How To Deal With Email and Instant Messages When They Are Records

Congress amended the Federal Records Act in 2014 by expanding the definition of electronic records to include both electronic mail and other electronic messages systems used for purposes of communicating between individuals.

Email and instant messages / texts and other similar communications that exist within the software you use may be records. Common apps include Google Chat, Chatter, Slack, iMessage and Skype. There is no one single way to handle emails, instant messages and other similar types of electronic communications. *Consider treating emails and electronic messages as you would any paper-based correspondence*. Save them in the appropriate location for the project or program of which they are a part. How long these messages must be saved depends **not** on the software program in which they exist, but rather they must be kept according the purpose for which they exist.

For example, if you have an email deciding the location for a speaking engagement, that email should be saved for 3 years as a *Public affairs-related routine operational record*. But if after the event you get an email from someone in the public complaining about the venue, that particular email only needs to be saved for 90 days as *Public correspondence not requiring formal action.*

Saving emails and instant messages will vary by application, but often one of two approaches will work: 1) Print to PDF or 2) taking a screenshot of the message. With screenshots, however, it is best to then email the screenshot to yourself in order to capture date and time of the message.

**Learn about the records schedule instructions that are common to your office.*