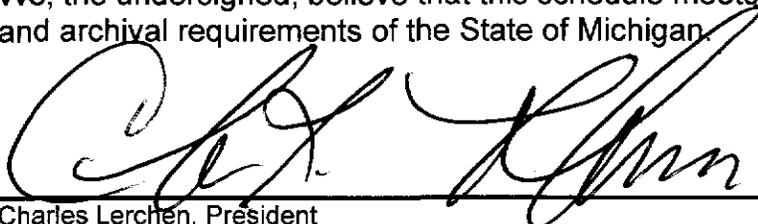


GENERAL SCHEDULE #21 – County Veterans Affairs

This Retention and Disposal Schedule covers records that are commonly found in **County Veterans Affairs** offices. The records that are described on the attached pages are deemed necessary (1) for the continued effective operation of Michigan government, (2) to constitute an adequate and proper recording of its activities, and (3) to protect the legal rights of the government of the State of Michigan and of the people.

We, the undersigned, believe that this schedule meets the administrative, legal, fiscal and archival requirements of the State of Michigan.



Charles Lerchen, President
Michigan Association of County Veterans Affairs Counselors

9/17/07
(Date)



Débra Gearhart, Director
Department of History, Arts and Libraries, Records Management Services

8/23/07
(Date)



Mark Harvey, State Archivist
Department of History, Arts and Libraries, Archives of Michigan

10/16/07
(Date)

State Administrative Board

11/6/07
(Date)

GENERAL RETENTION SCHEDULE #21 COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS INTRODUCTION

Public Records

The Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) ([MCL 15.231-15.246](#)) defines public records as recorded information “prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in the performance of an official function, from the time it is created.”

Retention and Disposal Schedules

Michigan law (MCL [399.5](#) and [750.491](#)) requires that all public records be listed on an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule that identifies the minimum amount of time that records must be kept to satisfy administrative, legal, fiscal and historical needs. Local situations may require retention beyond the periods listed, and nothing prevents an office from retaining records longer than the specified period of time. Schedules also identify when records may be destroyed, and when certain records can be sent to the Archives of Michigan for permanent preservation. *Records cannot be destroyed unless their disposition is authorized by an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule.* All schedules are approved by the Records Management Services, the Archives of Michigan and the State Administrative Board. There are two types of schedules that government agencies may use:

- A “general schedule” will cover records that are common to a particular type of government agency, such as a county veterans affairs office. General schedules may not address every single record that a particular office may have in its possession. *General schedules do not mandate that any of the records listed on the schedule be created.* However, if they are created in the normal course of business, the schedule establishes a minimum retention period for them.
- Any record that is not covered by a general schedule must be listed on an “agency-specific schedule” that will address records that are unique to a particular government agency. Agency-specific schedules always supersede general schedules. Agency-specific schedules only address the records of the agency named on the schedule, and may not be used by another agency.

Unofficial Documents

General Schedule #1 addresses the retention of “nonrecord” materials. These documents are broadly defined as drafts, duplicates, convenience copies, publications and other materials that do not document agency activities. These materials can be disposed of when they have served their intended purpose. Government agencies need to identify the “office of record” when multiple offices possess copies of the same record. The “office of record” is responsible for following the retention period that is specified, duplicates do not need to be retained. A more comprehensive definition of “nonrecords” can be found in the approved schedule (available online at http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal_mhc_rms_GS1_local_110758_7.pdf).

Record Maintenance

Records can exist in a wide variety of formats, including paper, maps, photographs, microfilm, digital images, e-mail messages, databases, etc. The retention periods listed on this general schedule do not specify the format that the record may exist in, because each government agency that adopts this schedule may choose to retain its records using different recording media. Government agencies are responsible for ensuring that all of their records (regardless of format) are properly retained and remain accessible during this entire retention period. All records need to be stored in a secure and stable environment that will protect them from tampering, damage and degradation. Electronic records are dependent upon specific hardware and software to be accessed and used. It is important to understand that the original technology that is used to create electronic records will eventually become obsolete. As a result, government agencies should work with their information technology staff to develop preservation plans for retaining electronic records with long-term (more than 10 years) retention requirements. Various laws (including the Records Reproduction Act, [MCL 24.401-24.406](#)) identify acceptable formats for retaining public records; agencies are responsible for understanding and complying with these laws.

Suspending Destruction

Government agencies must immediately cease the destruction of all relevant records (even if destruction is authorized by an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule) if they receive a FOIA request, if they believe that an investigation or litigation is imminent, or if they are notified that an audit, investigation or litigation has commenced. If relevant records exist in electronic formats (such as e-mail, digital images, word processed documents, databases, backup tapes, etc.), the agency may need to notify its information technology staff. Failure to cease the destruction of relevant records could result in penalties.

HAL Can Help!

The State of Michigan Records Management Services is available to assist government agencies with their questions about record retention and acceptable recording media. Agencies may contact the Records Management Services at (517) 335-9132. Additional information is also available from the Records Management Services' website <http://www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement/>, including records management manuals, general schedules, e-mail retention guidelines, microfilming standards and digital imaging standards, etc.

Contents

<u>Section</u>	<u>Pages</u>	<u>Item Number</u>
General Administrative	p. 1 - 3	100 - 113
Client Services	p. 4 - 6	200 - 212

Note: Veterans Trust Fund records are listed separately on General Schedule #22.

**General Retention Schedule #21
County Veterans Affairs**

Item Number	Series Title and Description	Total Retention
General Administrative		
100	<u>Subject Files</u> These records are used to support administrative analysis, program and project planning, procedure development, and programmatic activities. Subject files are generally organized alphabetically by topic. Document types may include special reports, topical correspondence (including electronic mail), research materials, project planning notes, organizational charts, etc. Subject files do NOT include files related to individual program activities, human resources files, and accounting records. For topics of continuing interest, files may be segmented into annual files. ACT = while topical file is of interest for ongoing administration.	ACT+5
101	<u>General Correspondence</u> General correspondence does not pertain to a specific issue or client and it is often organized chronologically or by correspondent's name. General correspondence may include referral correspondence. If the correspondence does pertain to a specific issue or client it should be filed with other relevant records. General correspondence may exist in a variety of formats, including memos, letters, notes and electronic mail messages. This series also includes automated or manual tools that index and/or track when correspondence was received, the topic of the correspondence, who is responsible for responding to the correspondence, and when the correspondence is considered closed for further action.	CR+2
102	<u>Transitory Correspondence</u> Transitory correspondence is any form of written communication with a short-term interest that has no documentary value and need not be retained more than 30 days. This type of correspondence has limited administrative and evidential value that is lost soon after the communication is received. Transitory messages do not set policy, establish guidelines or procedures, certify a transaction or become a receipt. Examples of transitory correspondence include letters of transmittal that do not add information to the transmitted materials, routine requests for information that require no administrative action, policy decision, special compilation or research. This type of record also includes invitations to work-related events, notifications of an upcoming meeting, and similar records.	CR+30 days

**General Retention Schedule #21
County Veterans Affairs**

Item Number	Series Title and Description	Total Retention
103	<u>Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests</u> This file will document any requests for information or public records maintained by the veterans affairs office. They may include requests for information, correspondence, a copy of the information released, and billing information.	CR+1
104	<u>Planners/Calendars</u> These may be electronic or manual planners and calendars that are used to track an individual staff member's work-related meetings, assignments, and tasks. Individual employees are responsible for retaining their planners/calendars for the duration of this retention period.	CR+2
105	<u>Meeting Records</u> These records document staff meetings, meetings with other government agencies, etc. They may include meeting minutes, agendas, and distribution materials, etc. Meeting records may also be retained in subject files, if they relate to a specific project.	CR+2
106	<u>Budget</u> These records document the amount of money that is appropriated for each account/line item for the current and previous fiscal years. They may include budget requests, statistics, budget amendments, budget summaries and balance sheets, etc.	CR+5
108	<u>Grants</u> These files are used to administer grants that are applied for by the office from state, federal and private agencies. Examples of grants include monument restoration, homelessness projects, etc. These files may contain applications, budgets, worksheets, adjustments, plans, rules and regulations, award letters, committee records, grant evaluation/monitoring reports, audits, periodic progress reports, etc. ACT = until the grant is closed out, plus any additional time that is required by the granting agency for auditing purposes. Final reports and products of the grant may be kept longer for use and reference purposes.	ACT
109	<u>Publications</u> These records may include press releases, brochures, newsletters, annual reports and other items that are published by the office. ACT = while of	ACT

 PERM = Permanent

ACT = Active

SUP = Superseded

CR = Creation Date

FY = Fiscal Year

**General Retention Schedule #21
County Veterans Affairs**

Item Number	Series Title and Description	Total Retention
	reference value. Offices are strongly encouraged to keep one copy permanently for historical purposes.	
110	<u>Policies, Procedures and Directives</u>	SUP
	These records document office policies, procedures, etc.	
111	<u>Speeches</u>	ACT
	These files document official presentations conducted by the staff. They may contain electronic presentations, speaker notes, formal papers, etc. ACT = while of reference value for preparing future presentations, or for documenting significant events.	
112	<u>Memorabilia</u>	ACT
	This series includes photographs, news clippings, certificates, awards, etc. that document events and activities of the office. ACT = while of reference value to the office. Offices are strongly encouraged to retain select items permanently for historical purposes.	
113	<u>Reports</u>	PERM
	These narrative and statistical reports are produced on a monthly and annual basis. They document the activities of the office.	
	Transfer to the Archives of Michigan	

**General Retention Schedule #21
County Veterans Affairs**

Item Number	Series Title and Description	Total Retention
Client Services		
200A	<u>Veterans Database—Client Data</u> This database is used to keep track of all services that are provided to veterans who contact the office. It may contain the veteran's name, social security number, address, phone number, date and place of birth, case number, military service information, discharge, dependents drawing benefits, types of services provided by the office, dates the services were provided to the veteran, etc.	PERM Transfer to the Archives of Michigan
200B	<u>Veterans Database—Activity Data</u> This database is used to keep track of all services that are provided to veterans who contact the office. It may contain the veteran's name, social security number, address, phone number, date and place of birth, case number, military service information, discharge, dependents drawing benefits, types of services provided by the office, dates the services were provided to the veteran, etc.	CR+2
201	<u>Veterans Index Cards/Logs</u> These records are used to keep track of all services that are provided to veterans who contact the office. They may contain the veteran's name, social security number, address, phone number, date and place of birth, military service information, discharge, dependents drawing benefits, types of services provided by the office, dates the services were provided to the veteran, etc. These paper records may not be created any longer, if the county office has switched to a database system.	PERM Transfer to the Archives of Michigan
202	<u>Client Files</u> These files document which services are provided to a veteran. Some services are provided directly by the county, and some services are provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (in which case, the county assists the veteran with applying for the services). These files may contain applications, DD-214, copies of cover letters, rating decisions, etc. These files are kept open until a veteran dies or moves outside of the service district. If the veteran moves, a copy of the file may be requested and sent to the new service district. ACT = while veteran is receiving services. The DD-214 may be retained permanently (see item #211) or sent to the county clerk for recordkeeping when the file is closed (see General Schedule #6.0417).	ACT+10

**General Retention Schedule #21
County Veterans Affairs**

Item Number	Series Title and Description	Total Retention
203	<u>Client File Number Index</u> This index is used to assign file numbers to new clients. It may contain the veteran's name, social security number, file number, input date, etc.	PERM
205	<u>Closed File Index</u> This index is used to keep track of the location of closed files. It may contain the veteran's name, social security number, file number, file location, etc.	PERM
206	<u>Requests for Military Records</u> These records are maintained on veterans who are not applying for services, but are requesting a copy of their military records from the federal government.	CR+2
207	<u>Applications for Home Loans</u> The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will guarantee home loans for veterans. These records are maintained on veterans who are not applying for services, but are applying for a home loan.	CR+1
208	<u>Requests for VA Markers</u> The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides burial benefits to veterans. These records are maintained on veterans who are not applying for services, but are requesting a marker, flag, Presidential memorial certificate, etc.	CR+2
209	<u>Requests for County Burial</u> The county provides burial benefits to eligible veterans. These records are maintained on veterans who are not applying for services, but are requesting funds to assist with the cost of burial.	CR+2
210	<u>Applications for Health Care</u> The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides free health care to eligible veterans. These records are maintained on veterans who are not applying for services, but are applying for care.	CR+1

**General Retention Schedule #21
County Veterans Affairs**

Item Number	Series Title and Description	Total Retention
211	<u>DD-214 (copies)</u> Veterans may file a copy of the DD-214 that they received when they separated from the armed forces with the county. These records may be retained by the county clerk (see General Schedule #6.0417).	PERM Transfer to the Archives of Michigan
212	<u>Military Service Books</u> These volumes may be compiled by the county to identify residents who served in the armed forces during a particular conflict, such as the Civil War, World War I, Vietnam, etc. They may contain names, contact information, military service information, family information, etc. These records may be retained by the county clerk.	PERM Transfer to the Archives of Michigan

Note: Select records listed on this schedule with permanent retention periods are authorized for transfer to the Archives of Michigan, if the county determines that it cannot maintain these records permanently. The Archives of Michigan will permanently preserve and protect these records and make them accessible to the public for research purposes. For more information about the Archives of Michigan, please visit the website <http://www.michigan.gov/archivesofmi/> or call 517-373-1408.

**Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries
Records Management Services**

**Frequently Asked Questions
About General Schedules**

Q: What is a public record?

A: The Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) ([MCL 15.231-15.246](#)) defines public records as recorded information “prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in the performance of an official function, from the time it is created.”

Q: Are all records considered to be “official” records?

A: No. General Schedule #1 addresses the retention of “nonrecord” materials. These documents are broadly defined as drafts, duplicates, convenience copies, publications and other materials that do not document agency activities. These materials can be disposed of when they have served their intended purpose. Government agencies need to identify the “office of record” when multiple offices possess copies of the same record. The “office of record” is responsible for following the retention period that is specified, duplicates do not need to be retained. A more comprehensive definition can be found in the approved schedule (available online at http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal_mhc_rms_GS1_local_110758_7.pdf).

Q: Are the retention periods that are listed on general schedules minimum amounts of time that a record should be kept?

A: Yes. General schedules authorize, but do not require, public officials to dispose of records after the expiration of the assigned retention period. Local situations may require retention beyond the periods listed, and nothing prevents a government agency from retaining records longer than the specified period of time. If records are kept for less than the amount of time listed, the agency can be penalized for unlawful destruction of records. In addition, if records are kept too long, they can waste valuable storage space, and they can become a liability to the agency if it receives a FOIA request, or if it becomes involved in litigation.

Q: Does my government agency have to follow a general schedule?

A: Records cannot be lawfully destroyed without the authorization of an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule. The purpose of a general schedule is to ensure that all government agencies are following consistent retention practices, and to prevent individual agencies from having to develop an agency-specific schedule. However, if your government agency does not want to follow an approved general schedule, it would need to get an agency-specific schedule approved. [Note: agency-specific schedules always supersede a general schedule.] Internal policies do not have the force of law that an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule has.

Q: What is an agency-specific schedule?

A: Agency-specific schedules are Retention and Disposal Schedules that only apply to the agency listed on the document. They are intended to cover records that are unique to that specific agency. Records that are listed on an approved general schedule should not be listed on an agency-specific schedule, unless the agency has a unique situation that justifies a different retention period than the one everyone else is following. The instructions and forms for agency-specific schedules are available online at <http://www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement/>.

Q: What should my government agency do if we create a record that is not listed on the general schedule?

A: The general schedule covers records that are common to most government agencies. However, general schedules do not claim to be inclusive of every record that all agencies create. Records that are not listed on general schedules cannot be destroyed without the authorization of an approved agency-specific schedule.

Q: What should my government agency do if we do not create a record that is listed on the general schedule?

A: Nothing. General schedules do not mandate that any of the records listed on the schedule be created. However, if they are created in the normal course of business, the schedule establishes a retention period for them.

Q: What do the codes in the Total Retention column mean?

A: The **retention codes** that appear on the schedule are used to establish how long records are retained by the creating agency before they are destroyed. Retention

codes determine how destruction dates will be automatically calculated by Versatile (Versatile is the records management software that is used by Records Management Services to manage the retention of records), and the date upon which the calculation will be based. Definitions of these codes can be found in the Records Management Manual that is available online at <http://www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement/>.

Q: What do the numbers in the Total Retention column represent?

A: In addition to the retention code, a period of time, years and/or months, can be used in the calculation of the retention period. Years are expressed as whole numbers, and months are expressed as fractions. For example, the fraction "0/6" would represent 6 months. The retention code plus the period of time results in a mathematical formula that is used to determine a disposal date.

Q: Do the general schedules only cover paper records, or do they cover databases and other electronic records too?

A: Records can exist in a wide variety of formats, including paper, maps, photographs, digital images, e-mail messages, databases, etc. The retention periods listed on the general schedules do not specify the format that the record may exist in, because each government agency that adopts the schedule may choose to retain its records using different recording media. Government agencies are responsible for ensuring that their records, regardless of format, are properly retained and remain accessible during this entire retention period. Various laws (including the Records Reproduction Act) identify acceptable formats for retaining public records; agencies are responsible for understanding and complying with these laws.

Q: Do the general schedules cover e-mail?

A: Yes. Many of the record series that are listed on the general schedules may originate as e-mail. Those e-mail messages need to be retained for the period of time specified by the schedule. For more information about e-mail retention, please check out the online guide at <http://www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement/>.

Q: Can records be microfilmed or digitally imaged?

A: Yes. The Records Reproduction Act (MCL 24.401-24.406) regulates the reproduction of public records by Michigan government agencies at all levels. This law requires the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries to promulgate technical

standards to ensure the continued accessibility and usability of records that are microfilmed or digitized throughout their retention period. The standards are also intended to help state and local governments ensure the integrity and authenticity of their records. The Records Management Services administers competitively bid master contracts for microfilming and imaging services. State agencies and local governments are eligible to use these contracts to receive these services. More information is available online at <http://www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement/>.

Q: How can I determine which records that are listed on the general schedules contain confidential information that should not be released to the public?

A: Select records series that are listed on the general schedules may be exempt from public disclosure, in accordance with the provisions of state and federal laws. Please consult with your attorney if you need additional information.

Q: Is there an appropriate way to destroy records that contain confidential information?

A: Yes. Some public records contain sensitive or confidential information. These records should not be placed in a regular trash or recycle bin when they are destroyed. It is important that government agencies ensure that these records are destroyed in a manner that prevents the inappropriate release of the information. The State of Michigan administers a master contract with a vendor that complies with the state's requirements for confidential destruction of records. Government agencies that are interested in using this contract should contact the vendor: Certified Document Destruction, attention: Brian Dorosz, (800) 433-7876. Confidential electronic records should be destroyed in accordance with the U.S. Department of Defense "Standard Industrial Security Program Operating Manual" (DoD 5220.22-M).

Q: Who is responsible for ensuring that Retention and Disposal Schedules are followed?

A: The Michigan Penal Code (MCL 750.491) establishes misdemeanor penalties for disposing of records without the authorization of an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule. Government agency directors are responsible for ensuring that relevant staff are aware of the provisions in the schedule and follow them. The Records Management Services does not audit agencies and assess penalties. However, courts may penalize agencies for failing to follow an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule.

Q: What should I do if I have suggestions for revising a general schedule?

A: Contact the Records Management Services at (517) 335-9132.

