

Managing Information in Ministers' Offices

Handbook

November 2025

STATE RECORDS

of South Australia



Government of South Australia
State Records

Table of Contents

Purpose	2
Scope	2
Information Management Responsibilities	2
Official records	2
Ministers' portfolio Records	3
Cabinet records.....	3
Agency (portfolio) records.....	3
Records of Assistant Ministers	3
Information Management in practice.....	3
Set up and maintain official business accounts	3
Establish policy	4
Assign roles and responsibilities.....	4
Establish business classifications for information.....	4
Create, capture and manage records	5
Retention requirements.....	5
Dispose of records routinely	6
Transfer of permanent records	6
Manage personal privacy.....	6
Facilitate appropriate access to information	7
Manage records in storage	8
Minister's Portfolio Restructures	8
Legacy Records	8
Access to Minister's Records.....	8
Caretaker Conventions	8

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Purpose

This handbook has been developed to assist Ministers' Offices to manage official records and information.

It is a legal requirement for agencies, including Ministers of the Crown, to keep official records as evidence of their business activities. Agencies are also required to provide access to information upon request and to protect personal information.

Records are important assets that capture the decisions and transactions of the government of the day. They are vital for informed and responsible decision-making and support government accountability and transparency.

Scope

This Handbook focuses on managing information by Ministers' Offices in accordance with:

- » the *State Records Act 1997* (SR Act)
- » the *Freedom of Information Act 1991* (FOI Act)
- » the Information Privacy Principles Instruction (IPPI)

of which State Records of South Australia (State Records) is responsible for administering.

It is important for Ministers' Offices to understand that:

- » Ministers of the Crown are agencies according to definitions in both the SR Act and FOI Act
- » Houses of Parliament, committees of Parliament, officers and members of Parliament are excluded from the SR Act (other than a Minister in respect of records made or received in their capacity as a Minister).

More information on agencies and public officers' responsibilities is available in State Records' [*Responsibilities and Guidance Brochure*](#).

The term 'official records' is defined by section 3(1) of the SR Act and refers to information, data and records, in any format (whether digital or hardcopy), where it is created or received through the conduct of government business. Other State Records policy may refer to the term 'information assets' which should also be taken to mean official records.

Information Management Responsibilities

Ministers' Offices should take a planned and coordinated approach to managing official records.

When setting up a new office, agencies should refer to State Records standards, the Information Governance Guideline (IGG) and other policy for advice, but some practical considerations are provided below.

Some Ministers' Offices may receive administrative, and systems support from a portfolio department and therefore will need to liaise with the department records manager for advice and assistance.

Official records

Records created or received by a Minister or a Minister's Office in the conduct of business are official records and must be managed in accordance with the SR Act.

Official records can be in any format including paper, film, tape and other analogue media. It also includes born digital and includes (but not limited to) records held in databases, email systems, office applications, apps (including broadcast and mobile apps), SMS messaging, social media, websites (external and intranets), and digital photographic and audiovisual systems.

There are three types of official records created by and/or received by Ministers' Offices:

- » Minister's portfolio records
- » Cabinet records
- » Agency (portfolio) records

Records created or received by a Minister in their capacity as a member of parliament (MP), member of a political party, or as a private citizen must not form part of a Minister's official government records and must be kept separate from official government records.

Minister's portfolio Records

A Minister's portfolio records belong to the relevant Minister's portfolio e.g. Minister for Education, not the office e.g. Minister Johnson. Records relating to individual portfolios should be managed so they can be easily separated within the Minister's Office's recordkeeping systems.

Administrative Arrangements Proclamations published in the Government Gazette can vest and attach the assets (including official records), rights and liabilities of a former Minister's portfolio in a new Minister. Responsibility for records is transferred through this mechanism.

The underlying principle is that records follow their function within government.

Cabinet records

Ministers' Offices hold Cabinet documents – including originals, copies and drafts in both digital and hardcopy formats.

Agency (portfolio) records

A Minister's Office may hold agency portfolio records for administrative use and business purposes for a period of time.

Records of Assistant Ministers

All records created or received in a person's capacity as Assistant Minister/Parliamentary Secretary are official records under the SR Act and subject to the FOI Act. Records created or held in that capacity should be regarded as the records of the Minister to which the Assistant Minister/Parliamentary Secretary is/was attached.

Information Management in practice

Set up and maintain official business accounts

Ministers' Offices should ensure official accounts are set up for official business separate from any electorate, personal or party-political accounts, including:

- » social media accounts for the Minister and staff
- » official government email accounts

- » phone and app accounts

Establish policy

Ministers' Offices should establish policies that detail how official records are to be managed. Policies should be based on State Records' standards, policy, and advice, including:

- » Management of and systems for official records of the Minister separate from their role as an MP, member of a political party or private citizen
- » Use of official government systems for undertaking Minister's work, not private email or file storage systems
- » Use of departmental systems (if applicable)
- » Establish processes for the collection, storage, use, access and disclosure of personal information.

Policy should be supported by procedures which clearly outlines how information management practices and tasks need to occur.

Assign roles and responsibilities

Ministers' Offices must ensure that information management tasks are appropriately resourced and that roles and responsibilities are assigned.

As the head of the agency the Minister has responsibilities under the SR Act to ensure:

- » official records are maintained in good order and condition
- » information management standards are followed
- » official records are protected against damage, alteration and illegal disposal.

There must be dedicated resources and funding for information management and staff are adequately equipped to fulfil their responsibilities.

For those Minister's Offices receiving administrative, and systems support from a portfolio department the department records manager will be able to provide advice and assistance.

All staff are responsible for creating official records of their day-to-day business and capturing them into official systems.

It is essential that all staff have general information management awareness and an understanding of their individual responsibilities under the SR Act, the FOI Act and the IPPI.

Dedicated support staff may undertake daily information management and FOI tasks including the classification and registration of documents, maintenance and creation of new files, handling requests for information and management of disposal, access and storage of both active and inactive records.

Ministers' Offices will need to nominate staff to facilitate loans from offsite storage including from Approved Service Providers (ASP) as well as an Authorised Agency Users to facilitate temporary loans from State Records.

Accredited FOI Officers are required to process and make determinations received by the Minister's Office.

Establish business classifications for information

Business classifications provide a structural hierarchy for recording information in the relevant function and activity. Related information (such as a sequence of

correspondence, or documents relating to a specific matter) should be stored and managed together.

See [General Disposal Schedule 50](#) (GDS 50) and [General Disposal Schedule 30](#) (GDS 30) for function and activity terms which can be used to establish business classifications

Create, capture and manage records

Ministers' Offices must create, capture and manage records of the Minister of the Crown as an agency.

Records must be created and captured in an official system, either digital folders in an Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS), a business system or in physical files.

Network drives and personal government email accounts are not suitable for records management, as they are not secure and records can be easily deleted or accidentally lost.

Agencies should:

- » create digital files / folders in accordance with a business classification scheme and must save records, email and phone messages, MS files (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), M365, PDF, webpages, social media posts etc into these files
- » ensure information is recorded accurately given that any document can be requested under FOI.

Ministers' Offices, as with all government agencies, should adopt a "digital first" approach to managing their records. Records created or received digitally should be managed digitally (and not printed and filed) within systems that comply with relevant State Records' standards.

Ministers' Offices need to ensure that all records remain accessible for as long as legally required in accordance with the minimum periods in GDS 30 and GDS 50.

Records may need to be migrated to a new Minister's Office if there is a change of portfolio or government and need to remain accessible.

Ministers' Offices may receive some records in hardcopy format. These records also need to be managed appropriately as hardcopy records. See GDS 21 below for guidance regarding digitisation.

Retention requirements

Records must be legally retained in accordance with approved GDS (known as disposal determinations under the SR Act).

Ministers' Offices should be aware of the two GDS' which detail the minimum period records need to be retained for before they can be destroyed, or in the case of permanent value records, are required to be kept permanently as part of the State's archive.

- » [GDS 50](#) (previously GDS 18) covers records specific to Minister's Offices.
- » [GDS 30](#) covers common records across agencies e.g. financial and personnel records.

[GDS 21](#) covers the management and destruction of digitised hardcopy records and allows the digital copy to become the official record. Ministers' Offices must gain [GDS 21 certification](#) to use it.

Some records need to remain as hardcopy records e.g. cannot be reproduced in a digital form (for example records with a common seal). See excluded records in GDS 21 for further information.

There are also [disposal freezes](#) for agencies which may also impact on the retention of records.

Dispose of records routinely

Ministers' Offices should regularly assess records against GDS' to identify those that can be legally destroyed or transferred. Ideally, this process should be automated in an EDRMS based on the business classification. The task of applying retention periods from disposal schedules to records is known as sentencing.

Disposal programs allow for agencies to manage their official records through routinely monitoring records due for destruction in accordance with disposal schedules and identifying those records for transfer offsite to an ASP or to State Records.

Having an ongoing disposal program including sentencing and regular destruction will ensure Ministers' Offices are not retaining information longer than needed.

Transfer of permanent records

Sentencing also involves identifying permanent value records that are no longer needed for current administrative purposes.

These permanent records can be transferred to State Records' custody in accordance with the Transfer of Official Records Standard (Transfer Standard). State Records will grant Ministers' Offices exemptions from the Transfer Standard in the lead up to an election.

Agencies and their successors are required to manage permanent digital records in their agency ensuring accessibility is maintained.

Where a Minister's Office is supported by and records held in a portfolio agency system, the supporting agency must also ensure the Minister's records are managed appropriately through any changes in technology and/or infrastructure.

Manage personal privacy

Collection, access, storage, use and disclosure of personal information by Ministers' Offices is governed by the [IPPI](#).

Ministers' Offices should:

- » obtain consent for the collection of personal information
- » only collect personal information necessary for the collection purpose
- » only use the personal information for the purpose it was collected
- » store personal information securely
- » only disclose personal information in line with the IPPI

Ministers' Offices that become aware of a privacy breach of information held by their office should follow the instructions in the [Personal Information Breach Guideline](#) and report it to the Privacy Committee of South Australia. Further guidance on the management of personal information is on the [State Records website](#).

Facilitate appropriate access to information

Allowing the public access to information demonstrates the government is committed to being open and accountable and encourages public participation.

There are several options for releasing information to the public:

- » **Administrative release** – this is at the discretion of the Minister's Office or in accordance with government circulars, e.g. detail of Ministers' credit card, travel, and mobile phone expenditure is proactively released in this way.

For further information on alternative release policies refer to:

- [Premier and Cabinet Circular PC035](#) – Proactive Disclosure of Regularly Requested Information.
 - [Premier and Cabinet Circular PC045](#) - Disclosure Logs for Non-Personal Information released through Freedom of Information.
 - State Records webpage on [Administrative disclosure and open data](#).
- » **FOI** - any document held by a Minister's Office can be requested under the FOI Act which provides an individual a legally enforceable right to seek access to government information.

When an FOI application to access a document is received, the Minister's Office is required to search all possible systems and locations (digital, physical, on site, off site) to ensure that relevant documents are located and considered for release. A bias to disclosure over non-disclosure should be the default position with exclusions only occurring when legislated exemptions (refer to Schedule 2 of FOI Act) are relevant.

State Records provides numerous FOI resources, including:

- [Resources for processing FOI applications](#) and a [Processing FOI Applications Guideline](#)
- [Agency FOI reporting requirements](#) which explain annual reporting and proactive disclosure obligations
- [FOI Letters and Document templates](#) and advice on [fees and charges](#).

If there is concern about the release of information, agencies are encouraged to contact the Crown Solicitor's Officer via email AGDCSOFOIRequest@sa.gov.au.

- » **Public access** – access to records of permanent value in the custody of State Records is determined by access determinations which specify whether the records can be accessed by the public immediately or are restricted for a period of time.

Access determinations are authorised by Ministers' Offices as part of the transfer process to State Records.

Whilst it is important that information is shared with other government agencies, third parties and the public, it is also important that Minister's Offices ensure that confidential, sensitive or personal information they create and store is protected from inappropriate access or disclosure.

The South Australian government has adopted the [South Australian Protective Security Framework](#) (SAPSF) to assist agencies to implement appropriate security controls.

Manage records in storage

Ministers' Offices are responsible for the storage of temporary value records until they are due for destruction, and for storage of permanent value records pending transfer to State Records.

Ministers' Offices should proactively manage records stored with an ASP, even those which may have been set up by a predecessor. Ministers' Offices should retain lists of records transferred to an ASP. Should ownership of the records change (e.g. through a machinery of government (MOG) change) then the new Minister's Office should be provided with the lists to assist in the ongoing management of those records.

Minister's Portfolio Restructures

During a portfolio restructure (MOG change) it is important that all records relating to a specific portfolio are transferred to the Minister that assumes responsibility for that portfolio.

Ownership of records that are not currently active (e.g. those stored in temporary or archival storage) must also be transferred to the new Minister.

If the records are in digital form they should be transferred in this format.

Legacy Records

To minimise accumulation of legacy records, Ministers' Offices should maintain an effective disposal program that ensures the timely destruction and transfer of official records.

A Minister who inherits a portfolio or function is responsible for managing any official records related to this new portfolio/function. This includes the costs associated with the sentencing and destruction of those records, storage and the transfer of permanent value records to State Records.

If a Minister inherits records of an abolished portfolio, agencies should contact State Records to discuss how these records should be managed.

Access to Ministers' Records

The following advice has been provided to State Records from the Crown Solicitor's Office and applies following the appointment of a new Minister to a portfolio or to a change in government:

Where a newly appointed Minister is the agency responsible for those official records transferred by a previous Minister, the new Minister will have a statutory right to seek access to those records in accordance with s.25 of the SR Act.

Note: the convention is that Ministers do not exercise this right unless they have a requirement to do so for the ongoing management of the office and the portfolio e.g. in response to a member of the public who wrote to the Minister pre-election.

Caretaker Conventions

Once an election is called, the government enters a period known as the 'caretaker period'. What occurs during the caretaker period is based on conventions established under the Westminster system of government and adopted by South Australia.

Management of the three types of records created and received by Ministers' Offices during the caretaker period differs, as outlined below:

» Ministers' portfolio records

Ministers' records required for ongoing business should be retained in the office. Those not required for ongoing business should be sentenced and transferred to an ASP or State Records (for permanent value records).

» Cabinet records

Cabinet documents are considered confidential to the government that created them. In the event of an election being called, cabinet documents, including files and submissions, notes and comments in any format, need to be transferred to the custody of the chief executive of the relevant portfolio for safe keeping until the outcome of the election has been determined.

If, following an election, there has been no change in government, chief executives will/can return cabinet documents to the Minister. Where a change in government has occurred, chief executives are responsible for the ongoing management of the records.

» Agency (portfolio) records

Portfolio records should be returned to the records management unit of the responsible agency.

For further guidance on managing the records of a Minister's Office during caretaker and following an election, please refer to:

» [Guide to caretaker conventions and pre-election practices 2025](#)

» [Administrative Change, Caretaker Periods and Elections | State Records of South Australia](#)

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Need further assistance?

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