



How Public Leaders are Modernizing Government as Champions and Guardians of Official Records

Breaking Down the Opportunity and Challenges
for Government Officials to Safeguard, Manage,
and Provide Access to Critical Records



Walk into any local, county, or state government office and find our nation's history lining the shelves. Billions of irreplaceable vital, property, legal, and historical documents from birth certificates to judicial records tell the stories of the people and events that shaped and impacted the community. Those are the records under the watch of government organizations and their elected or appointed officials.

An essential responsibility of government leaders is to champion and guard history. That includes managing, protecting, and providing secure access to public, legal and historical records. Having accurate and complete records is an enormous responsibility and integral to our democratic system. As the guardians of records, leaders such as supervisors, judges, district attorneys, sheriffs, clerks, recorders, auditors, and assessors – to pick a few – take a sworn oath to protect and provide transparent access to documents that represent people's legacies, the community's history, and the records required for citizens and companies to conduct everyday business.

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Today's record is tomorrow's history. I don't think citizens fully understand the importance of our duty in serving the public and making business transactions go smoothly. We preserve the information about the people who lived or passed through our county, so they can access it during the times they need it—usually during milestones and emotional times in their lives. It's an important responsibility that we promise to have what they need so it's not another burden to them. And for every property transaction that's done in this county—title researchers, attorneys, and the general public come to us and trust that we have the records to make sure it all goes well.



Michael Willis

County Clerk, Tulsa County, OK

The challenge of records management facing today's guardians

Records have been around since the early days of our nation, but they've become increasingly difficult to manage. First, the world is now undeniably digital. Citizens and businesses expect records to be available online, and one-click away with 24/7/365 access. But most local, county, and state governments are still playing catch up. Surging record volumes outpace storage. Many documents are in vulnerable analog media and a single unpredictable flood, fire, or extreme weather event away from being lost forever. And it's harder to keep up with legal requirements and meet constituent expectations with aging records and outdated technology.

Many leaders' first reaction is simply to scan the records to get documents online using a single service provider or in-house staff. But they quickly realize it's not enough. Records management is incredibly complex. Many records are moldy, fragile, have limited legibility, and compromised images. These documents must be restored and preserved before imaging and digitally enhanced for clarity. And once imaged, proper indexing for rapid search and retrieval requires highly-trained staff with expertise in diverse record formats, large-volume books, cursive handwriting, and typescript.

Turning challenges into opportunities through advanced technology

Even early adopters of digitization find they're lagging behind. Recently, Bucks County secured a grant to restore, preserve, and image permanent records that had previously been digitized with poor quality. But technology advancements now enable officials to enhance digital images, even when the original copies are illegible.

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When these books were originally scanned in the 1990s, the technology was not as advanced as it is today. Because of this, the quality of current images online is very poor, sometimes unreadable. The grant will assist with funding the improvement phase of the project being handled by Kofile; the preservation company used by the Recorder of Deeds for the project. Kofile has taken on preserving these books and providing clear digital images of each page within the books.

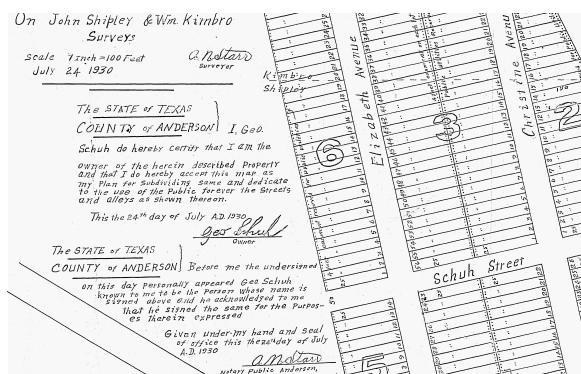


Dan McPhillips

Recorder of Deeds, Bucks County, PA



Before



After

There are billions of records in this country in multiple sizes, formats, file types, paper types, and stages of decay. As the guardian of records, government leaders must think beyond short-term records maintenance requirements and consider a more holistic approach to the management, protection, and secure public access of their records for future generations.

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When we sit down with leaders, they're blown away by the volume and complexity of public records in their care. It's not until they see the scope and historical perspective that the lightbulb goes off that they need to modernize and they need expert help to do it.



Chris Marotti

Senior Vice President of Brand & Experience, Kofile

The opportunity to modernize government with a comprehensive approach to Critical Records Management

Public officials are adopting Critical Records Management - a modern, integrated approach to managing, maintaining, safeguarding, and providing access to public records. By using a Critical Records Management framework, government leaders can prioritize records needs and apply a proactive, methodical strategy including:

- A partnership between government leaders, staff and their vendors to co-create a management, treatment, and care plan for critical records
- Scheduled assessments to review the usability, legibility, and compliance of critical records required by law and expected by citizens
- Plan for restoring, preserving, and maintaining records that are or become unusable due to aging, wear and tear, deterioration, or an unforeseen disaster
- Process for indexing and archiving to accommodate both modern digital, paper, and handwritten records
- Method for providing secure, controlled search and access of public records from anywhere to support staff and constituents

But that doesn't mean everything must be done at once. Each record is unique and requires its own treatment, management, and care plan. Critical Records Management empowers you and your team to apply specific records' care solutions using the right mix of techniques, technology, and processes to address immediate needs and requirements at various stages.

As the guardian of records, government leaders must think beyond short-term records maintenance requirements and consider a more holistic approach to the management, protection, and secure public access of their records for future generations.

Expert tips on creating your Critical Records Management plan

As you begin to identify your records' care needs, consider these expert tips to create a comprehensive plan:

- Never destroy the originals. Whether required by law or for historical purposes, always retain the original records. Expert conservators can restore and preserve nearly any original document.
- Remember this is a holistic plan that may span multiple years. It doesn't have to all be done at once, but you should plan for the entire lifecycle of the records.
- Keep in mind that both historical and public record types require restoration, preservation, maintenance, and access. Consider both when assessing your records inventory and creating a care plan.

Leaders prioritizing Critical Records Management continue the tradition of safeguarding recorded history and better serving their constituents

Government officials elevating the urgency and making Critical Records Management a priority agenda item often have positive election outcomes. For example, Mary Ann Cromwell, Hillsborough, NH County Register of Deeds, ran for and won her first term in office on her [perseverance and a strong desire to serve her constituents](#) by preserving and digitizing hundreds of deeds using federally available funds.

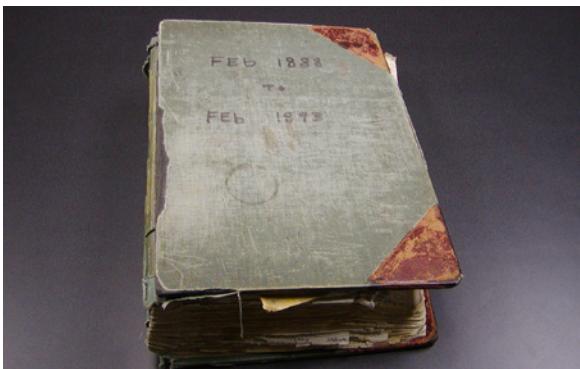
Lucy Adame-Clark, County Clerk of Bexar County, TX, continues to lead the nation in her approach to Critical Records Management and finding ways to better serve her community. Adame-Clark is determined to properly restore and archive all the historical records in her care.

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It shouldn't be a challenge for any county clerk to preserve history, because that's in the statute. It says, 'You shall.' It didn't say 'You may,' it says 'You shall.' Meaning, you better do your job, and it's your duty to preserve what's under your umbrella.



Lucy Adame-Clark
County Clerk, Bexar County, TX



Before



After

Public officials have an incredible opportunity today to take a leadership role in the care, protection, and access of records that modernize government, protect history, and build thriving communities. As the guardian and champion of their community's history and public records, the most important steps are to take inventory, assess their current state, and develop a comprehensive Critical Records Management plan. Because in a digital, data-driven world, government transparency and accessibility are foundational to public trust and democracy.

Set up a discussion with a Kofile expert to assess your organization's state of Critical Records Management.

Email Experts@Kofile.com to get started.



Your Trusted Partner for Critical Records Management

Kofile is the leader in Critical Records Management working closely with county, local, and state government organizations and their leaders. Our commitment to preserving, safeguarding, and modernizing access to history and the public record drives everything we do. Trusted by over 3,000 government organizations and officials earned from decades of service and innovation, we apply the right mix of expertise, technology, and processes to empower leaders to increase the impact of government services more efficiently.

Kofile
Critical Records Management

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