stored by any means whether graphic, electronic, mechanical or otherwise.

Records Appraisal

The analysis of records for the purpose of establishing their value, use and period of retention. It includes a review of the administrative, fiscal, legal and archival value of records by records series.

Records Classification System

A logical and systematic arrangement of files into subject groups or categories based on some definite scheme of natural relationships, and, if desired, using numbers and/or letters for identification.

Records Inventory

A complete listing of an organization's records usually records series, with sufficient supporting information to enable a proper evaluation of records operations, and to provide data for the development of records management programs.

Records Series

Records are grouped into records series. Related records (a record series) are treated as a unit because of function, transactions recorded, format or mode of storage. For example, council minutes, regulations or individual personnel records would be considered records series. These records are treated as a unit for ease of retention, classification, storage and/or disposal.

Transitory Records

Extra copies of records preserved only for the convenience of reference; working papers; stocks of publications or printed documents.

Important Contacts

For more information about Access to Information and Protection of Privacy please contact:

- Mr. Sandy Hounsell
Director - Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Office
Department of Justice
Phone: 709-729-7939 E-Mail: sandyhounsell@gov.nl.ca

For technical information about archives and managing records, please contact:

- Mr. Paul Kenney
Provincial Records Manager - Records Unit, The Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador - The Rooms Corporation
Phone: 709-729-3628 E-mail: Pkenney@gov.nl.ca
- Ms. Mary Ellen Wright
Professional Development and Outreach Officer - The Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archives
Phone: 709-726-2867 E-Mail: anla@nf.sympatico.ca
- Ms. Joan Mowbray
Government Records Archivist - Provincial Archives Division
Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation
Phone: 709-729-0668 Fax: 709-729-0578
E-mail; Jmowbray@gov.nl.ca

For information about this program, "Managing Your Municipal Records . . . The Right Approach", or other training programs offered by the Municipal Training and Development Corporation please contact either of the following:

- Ms. Ruby Piercey
Administrative Assistant
Municipal Training and Development Corporation
Phone: 709-753-1867 Fax: 709-753-7077
E-Mail: mtdc@mtdc-nl.ca Web Site: www.mtdc-nl.ca
- Ms. Jane Fitzgerald
Manager, Municipal Training Program
Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs
Phone: 709-729-3077 Fax: 709-729-0477
E-Mail: jfitzgerald@gov.nl.ca

