
Electronic Records Management: How Long Do Voicemails Need to be Kept?

Purpose: Provide guidance to state agencies and local government entities on the retention of voicemails.

Is there one retention period for voicemails?

NO – The retention period for public records depends on the *function* and *content* of the record, not its format or method of transmission.

How long voicemails need to be kept depends of the agency's business, legal and accountability needs to retain the evidence of the transaction that is documented in the voicemail. Like public records in any format, some only need to be kept for a very short time, some need to be kept a little longer, and some will be "Archival" and kept forever.

The questions to ask to determine the function/content of voicemail are:

1. What is the message about? (content)
2. Why was it sent and for what purpose? (function)

Having just one blanket retention period for voicemails is akin to having a single retention period for all letter-sized paper – the format does not determine the retention.

Aren't all voicemails transitory records?

NO – If the information contained in a voicemail relates to agency business and is not more formally documented elsewhere, the voicemail will need to be retained as a record of that agency business.

Is simply keeping all voicemails the answer?

NO – Storing every voicemail is not the same as managing public records received as voicemails. Such a strategy is unlikely to be sustainable in the long run, will make it harder to locate the public records that do need to be retained, and may not be the most efficient use of agency resources.

Where can I find out what the retention is based on the function and content?

RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULES – These schedules set out the minimum required retention periods and grant permission to either destroy or transfer the records at the end of that period. The current approved records retention schedules are available from Washington State Archives' website.

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

**www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov**