GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND CIVIC EDUCATION

RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ARCHIVES POLICY



AUGUST 2025, FREETOWN

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Executive Summary

The Policy covers Public Records and Judicial Records and applies to all public entities of the Republic of Sierra Leone, subject to the Public Archives Act 1965 or any new legislation.

The Policy is based on internationally accepted principles ISO 15489; these principles include:

- A senior Executive should be accountable for records management.
- Records are authentic and protected.
- Records management complies with applicable laws and authorities.
- Records are available when needed, retained for as long as required and disposed of appropriately, and
- The records management programme and processes are documented.

Strengthening relations with citizens is a sound investment in better policy-making and a core element of good governance. Proper record-keeping allows governments to tap new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information, and resources when making decisions. Equally important, record keeping contributes to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy, and strengthening civic capacity. Such efforts help strengthen representative democracy, in which legislative assemblies play a role.

Permanent Secretaries and the equivalent Administrative Heads of public entities must ensure that all programmes and services take account of records management requirements; that decisions and decision-making processes are documented; that records are shared within and across ministries and public entities to the greatest extent possible while respecting security and privacy requirements; and that the completeness, authenticity and quality of records are maintained for as long as required. Permanent Secretaries and heads of public entities must designate a Senior official to represent the ministry or agency for the Policy and must monitor adherence to this Policy. The Ministry of Information and Civic Education, which will be in charge, will ensure compliance through the Director of Public Records and Archives.

Consequences of non-compliance include informal follow-up visits and requests from the Ministry, external audits or formal direction on corrective measures.

The Ministry, through the Director of Records and Archives and the Director of Public Archives, provides interpretive advice on this Policy and develops and promotes directives, standards, guidelines, tools, and procedures that achieve its goals and expected results.

The National Records and Archives Advisory Board, to be established, will be responsible for making recommendations to the Minister on the retention or destruction of public records and judicial records, the transfer of records to the Public Archives, and any other matters prescribed.



Rationale

Good record keeping and management go hand in hand with keeping archives, which are the nation's memory. Archival services are widely used and it is an essential component for academic research, education, the pursuit of family history, business, legal, and other purposes. Good record keeping is also an essential component of policy making, efficiency, accountability, and transparency in government at the local and central levels. Bad record keeping and lost information can lead to poor performance and, at worst, disruptive crises and scandals.

Sequel to the above, the Public Archives Act No. 44 of 1965 section 3 (2) places responsibility on the Public Archives Office to "make provision for the custody, preservation, arrangement, repair, and rehabilitation, and for such duplication reproduction, description and exhibition of archives transferred to the Public Archives Office …". What is missing from the Public Archives Act of 1965 is that the Act does not provide any guide on the management of Current Records which is tomorrow's Archives. This has affected the smooth operation of governmental activities since records that should inform government decisions are difficult to retrieve or unavailable. It has also led to the occupation of valuable space with records of less value. Thus, there is a lack of a uniform approach to the management of records across the public sector. The lack of a uniform guide on the management of digital records across the public sector further bedevils this. It is no gain saying that, as far as paper records are concerned, the Public Archives Office lacks the physical resources to manage the large quantities of records that continue to be generated. The current records centre on Slater Terrace, State Avenue, is full to capacity. While the Public Archives Office at Fourah Bay College is also challenged with space.

Unlike other offices, the Public Archives Office (PAO) is a small Sub-vented Unit formally supervised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). It was funded under a Vote of the Permanent Secretary's Office, which makes it look like the Records Office of MEST. Hence, over the years, under MEST, Records Management and Archives' contribution to the national development agenda has been limited.

Structurally, as a national outfit, it should be a department in its own right. The need for the creation of a new Department cannot be overemphasised. International best practice calls for managing Records according to the Life Cycle Concepts. These concepts require Achieves Offices to be very much involved in all the stages of the Life of a record and not just the non-current.

Whilst the 1965 Act does not specifically identify a supervising Ministry, for convenience, the PAO was placed under MEST for the following reasons, which were convenient at the time:

- With the experience of moving the holdings back and forth between New England in Freetown and Moyamba (where Records had been stored for safe-keeping) during the Second World War years, the Fourah Bay College premises provided a safe and secure environment to keep government records collated from the Colonial Secretary's Office.
- Christopher Fyfe, the First Government Archivist, taught history at Fourah Bay College and demonstrated a commitment to gathering and collating records. He considered the institution an academic and research institution that could strategically serve the university learning environment.
- The Ministry of Education merged with Cultural Affairs at the time. The Public Archives exemplifies the cultural heritage ramifications, and like the Sierra Leone Museum and Sierra Leone Library Services, the Ministry of Education, with support from UNESCO, was the preferred Ministry to place the Public Archives Office.

The new Records and Archives Directorate will be strategically positioned to fulfil its crosscutting role for the whole of Government and the Public Sector by introducing best practices in the management of records and archives, both digital and manual, that will support transparency and accountability, thereby ensuring effective and efficient service delivery.

The Right to Access Information Act, passed in October 2013, aims to improve transparency across the Government by making information readily available and accessible. This places responsibility on ministries, departments and agencies to manage their records effectively, both paper and electronic. However, the Public Archives Office, as it is presently constituted, has neither the authority nor the resources to provide the necessary standards and infrastructure.

Many countries have adopted a National Records Management Policy as a critical and easily updateable component of the legislative and regulatory framework for public records, as recommended in the International Standard Organisation, ISO 15489.

The Records Management Policy provides an overarching framework of accountability and responsibility for managing public records according to acceptable standards. It treats records as assets equal in significance to other assets, such as human and financial resources.

The Records Management Policy provides an **overarching framework** of accountability and **responsibility** for managing public records according to acceptable **standards**.

Supervising Ministry - In light of the current structure and mandate of the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, which includes oversight of the Rights to Access Information Commission (RAIC); managing the country's Information Management generally (of which Records and Archives are an integral part), it is logical that the Records and Archives Department would be more appropriately located within the Ministry of Information and Civic Education. This would avoid any duplication and enhance better coordination in Government activities. Therefore, references in this Policy to "the Ministry" or "the Minister" refer to the Ministry/Minister of Information and Civic Education.

In accordance with Section 27 (3) of the Right to Access Information Act, 2013 which mandates the RAIC to establish a Documentation Centre, there is a clear nexus to be found in the work of RAIC and the Records and Archives Department should work in tandem in establishing Records Centres that will help enhance efficiency in Records keeping thereby promoting access to information.

Key Concepts

Authentic Record

is one that can be proven: To be what it purports to be; to have been created or sent by the person purported to have created and or sent it; to have been created or sent at the time purported. Authenticity is conferred on a record by its mode, form, and/or state of transmission and/or manner of preservation and custody

Public Records

any records, documents or information in any format, other than judicial records, drawn up for the purpose of, or used during, the conduct of affairs of any kind of Government entity which (a) are in the custody of any person or Ministry, Department or Agency; or (b) have been transferred to the Public Archives.

Judicial Records

: all records of proceedings of a court and all records, documents, books or information in any format that:

a) are in the custody of any court or of any officer of any court in his/her capacity as such
b) have been transferred to the Public Archives

Vital Records

records, regardless of medium, which are essential to the continued functioning or reconstitution of an organisation during and after an emergency and also those records essential to protecting the legal and financial rights of that organisation and of the individuals directly affected by its activities.

Public Archives

all public records and judicial records which are more than fifteen years old; are specified by the Public Archives Committee as being of enduring or historical value and worthy of permanent preservation; and have been transferred to the Public Archives; or any document, book or other material acquired for the Public Archives by the Director of Public Archives under the Public Archives Act 1965 or any new legislation relating to records and archives.

Public Office

Any organisation, including ministries, departments and agencies whose work is part of the process of government or is funded in whole or in part by the public finances of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Records Management Programme

a public entity-wide plan that sets out policies and responsibilities for the management of its records and establishes standards and procedures for records classification, retention and disposition, security, audit, business continuity, vital records and archiving arrangements, and provides a framework for capacity building and training.



Generally Accepted Records Management Principles

These Principles provide a high-level overview of the principles of public and judicial records management. These are based on records management principles developed by the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) International. The Principles set forth the characteristics of an effective records management programme but allow flexibility based upon the unique circumstances of a public office's size, complexity, legal environment and resources.

Principle of Accountability

A senior executive (or a person of comparable authority) shall oversee the records management programme and delegate responsibility to appropriate individuals. The public office shall adopt policies and procedures to guide personnel and ensure that the programme can be audited.

Principle of Integrity

A records management programme shall be constructed so that the records generated by or managed for the public office have a reasonable and suitable guarantee of authenticity and reliability.

Principle of Protection

A records management programme shall be constructed to ensure a reasonable level of protection for records that are private, confidential, privileged, secret, classified, or essential to business continuity or that otherwise require protection.

Principle of Compliance

: A records management programme should be constructed to comply with applicable laws and other binding authorities, as well as with the public office's policies.

Principle of Availability

A public office shall maintain records in a manner that ensures timely, efficient and accurate retrieval of needed information.

Principle of Retention

A public office shall maintain its records for an appropriate time, bearing in mind its legal, regulatory, fiscal, operational and historical requirements.

Principle of Disposition

A public office shall provide secure and appropriate disposition for records that are no longer required to be maintained by applicable laws and the public entity's policies.

Principle of Transparency

A public office's business processes and activities, including its records management programme, shall be documented in an open and verifiable manner, and that documentation shall be available to all personnel and appropriate interested parties.



Elements of the Policy

Effective Date

This Policy takes effect August 2025

Application

This Policy applies to all public offices of the Republic of Sierra Leone, subject to the Public Archives Act 1965 [or new Bill when passed].

Context

Strengthening relations with citizens is a sound investment in better policy-making and a core element of good governance. Proper record-keeping allows governments to tap new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and resources when making decisions. Equally important, records contribute to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity. Such efforts help strengthen representative democracy in which legislative assemblies play a role.

Records that are complete and accurate serve as an important source of information to support decision-making, the conduct of programmes and services, management reporting, the analysis of trends, and reviews and audits. Records are also essential to capture the corporate and national memory, to provide continuity and to preserve explicit knowledge.

All employees of public offices are responsible for documenting their activities and decisions and for applying records management principles, standards and practices in the performance of their duties.

Permanent Secretaries and the equivalent administrative heads of public offices are accountable to the Minister, who will be in charge of the effective and well-coordinated management of records throughout the public service. Heads of Departments and Agencies are responsible to the Permanent Secretary of their respective supervising Ministries.

Policy Statement

The objective of this Policy is to achieve the efficient and effective management of public records and judicial records, regardless of their format, to support programme and service delivery; foster informed decision making; facilitate accountability and collaboration; promote public access to information; and preserve and ensure access to reliable public records and judicial records for the benefit of present and future generations.

Desired Outcomes

- Public offices provide convenient access to relevant, reliable, comprehensive and timely information contained in the records under their control.
- Public records and judicial records are managed as valuable assets to support the outcomes of programmes and services, as well as operational needs and accountabilities.
- Governance structures with respect to career paths, mechanisms and resources are in place to ensure the continuous and effective management of public records and judicial records.
- Public offices are able to comply with the Right to Access Information Act 2013.
- Public offices are able to make the transition from paper-based to digital record-keeping systems while complying with the principles of records management as outlined in this Policy and supporting directives and standards.

Policy Requirements

- Ensuring that the programmes and services carried out in their ministries, departments and agencies take account of records management (in all format) requirements in all planning, development, implementation, evaluation and reporting activities.
- Ensuring that decisions and decision-making processes are documented to account for and support the continuity of operations, permit the reconstruction of policy and programme evolution, and allow for independent evaluation, audit and review.
- Ensuring that risk management requirements is taking into consideration
- Ensuring that records are shared within and across ministries, departments and public entities to the greatest extent possible while respecting security and privacy requirements.
- Ensuring the continued completeness, authenticity and quality of public records and judicial records for as long as they are required to meet operational needs and accountabilities.
- Designating a senior official to represent the ministry or head of the department or agency for the purposes of the Policy.
- Establishing, measuring and reporting on a strategy and programme for the improvement of records management.
- Ensuring that private records generated as a result of the inter-relationship with the private sector are

Monitoring and Reporting

- Permanent Secretaries and heads of departments and public offices are responsible for monitoring adherence to this Policy. They are responsible for ensuring that appropriate remedial action is taken to address any deficiencies in records management in their organisations.
- The Minister will monitor compliance with all aspects of this Policy and the achievement of expected results based on Ministry-level reports, audit results, evaluations, and studies, in addition to working directly with departments and agencies within the performance management system.
- The Minister will review this Policy, its associated directives and standards, and their effectiveness within three (3) years of the date that this Policy comes into effect (or earlier for certain directives and standards).
- Consequences of non-compliance can include informal follow-up visits and requests from the Minister, external audits or formal direction on corrective measures.





Responsibilities of Central Authorities

The Minister through the Director of Records and Archives :

- Provides interpretive advice on this Policy.
- That there should be a Directorate at the Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE) with autonomous mandate to regulate the keeping and management of Public Records and Archives.
- That the said directorate should be structured under two major professional divisions:
- Archives Administration Division
- Records Management, Planning and Project Division
- Each of these Professional divisions is headed by a Deputy Director. In addition, a Deputy Director is in charge of each of the regional offices while Assistant Directors head the District Offices.
- The Directorate develops guidelines for the management and preservation of digital records and Archives
- That the Directorate develops a clear career path for Records and Archives professionals in consultation with other stakeholders.
- Develops and promotes, in consultation with other ministries, departments, and agencies, directives, standards, good practice guidelines, tools, and procedures that achieve the goals and expected results of this policy.
- Provides direction and assistance in the management of public records and judicial records for the government of Sierra Leone.
- Acquires, preserves, makes known, and facilitates access to Sierra Leone's documentary heritage in accordance with legislative requirements.
- Identifies, selects, acquires and preserves public records and judicial records, as defined in the Public Archives Act 1965 or any legislation related to records and archives, in all media and considered to be of enduring value to Sierra Leone as part of its documentary heritage.
- Issues records retention schedules in consultation with key stakeholders, pursuant to the Public Archives Act 1965 any legislation in relation to records and archives, to enable Ministries, Departments and Agencies to carry out the necessary retention and disposition of their records.
- Manages and protects the vital records and less frequently referenced material of government ministries, departments and agencies.
- Promotes the development of digital records, records management capacity and best practices.
- Develops competency and other professional standards for records management specialists as required.

The Public Archives Committee, established pursuant to the Public Archives Act 1965 or any new legislation relating to records and archives, is responsible for making recommendations to the Minister on the following matters concerning public records and archives:

- The retention or destruction of public records and judicial records.
- The transfer of public records and judicial records to the Public Archives.
- The conditions and restrictions, if any, upon which any public records or public archives may be inspected or published.
- Any other matters that may be prescribed.