

Electronic Records Management: Factors Affecting the Cost of Digitizing Paper Records

Purpose: Provide guidance to state and local government agencies on key factors that influence the cost to digitize paper records.

Frequently requested public records can be excellent candidates for scanning, especially when they have a long retention period.

There are at least four factors to consider when estimating imaging costs:

1. **Variety** – Are the records of uniform size (a stack of forms) or do they vary widely?
2. **Obstacles** – Common obstacles that increase the difficulty in scanning include staples, clasps, folds, rips and fragility.
3. **Content** – How many pages are there? (A standard storage box holds an average of 2,500 pages when filled.) Is the record all text? Are there photos? Detailed drawings? Graphs? Is color important?
4. **Access** – How do you locate a specific record now? What information will you need to find that record in digital form?

Records that are easier to scan and index cost less to digitize.

Records like council meeting minutes, ordinances and resolutions are often uniform in size and can be put through a standard scanner without needing to stop for adjustments. The content of the pages is generally consistent and typed on standard letter- or legal-size paper. Any access to the record tends to be well-defined and reliable.



Records that are more difficult to scan and index cost more to digitize.

Records like investigative case files and construction project files often include a variety of paper sizes and shapes that hinder continuous scanning. Obstacles like maps, photos, folds, rips and staples all require extra preparation before the scanning process.



Breakdown of Scanning Process

The process for scanning records includes document preparation, scanning, quality control, indexing and (for long-term records) microfilming. Scanning can include high-speed scanners, flatbed scanners, wide-format scanners, or microfilm scanners. Quality control compares the original record against the digital image, ensuring that the complete record has been captured and any issues with scanning are fixed. Indexing and metadata are key to identifying the digital record, but often need to be entered by hand. Limited indexing keeps costs low. Microfilming is a trusted, cost-effective option for disaster recovery of long-term records.

**Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from
Washington State Archives:**

www.sos.wa.gov/archives
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