

# 2004 Records Management Survey Report



**Issued March 2005**

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How well a public office and its employees keep records and manage them has a major impact on how efficiently that body can conduct its business, how accountable it can be to its stakeholders and how well it can deliver services to the community.

The *State Records Act 1998* establishes important obligations for the public sector in New South Wales, in relation to all aspects of the creation and management of records. These obligations reflect the community's expectations that the same high standards will apply to a public sector body's recordkeeping practices as to any other aspect of public management.

The State Records Act requires public offices to make arrangements with State Records for the monitoring of their records management programs and to report to State Records on the implementation of those programs (section 12(2)). To minimise the reporting burden on public offices, State Records has made records management surveys the principal means by which public offices can discharge this obligation.

In October 2004 State Records adopted a new framework for monitoring activities under the State Records Act. The framework outlines the purpose of monitoring and the roles and responsibilities of both State Records and public offices. The framework also outlines a number of monitoring mechanisms, the primary one of which is the records management survey.

This is the report of the findings of the first monitoring activity to be undertaken within the new monitoring framework, the 2004 Records Management Survey. The report:

- provides detailed analysis of the results of the 2004 Records Management Survey and highlights issues and trends
- contains an assessment of the overall compliance of public offices with the requirements of the State Records Act and the records management standards issued under the Act
- contains recommendations and proposed actions for State Records to implement, so that it is clear how State Records intends to use and learn from the data collected, and
- may also be used by public offices for benchmarking their own performance and for identifying priorities for further improvements.

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## **Executive Summary**

The following report contains a detailed analysis of the results of the 2004 Records Management Survey and how well public offices in NSW are meeting their obligations under the *State Records Act 1998*. The report also considers ways in which both State Records and public offices can implement any necessary changes to improve recordkeeping performance and compliance.

The statistics discussed in the report are based on the information provided by the 348 public offices who responded to the survey, including all NSW Government agencies, State owned corporations, local government bodies, universities, and some public health organisations. There was a 100% response rate for the survey.

While statistically meaningful comparisons cannot be drawn with earlier records management surveys, it is clear that many public offices are continuing to implement better records management practices and processes in order to improve performance and comply with the State Records Act.

Some of the highlights of the survey results include:

- 70% of public offices now store their paper-based records in dedicated storage facilities
- 70% of public offices have assigned recordkeeping responsibilities throughout their organisation
- 73% of public offices have skilled records management staff, and
- 80% of public offices dispose of records in accordance with the requirements of the State Records Act.

Despite these improvements in practice, there are a number of key areas which pose potential risks to Government business.

### **Counter disaster planning**

Only 32% of public offices have counter disaster reaction and recovery plans for their organisation's records and recordkeeping systems. The survey results indicate that many public offices are attempting to identify and protect their vital records, yet many are not developing this most important protection measure. Ensuring that the essential records on which continued operations and services depend are quickly available following a disaster or attack is an essential part of any organisation's business continuity planning. This failure to plan could compromise the business capability of an organisation.

### **Email management**

23% of public offices do not have systems and procedures in place to capture and manage those emails which are records. This means that much of the Government's business, conducted by email, could be placed at risk if emails are not available to justify or defend the actions of officers conducting Government business.

### **Technology dependent records**

22% of public offices are not able to read and use some of their records which are dependent on equipment or technology. This inaccessibility of records due to

obsolescence in equipment/technology/storage format is a significant concern. It means that some records of NSW Government business are already effectively lost: they either cannot be retrieved at all, or are accessible only through an expensive or time consuming effort. As the NSW public sector conducts more of its business using new technologies, even more of the State's records could be at risk without better planning and appropriate migration strategies.

## Long term records and archives

24% of public offices do not store long term records (older than 25 years) or archives in environmentally controlled storage facilities and 21% do not monitor the physical condition of longer term records or State archives. Inadequate storage risks the deterioration of records required by the State to manage its business over time (for example, major infrastructure records which may be needed for many decades) and of records destined to be preserved as part of the State archives collection.

In addition, only 14% of public offices have transferred to State Records' control those records which are required as State archives, are inactive and are over 25 years old. This is potentially placing a significant part of the State's official documentary heritage at risk.

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## Introduction

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## Monitoring framework

On 1 October 2004 the new framework for monitoring activities covering all aspects of the *State Records Act 1998* commenced. The [monitoring framework](#) is available from State Records' website.

The framework outlines the purpose of monitoring, the roles and responsibilities of both State Records and public offices and monitoring arrangements for 2004 to 2008. The framework recognises that there are limited resources for monitoring, so any monitoring must not place an unreasonable burden on public offices or State Records.

Under the monitoring framework, public offices in NSW are expected to continue regular performance monitoring activities as outlined in the [Standard on Managing a Records Management Program](#). These activities are designed to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of recordkeeping systems and processes in public offices to ensure that they are satisfactory and meeting the public offices' needs.

The monitoring framework establishes the records management survey as the primary monitoring mechanism. The records management survey is designed to measure and

monitor public office compliance with the Act, standards and codes of best practice, and allow public offices to discharge their obligations under s.12(4) of the State Records Act. State Records plans to conduct the survey every second year and cover all public offices, that is, NSW Government agencies, State owned corporations, local government bodies, universities, and area health services.

The records management survey is also the key mechanism by which State Records can assess the state of official recordkeeping and records management across the NSW public sector. Data obtained from the survey is used to report to Parliament on the state of government recordkeeping in State Records' annual report. Public offices can use the survey as a tool to monitor their own progress and improvement in recordkeeping.

## **Survey questionnaire**

State Records has conducted records management surveys of public offices since 1996. The commencement of the new monitoring framework, however, provided an opportunity for State Records to review surveying methodologies and tools and develop a more streamlined survey questionnaire. The new questionnaire is tailored to meet State Records' and public offices' requirements better, and minimises the administrative reporting burden on public offices.

The survey questionnaire was designed to be a self-assessment exercise and to assess all the obligations of public offices under the State Records Act. For the first time, public offices were required to look beyond their recordkeeping responsibilities under the provisions in Parts 2 and 3 of the Act and to consider also their obligations under Part 4 (Authority entitled to control of State records not currently in use) and Part 6 (Public access to State records after 30 years) of the Act.

The survey questionnaire was divided according to the seven key obligations under the State Records Act. Each section included some introductory text on the obligation being assessed and referred survey participants to the appropriate sections of the Act. The questionnaire included only 26 questions, a significant reduction from previous surveys. The last section of the questionnaire allowed survey participants to provide feedback to State Records.

The survey was designed to allow public offices to make an assessment and answer on behalf of the entire organisation. For very large and complex organisations (over 1000 staff) with numerous locations and subsidiaries, those answering the questionnaire needed to take a 'bird's eye view' or overview of the organisation's compliance with requirements rather than an in-depth analysis of every location, division, and facility.

The survey questionnaire was designed as an online survey and the survey data was collected via State Records' website. It was collated automatically and was available in electronic form for analysis and reporting purposes.

## **Comparison with previous surveys**

Due to the major changes in the 2004 survey questionnaire, it is unlikely that statistically meaningful comparisons can be made with the results of previous records management surveys. Earlier survey reports will continue to be available from State Records' website.

## **Survey pool**

The 2004 survey pool comprised 348 public offices subject to the State Records Act, including all NSW Government agencies, State owned corporations, local government bodies, universities, and some health organisations. Area health services were excluded from this survey because of the widespread amalgamations which occurred among the area health services in late 2004.

## Response rate

The survey commenced on 22 October 2004 and ran until 3 December 2004, a period of 6 weeks. Extensive follow-up was done with those public offices that had not completed the survey by the due date. Extensions were granted to a number of public offices to assist them to meet the requirement to submit a completed survey return. This effort resulted in a response rate of 100%.

State Records would like to thank all public offices for their participation and cooperation during the survey.

## Verification

During November and December 2004, State Records staff undertook a verification process by visiting a small random sample of public offices in the survey. The sample included a range of organisations (very small to very large), located in Sydney and a regional location.

The visits were an opportunity to verify the information supplied and to ensure that the respondents had understood the survey questionnaire. State Records would like to thank those public offices who participated in the verification process for their cooperation.

## Follow-up and remedial process

The records management survey is a formal monitoring exercise and the key mechanism for public offices to meet their obligations under s.12(4) of the State Records Act.

State Records, using a risk management approach, will follow up major issues of concern with those public offices that:

- appear to be having serious difficulties in complying with key obligations under the Act, and
- may be at particular risk of a recordkeeping failure.

These public offices will be sent an individual report accompanied by suggestions for remedial action. Depending upon the issues identified, State Records will also make arrangements with the public office for monitoring the remedial action.

## The report

This report includes a discussion of each survey question, an examination of results and a detailed analysis of what they indicate about compliance with obligations in the State Records Act. The report also considers ways in which both State Records and public offices can implement any necessary changes to improve recordkeeping performance and compliance.

The report refers to standards and guidance issued by State Records. All standards and guidance are available in the [Government Recordkeeping Manual](#) which is available on State Records' website at <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/>.

## How to use this report

This report can be used by public offices to assess their records management performance by:

- benchmarking against the statistical data, and

- examining and assessing the results of individual questions.

## **Benchmarking**

Benchmarking is a process of comparison between an accepted standard and an organisation's service, outputs or performance. The outcome is to identify areas of improvement.

This report can be used as the basis of a benchmarking exercise. Public offices interested in benchmarking should use the statistical data contained in the [Appendix](#) to this report. Comparisons can be drawn from the overall performance of public offices and the individual public office's survey response, in order to identify areas where the public office is underperforming and priorities for improvement.

## **Results of individual questions**

This report examines each obligation and its respective questions in detail and discusses relevant guidance and advice available. Public offices seeking information to improve performance should refer to the discussion and links available at each section.

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## **Survey results**

This section contains

- [Survey statistics](#)
- [Information about public offices](#)
- [Safe custody and proper preservation](#)
- [Make and keep full and accurate records](#)
- [Establish and maintain a records management program](#)
- [Maintain accessibility to equipment/technology dependent records](#)
- [Disposal of records](#)
- [Management of longer term records](#)
- [Public access](#)
- [Feedback to State Records](#)

## **Survey statistics**

The statistics used in the survey report are based on a simple statistical analysis of the number of responses for each question. To improve readability, statistics used in the text of this report have been rounded to the nearest whole figure. In some instances this means that the percentage total does not equal 100%.

Statistics for the survey are available at the [Appendix](#) of this report. These statistics are also suitable for benchmarking and comparative analysis purposes.

## **Information about public offices**

This is the first single survey that State Records has conducted concurrently across most of the jurisdiction of the State Records Act. This approach has offered the opportunity to collect information about the whole jurisdiction which shows the differences, similarities and experiences of the constituent sectors. It has also provided State Records with a further understanding of the types of organisations, their sizes and locations, and useful

data to assess the appropriateness of current strategies to assist public offices.

With the exclusion of the area health services from the records management survey, four major sectors of the jurisdiction were surveyed (NSW Government agencies, State owned corporations, local government bodies and the universities). Some health organisations which were normally grouped under the area health service sector did participate in the survey, but were asked to nominate what type of organisation they were, rather than to which sector they belonged. Thus the results for this small number of health organisations have been grouped under the 'agencies' organisational type.

### ***Question ii What type of public office is your organisation?***

47% of public offices reported that they were local government bodies, 42% were Government agencies, 8% were State owned corporations, and 3% were universities.

### ***Question iii What size is your organisation?***

This question sought data on the size of the public offices, to gain a better understanding of the spread of organisational size and to gauge the possible scale of records management operations. Each public office was asked to report on the number of full time equivalent staff (FTE) in their organisation. Sizes were defined as 'very small' (less than 20), 'small' (20–80), 'medium' (80–250), 'large' (250–1 000), and 'very large' (more than 1 000).

19% reported that they are 'very small' organisations, 26% are 'small' organisations, 25% are 'medium' sized organisations, 19% are 'large' organisations, while only 11% are 'very large' organisations.

When we analysed this result further to determine what type of organisations featured most in each category, we found that:

- most local councils are small to medium sized organisations (13% are very small, 26% are small, 32% are medium sized, 24% are large, 4% are very large)
- most universities are very large organisations (one is small, one is large, and the other nine are very large)
- State owned corporations are spread across most categories, but the majority are medium to very large organisations and almost half are either large or very large (19% are very small, 7% are small, 26% are medium, 26% are large, and 22% are very large), and
- Government agencies are predominantly very small to medium, with less than a quarter identified as large or very large (27% are very small, 29% are small, 18% are medium, 12% are large, and 12% are very large).

This information will help State Records to develop further strategies to work with public offices with different needs. The results reinforce State Records' decision to provide specific advice to small and very small public offices through our 'Small Agencies Strategy'.

### ***Question iv Where is your organisation primarily located (i.e Head Office)?***

This question sought data about where public offices are primarily located. 52% of public offices reported that they are primarily located in Sydney, 18% are located in regional centres, and 31% are located in rural areas.

The survey results revealed:

- 84% of Government agencies are primarily located in Sydney
- 63% of State owned corporations are primarily located in Sydney
- six of the universities are primarily located in Sydney, the other five in regional centres, and

- 21% of local councils are located in Sydney, 21% are in regional centres, and 58% are in rural areas.

This information will help State Records to develop better strategies to assist rural and regional based public offices, in particular local councils in these areas. These results confirm State Records' decision to increase the availability of records management training in regional centres and rural areas of the State.

***Question v Does your organisation have multiple locations, regional offices, or act as an umbrella organisation for a number of smaller organisations?***

This question sought to help State Records to gauge the complexity of records management operations. Public offices that have multiple locations are likely to have devolved or de-centralised operations.

The survey revealed an almost even split between those that have multiple locations (49%) and those without (51%).

**Safe custody and proper preservation**

The questions in this section of the survey questionnaire related to a public office's obligations under section 11 of the State Records Act, notably to ensure the safe custody and proper preservation of its records. The questions drew on requirements in the [Standard on Counter Disaster Strategies for Records and Recordkeeping Systems](#) and the [Standard on the Physical Storage of State Records](#). Respondents were reminded that the use of the term 'records' meant all records in all formats and also included any records from a predecessor organisation.

***Question 1 Has your organisation identified its vital records?***

Vital records are those records which are essential to the ongoing business of a public office, without which the public office could not continue to function effectively. The identification and protection of vital records is a primary object both of records management and of counter disaster planning.

57% of public offices reported that they have identified their organisation's vital records, 35% are preparing to do this work, and 8% have not identified their vital records.

Those that have not done so include Government agencies (10% of those surveyed), local councils (9% those surveyed), and State owned corporations (4% of those surveyed).

***Question 2 Has your organisation protected its vital records?***

Protection measures for vital records can include:

- duplication and dispersal of copies to other locations which may not be affected by the disaster
- establishment of procedures for managing work in progress such as 'clean desk policies', to ensure that vital documents and records are protected overnight, and
- dedicated vital records recovery and restoration procedures in a counter disaster reaction and recovery plan.

44% of public offices reported that they have protected their organisation's vital records, 45% are preparing to, and 11% have not protected their vital records.

Those that have not done so include Government agencies (12% of those surveyed), local councils (13% of those surveyed), and State owned corporations (4% of those surveyed).

***Question 3 Does your organisation have current counter disaster reaction and***

## ***recovery plans for records and recordkeeping systems in place?***

Counter disaster reaction and recovery plans for records and recordkeeping systems can be incorporated into a public office's counter disaster and business continuity planning. Alternatively, a public office can have a dedicated plan for records and recordkeeping systems.

32% of public offices reported that they have counter disaster reaction and recovery plans for records and recordkeeping systems, 52% are preparing them, and 17% do not have such plans.

Those that do not have such plans include Government agencies (14% of those surveyed), local councils (19% of those surveyed), and State owned corporations (22% of those surveyed).

## ***Question 4 Does your organisation store its physical records in storage areas/facilities dedicated specifically to the storage of records and/or library items?***

70% of public offices reported that they store records in dedicated storage areas, 26% store some records in such areas, and 3% do not store any of their records in such areas.

Those that do not do so include Government agencies (4% of those surveyed) and councils (3% of those surveyed).

## ***Question 5 Are records of long term value, for example those required as State archives or for longer than 25 years, stored in environmentally controlled storage facilities?***

42% of public offices reported that they store long term records in environmentally controlled storage facilities, 34% store some long term records in these storage facilities, and 24% do not store any long term records in such storage facilities.

Those that do not do so include Government agencies (22% of those surveyed), local councils (30% of those surveyed), State owned corporations (7% of those surveyed), and universities (one out of eleven). Of these, most are located either in regional centres or rural areas.

## ***Commentary on results***

The results on disaster planning are disappointing: while a majority of public offices have identified their vital records, fewer have taken the necessary measures to protect them and fewer still have undertaken comprehensive planning for protecting their records and recordkeeping systems in the event of a disaster.

The continued availability of the records necessary to maintain services and operations after a disaster or attack is an important element of business continuity. The limited progress with the identification and protection of vital records is a matter of concern in view of the Government's commitment to business continuity planning by agencies.

State Records provides guidance on [counter disaster planning](#) on its website, and information tailored to small and very small public offices on the [small agencies page](#). State Records will continue to promote the importance of counter disaster planning and will draw the attention of the NSW Premier's Department, which has sector-wide responsibility for business continuity planning, to our concerns in this regard.

The results regarding the use of dedicated storage facilities (Question 4) is pleasing. The results relating to the storage of long term records (Question 5), however, are not so encouraging. Inadequate storage conditions for records to be retained over extended periods of time create a risk that they will not be available when needed due to damage or destruction. Records destined to be preserved as part of the State archives collection

also require suitable storage conditions while under a public office’s control for the same reason and to reduce the potentially large cost to State Records of remedial conservation.

State Records will use this data to review strategies for helping public offices to preserve their long term records, particularly in regional and rural NSW. State Records will also address the related issue of the transfer of records as State archives (discussed under Question 24).

## **Make and keep full and accurate records**

The questions in this section related to a public office’s obligation under section 12(1) of the State Records Act to make and keep full and accurate records of its activities. The questions drew on requirements in the [Standard on Full and Accurate Records](#), the [Standard on Recordkeeping in the Electronic Business Environment](#) and the [NSW Recordkeeping Metadata Standard](#). Respondents were reminded that the use of the term ‘records’ meant all records in all formats and also included any records from a predecessor organisation.

### **Question 6 Are organisational requirements for creating and keeping records of all business processes documented and communicated to staff?**

	<b>Organisational requirements documented</b>	<b>Organisational requirements communicated</b>
<b>Yes</b>	65%	64%
<b>Some requirements</b>	32%	34%
<b>No</b>	4%	2%

### **Question 7 Are organisational recordkeeping requirements written into agreements with parties conducting business that has been outsourced or which is the subject of a shared service arrangement?**

Respondents were advised that ‘Not Applicable’ was appropriate for this question if the public office does not outsource any of its business.

13% of public offices reported that they include recordkeeping requirements in agreements for outsourced business, 28% do so in some agreements, 11% do not do so in any agreements, and 48% advised that this question was not applicable.

Those that do not do so include Government agencies (7% of those surveyed), local councils (16% of those surveyed), and State owned corporations (11% of those surveyed).

### **Question 8 Are measures in place to protect records and recordkeeping systems from unauthorised access, alteration, deletion and destruction?**

Protection measures for records and recordkeeping systems can include:

- locking storage areas and ensuring that they are physically secure
- monitoring and controlling access to storage areas and recordkeeping systems
- implementing appropriate information security for recordkeeping systems
- implementing corporate policies on recordkeeping, and
- staff training on recordkeeping practices and policies.

	Protect against unauthorised access	Protect against unauthorised alteration	Protect against unauthorised deletion and destruction
Yes	72%	61%	63%
Some measures	26%	33%	32%
No protection	2%	6%	5%

**Question 9 Are systems and procedures in place and operating for capturing and managing email as records?**

77% of public offices reported that they have systems and procedures in place for capturing and managing email as records, while 23% do not.

Those that do not have such systems and procedures in place include Government agencies (29% of those surveyed), local councils (14% of those surveyed), State owned corporations (41% of those surveyed), and universities (18% or two universities).

**Question 10 Do your recordkeeping systems enable you to identify the current location of records for which your public office is responsible?**

62% of public offices reported that they are able to identify the current location of their records, 36% are able to identify the current location of some records, and 2% are not able to identify the current location of their records.

Those that could not do so were Government agencies and local councils predominantly in regional centres and rural areas.

**Question 11 Do your recordkeeping systems enable you to identify who has accessed a record?**

33% of public offices reported that their recordkeeping systems are able to identify who has accessed a record; in 49%, some recordkeeping systems are able to do so; while in 18% access to records cannot be identified by their recordkeeping systems.

Those unable to do so comprised Government agencies, local councils and State owned corporations predominantly in regional centres and rural areas.

**Question 12 Do your recordkeeping systems enable you to identify who has altered a record?**

31% of public offices reported that their recordkeeping systems are able to identify who has altered a record; in 51%, some recordkeeping systems are able to do so; and in 17% alterations to records cannot be identified by their recordkeeping systems.

Those unable to do so were Government agencies, local councils and State owned corporations predominantly in regional centres and rural areas.

### ***Question 13 Do your recordkeeping systems enable you to identify the individual or business unit responsible for creation of a record?***

56% of public offices reported that their recordkeeping systems are able to identify the individual or business unit responsible for the creation of a record; in 37% of public offices, some recordkeeping systems are able to do so; in 7% of public offices, the records creator cannot be identified by their recordkeeping systems.

Those unable to do so were Government agencies, local councils and State owned corporations predominantly in regional centres and rural areas.

#### ***Commentary on results***

The requirements under the [Standard on Full and Accurate Records](#) have applied to Government agencies since 1999 and to local government since 2000. It is reasonable to expect that compliance with these requirements should be higher than indicated in some of the responses.

The results for Question 7, with a fifth of public offices with outsourcing or shared services arrangements failing to address recordkeeping requirements in contracts, are a matter of concern. This represents an area of significant potential risk for accountability and the capacity to meet ongoing business needs for documentation. State Records provides useful guidance on this subject in [Accountable outsourcing: Recordkeeping considerations of outsourcing NSW Government business](#). State Records will remind public offices of the need to include recordkeeping requirements in relevant contracts and agreements.

The results for Question 9 were poor, with 23% of public offices without systems or procedures for capturing and managing email as records. This failure is spread across public offices in all sectors (although State own corporations were the worst performing sector) and across all locations (Sydney, regional and rural). Of concern also is the variance of the failure figures for Government agencies (29%) and State owned corporations (41%) compared with the results of the compliance review conducted by the Audit Office of NSW in 2002, in which only 13% of agencies were reported as not having systems or procedures for capturing email as records. The reasons for this variance are not clear.

Given the widespread use of email for the conduct of a wide variety of everyday official business, a public office without the capacity to capture and manage emails as records is at serious risk of being unable to account for its actions or to meet important business needs in the future. State Records has highlighted this issue in policy, standards and guidance since 1998, while a Premier's Memorandum in December 2004 provided the most recent reminder. We will follow up on this issue with those public offices where this failure represents the most serious risk to themselves and to Government.

The results for Question 10 showed that the majority of public offices are able to identify the current location of their records, which is a practical necessity for retrieval and use. Many public offices, however, still need to improve their control over all their records.

The results for Questions 11, 12 and 13 indicate that systems used for recordkeeping in many public offices are failing to provide important functionality. The public offices which appear to be having the greatest difficulty are local councils and those that are based in regional centres and rural areas. State Records will use this information to improve advice to small and very small public offices, particularly in local government, on how to improve their recordkeeping systems in practical ways.

### **Establish and maintain a records management program**

The questions in this section related to public offices' obligation under section 12(2) of the State Records Act to establish and maintain a records management program in conformity with approved standards and codes of best practice. The questions drew on

requirements in the [Standard on Managing a Records Management Program](#).

**Question 14 Has your organisation developed and promulgated corporate policy relating to records management throughout the organisation?**

62% of public offices reported that they have developed and promulgated corporate policy, 20% have developed it but have not promulgated it, and 18% of public offices do not have such policy at all.

Those that have not met this requirement comprise Government agencies (13% of those surveyed), local councils (25% of those surveyed), State owned corporations (11% of those surveyed), and one university. Most are from regional centres and rural areas.

**Question 15 Have short and long term goals for the records management program been identified and documented in the planning mechanisms of your organisation?**

	Short term goals	Long term goals
Yes	60%	44%
In preparation	26%	37%
No	14%	19%

Those that have not set such goals include all types of public offices, mostly from regional centres and rural areas.

**Question 16 Do you have policy in place assigning recordkeeping responsibilities throughout your organisation?**

70% of public offices reported that they have assigned recordkeeping responsibilities, 21% are preparing to, and 8% have not done so.

Those that have not met this requirement include Government agencies (5% of those surveyed), local councils (12% of those surveyed), and State owned corporations (7% of those surveyed). Most are from regional centres and rural areas.

**Question 17 Do you have skilled records management staff to undertake records management in your organisation?**

73% of public offices reported that they have skilled records management staff, 18% of public offices do not have skilled records management staff, but have access to records management skills externally, and 9% of public offices have neither.

Those that have neither include Government agencies (11% of those surveyed), local councils (9% of those surveyed), and State owned corporations (7% of those surveyed). The university sector has good access to skilled staff both internally and externally. The lack of skilled staff is most apparent in regional centres and rural locations.

**Question 18 Do all staff (including agents and contractors) receive training and guidance in recordkeeping practices and procedures?**

	Training in recordkeeping practices and procedures	Guidance in recordkeeping practices and procedures
All employees	33%	45%

<b>Some employees</b>	58%	51%
<b>None</b>	9%	5%

**Question 19 Is the records management program regularly reviewed against performance objectives?**

44% of public offices reported that they regularly review their records management program, 31% are preparing to do so, and 25% do not regularly review the program.

Those that do not do so include Government agencies (25% of those surveyed), local councils (27% of those surveyed), State owned corporations (19% of those surveyed), and one university.

**Commentary on results**

The result for Question 14 was surprising, as it indicates that 18% of public offices (or 64 organisations) do not have a corporate records management policy. This has long been a basic requirement under the [Standard on Managing a Records Management Program](#) and there are [examples of such policies](#) provided on State Records' website. State Records will identify ways of communicating to public offices, particularly those in regional centres and rural areas, the importance and value of developing and promulgating corporate records management policy.

The results for Question 15 show that the majority of public offices are setting short term goals for their records management program, but that long term planning needs more attention. The greatest concern here relates to small public offices outside Sydney: State Records will address this through the Small Agencies Strategy.

The results for Question 16 are encouraging, particularly for the universities. Again public offices from regional centres and rural areas need the most help.

The results for Question 17 show that public office access to either internal or external skilled records management staff is good. State Records' 'Better Skills Strategy' (which encompasses a range of communication, training and guidance activities) appears to have had some positive results and is reflected in the increased level of skilled records management staff. There are, however, still issues with access to and availability of skilled staff in regional and rural areas.

The results for Question 18 indicate that staff are receiving training and guidance in recordkeeping practices and procedures but there is still room for improvement. It is difficult to require staff to understand their recordkeeping responsibilities and know how to capture records in official recordkeeping systems if they do not receive basic training (which can include one-to-one training or more formal training) or sufficient guidance. State Records provides materials for public offices on its website for use in staff induction and internal training (including [downloadable leaflets](#) and a [customisable PowerPoint presentation](#)). In addition, State Records runs a program of [records management training courses](#) in metropolitan and in regional and rural New South Wales.

The results for Question 19 indicate that many public offices need to improve their own monitoring activities. A records management program cannot be managed effectively without monitoring its performance. State Records provides guidance on [Monitoring recordkeeping performance](#) on its website. This survey provides public offices with one of the basic benchmarks for monitoring their records management program.

**Maintain accessibility to equipment/technology dependent records**

This question related to a public office's obligation under section 14(1) of the State

Records Act to ensure that the information in its equipment/technology dependent records remains able to be produced or made available. Respondents were reminded that 'records' means all records in all formats, including records in business systems such as HR and finance systems, and records from a predecessor organisation.

**Question 20 Are all equipment/technology dependent records able to be read and used, regardless of their age?**

77% of public offices reported that they are able to read and use their equipment/technology dependent records, while 23% have some records that cannot be accessed.

Those that have some such records include Government agencies (22% of those surveyed), local councils (20% of those surveyed), State owned corporations (33% of those surveyed), and universities (55% of those surveyed).

**Commentary on results**

The primary reason for equipment/technology dependent records becoming inaccessible is technological change resulting in obsolescence in equipment/technology/storage formats. It applies most commonly to digital (computer-based) records, including both hardware and software obsolescence, but also affects audio-visual record formats.

The fact that 23% of public offices have some records that are inaccessible is a serious matter. It means that some records of official business are already effectively lost or cannot be retrieved without expensive or time consuming effort. More may be at risk because of a lack of planning and migration strategies.

As Government business is increasingly conducted using new technologies, it is critical that public offices have in place strategies to ensure that records created electronically or that are otherwise equipment/technology dependent remain accessible for as long as they are required. State Records has guidance on its website on this subject, notably [Future proof: Ensuring the accessibility of equipment/technology dependent records](#). This is such an important matter, particularly in relation to digital records, that State Records will continue to raise it with other agencies with relevant sector-wide responsibilities.

**Disposal of records**

The questions in this section related to a public office's obligations under section 21 of the State Records Act in relation to legal forms of disposal of records. Questions 22 and Question 23 also related to requirements under the [Standard on Managing a Records Management Program](#) and the [Standard on Full and Accurate Records](#) respectively. Respondents were reminded that the use of the term 'records' means all records in all formats, and includes records from a predecessor organisation.

**Question 21 Are all records disposed of in accordance with the requirements of the State Records Act?**

Section 21 of the State Records Act prohibits the disposal of State records except where it is permitted under the Act. Disposal is permitted through [general retention and disposal authorities](#), [functional retention and disposal authorities](#), certain pieces of legislation under which a public office operates, or 'normal administrative practice' as defined in the Act.

80% of public offices reported that they dispose of records in accordance with the requirements of the Act, 16% of public offices have not disposed of records, and 4% of public offices do not dispose of records in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

Those in the third category include Government agencies (5% of those surveyed), local councils (2% of those surveyed), State owned corporations (4% of those surveyed), and

two universities.

### ***Q22 Are all disposal actions documented?***

Disposal actions could include retention, deletion or destruction of records in or from recordkeeping systems. They may also include the migration or transmission of records between recordkeeping systems, and the transfer of custody or ownership of records.

68% of public offices reported that they document their disposal actions, 13% document some disposal actions, 16% have not disposed records, and 3% do not document disposal actions.

Those that do not document their disposal actions include Government agencies (4% of those surveyed), local councils (3% of those surveyed), and State owned corporations (4% of those surveyed).

### ***Q23 Is information recorded about the disposal (including migration) of all electronic records?***

Information about the disposal of electronic records could be recorded by the automatic audit trail of a records management software product, or manually through the updating of documentation about electronic records.

31% of public offices reported that they document the disposal of electronic records, 24% document the disposal of some electronic records, 40% do not have a disposal program for electronic records, and 5% do not document the disposal of electronic records.

Those that do not document such disposal include Government agencies (3% of those surveyed), local councils (7% of those surveyed), and State owned corporations (4% of those surveyed).

An analysis of public offices that do not have a disposal program for electronic records identified that this is a significant area needing improvement for all sectors: 46% of Government agencies; 38% of local councils; 30% of State owned corporations; and one of the universities do not have an electronic records disposal program.

### ***Commentary on results***

The results for Question 21 are generally positive, but it is of concern that 4% of public offices reported that they are disposing of records outside the mechanisms of the Act.

The number of public offices that reported that they are not disposing of records at all (16%) is also surprising. Even if their unique records have not been appraised, every public office can use one or more of the general retention and disposal authorities. By retaining records which they could lawfully dispose of, public offices are incurring unnecessary expense in storage costs.

The results for Question 22, when compared with Question 21, show that while 279 public offices dispose of records lawfully, only 235 are systematically documenting it. Documenting disposal actions is an important part of records management practice and enables a public office to know what has happened to its records and by what authority, which can be important information when responding to a Freedom of Information request or a subpoena. State Records provides guidance on this in the guidelines [Implementing a disposal authority](#), available on its website.

The results for Question 23 highlight several issues relating to the disposal of electronic records. State Records will develop additional advice for public offices about this.

## **Management of longer term records**

The questions in this section related to a public office's obligations under the State Records Act, notably to ensure the safe custody and proper preservation of its records under section 11, and under sections 27 to 29, which concern State Records' entitlement to control of records no longer in use for official purposes in the public office. Respondents were reminded that the use of the term 'records' meant all records in all formats and also included any records from a predecessor organisation.

### ***Question 24 Have all inactive records that are identified as State archives, over 25 years old, and not subject to Still in Use Determinations, been made available for transfer to State Records' control?***

Under section 27 of the State Records Act, State Records is entitled to control of State records no longer in use for official purposes in the public office responsible for them. The transfer of control is the formal mechanism by which records become State archives. In practice, therefore, State Records exercises this entitlement only in relation to records that are to be kept indefinitely as part of the State archives collection. This transfer of control can involve transfer of the records to State Records' physical custody, or it can involve the public office or a third party having custody under 'distributed management' arrangements for State archives.

While State Records is entitled to control of records destined to be kept as State archives and no longer in use for official purposes, in practice it must rely on public offices notifying it that the records are available for transfer.

While records can cease to be in use for official purposes at any time, the Act presumes that records more than 25 years old are no longer in use. The Act also acknowledges that, while most records required as State archives are inactive by the time they are 25 years old, a proportion will continue to be used for longer than this. In such cases, continuing official use can be accommodated by the public office making a 'still in use determination' (s.28(1)). A still in use determination defers, but does not extinguish, State Records' entitlement to control of the records covered.

14% of public offices reported that they have transferred the control of all records that are inactive, over 25 years old and identified as State archives; 22% of public offices have transferred some such records; while 65% have not transferred the control of any such records. It should be noted that this last figure includes newer public offices that have no records more than 25 years old.

Those public offices that have not transferred any such records include Government agencies (53% of those surveyed), local councils (77% of those surveyed), State owned corporations (52% of those surveyed), and universities (seven out of eleven).

### ***Question 25 Do you monitor the physical condition of longer term records or State archives in your custody?***

42% of public offices reported that they monitor the physical condition of longer term records or State archives in their custody, 37% monitor the condition of some such records, and 21% do not monitor the condition of any such records.

Those that do not monitor the condition of any such records include Government agencies (28% of those surveyed), local councils (16% of those surveyed), State owned corporations (15% of those surveyed), and one university.

### ***Commentary on results***

The results for Question 24 confirm anecdotal evidence that many records that should be part of the State archives collection are being retained unnecessarily by public offices. Even allowing for newer public offices with no records more than 25 years old (estimated as about 20% of the survey pool), two thirds of public offices hold at least some records which should be transferred as State archives.

The failure to transfer records identified as State archives when they are no longer required for business is potentially placing part of the State's documentary heritage at risk. Many such records are, in effect, inaccessible to the public and unavailable for research use, despite the public being entitled to access to most records more than 30 years old under the State Records Act. Public offices are also incurring unnecessary costs by maintaining these records.

One reason for this situation is the desire of public offices in regional and rural areas of the State to retain records of long-term value within the region or area. A network of regional archives repositories, hosted by State Records' regional partners, helps meet this need, along with distributed management agreements, whereby public offices can manage their own archival records, provided they are willing to bear the necessary infrastructure and operational costs. Distributed management agreements are also a suitable means for bodies like universities and local councils to maintain their own archival operations, while forming part of a larger State archives network. Information about [distributed management](#) is available on State Records' website.

Comparison between the 'No' responses for Question 24 with the results for Question 5 (storage of long term and archival records) indicates that 32% of public offices do not have environmentally controlled storage for long term records and archives and have not transferred control of inactive records as State archives. Allowing for newer public offices with no records more than 25 years old, it appears that at least 10% of public offices are storing some records that should be transferred as State archives in inadequate conditions. Such records are at a heightened risk of damage, while remaining, as noted above, unavailable for public use.

Also of concern is the result from comparing the 'No' response for Question 25 with the results for Question 5: 41% of public offices reported that they do not monitor the physical condition of long term or archival records and do not store these records in environmentally controlled storage facilities.

State Records will use this information to:

- encourage all public offices to plan how they will manage the archival records that they create and when they will transfer them to State Records' control.
- encourage Government agencies with large accumulations of older archival records to transfer these records to its custody, as resources on both sides permit. Where such agencies have ongoing business requirements to retain these records, State Records will ensure that they understand their obligation to preserve the records and provide public access.
- encourage public offices that are committed to managing their own archives to enter distributed management agreements.

State Records will also continue to work with and support the network of regional archives repositories and will look for viable opportunities to expand the network.

## **Public Access**

This question related to a public office's obligation under section 51 of the State Records Act to make access directions for the records in the 'open access period' (at least 30 years old) for which they are responsible. This includes records held by State Records as State archives.

Respondents were reminded that the use of the term 'records' meant all records in all formats and also included any records from a predecessor organisation. They were also advised that 'Not Applicable' was appropriate for this question if the public office was less than 30 years old and was not responsible for records of a predecessor organisation.

Access directions are made by a public office to open or close a series, group or class of records in the open access period to public access. An open to public access (OPA) direction allows access to anyone. A closed to public access (CPA) direction closes the

records for a specified period. A CPA direction does not affect other entitlements of access. Access directions are made according to guidelines issued by the Attorney General.

***Question 26 Have access directions been made for all records over 30 years old for which your organisation is responsible?***

11% of public offices reported that they have made access directions for all open period records for which they are responsible, 12% have made access directions for some of these records, 21% of public offices are in the process of making access directions, and 34% have not made any access directions for these records. 23% of public offices advised that this question was not applicable to them.

Those that have not made access directions include Government agencies (19% of those surveyed), local councils (49% of those surveyed), and State owned corporations (33% of those surveyed).

***Commentary on results***

It is apparent from the results that this is an area to which many public offices have not paid much attention. Often the issue of making access directions arises only when a public office wants to transfer records as State archives.

State Records provides advice about [making access directions](#) on its website. State Records will remind public offices about this obligation and the public interest in there being appropriate access directions for their open access period records.

**Feedback to State Records**

The last section of the survey questionnaire was an opportunity for public offices to provide feedback to State Records. The feedback provided can be grouped into 3 broad themes:

- context for survey answers
- survey questionnaire, and
- issues with compliance requirements.

**Context for survey answers**

Many public offices used this last section of the survey questionnaire to elaborate on their responses to the survey and to provide detailed feedback on the implementation of their records management programs and systems. A number of public offices also advised State Records about the organisation, its structure and date of commencement (particularly if the organisation was less than 25 years old), and whether it was currently being amalgamated (eg. referring to the recent council amalgamations).

**Survey questionnaire**

A number of public offices congratulated State Records on the new streamlined survey questionnaire:

- "Congratulations on this format of survey - simple yet thorough. Well done State Records."
- "Thank you - this was a painless survey to complete."
- "This survey is concise and very streamlined. The questions are direct and easy

to understand.”

- “Survey is much simpler than previous and will be a useful tool for records management benchmarking within the organisation.”

Some public offices had suggestions for further improvements to the survey questionnaire:

- “We would like to have had the opportunity to complete the survey in stages on-line. It would have been appreciated that we could have partially complete the survey, save it, and come back to it as we gathered the information it asked for.”
- “In the next survey, can space be provided at the end of each question for qualifying statements?”
- “Some of the questions need different options to answer and "Comment" boxes after questions would have been helpful.”
- “Sometimes life is a bit more complex than as laid out in 3 options.”

### **Issues with compliance requirements**

A number of public offices noted issues with meeting compliance requirements, particularly budget and resource constraints:

- “As comment on the survey content itself, we would like state that there are certain budget & other resource constraints that have slowed down the development and implementation of certain aspects of our Records Management Program...”
- “As repeated in the past a small organisation such as ours has great difficulty in complying with this legislation, with failing infrastructure, rate pegging constraining opportunities to adequately resource records management along with many other essential elements.”
- “Limited resources at this organisation to attend to these matters.”

Some public offices noted their difficulty in providing an accurate assessment of compliance, due to the size or complexity of their organisations, or because they felt that the options provided in the survey questionnaire did not meet their needs:

- “For questions with answer options of "All records / Some records / No" available, could another answer option of "Most records" be included? This would give a more accurate picture in cases when the majority of records or recordkeeping systems are compliant but not quite all.”
- “For some responses, we felt that we needed to respond in the negative because of inability to guarantee 100% compliance even though we would have a high level of compliance. eg we cannot guarantee that every single contractor (some very short term) has received thorough records guidance within business units even though it is standard practice.”
- “Answers to a number of question such as disposal have been provided on the basis of known actions and procedures. In a large organisation of over 700 locations it can not be said with certainty that all records have been treated in accordance with policy and procedure”

State Records thanks all public offices for their feedback and participation in the 2004 Records Management Survey.

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## **Appendix: Statistical data from the 2004 survey**

Click here to see [statistical analysis report](#) for the 2004 Records Management Survey. This report is in pdf format and 55KB.

Click here to see a [statistical comparison of performance by the 4 key sectors](#) surveyed (NSW Government agencies, State owned corporations, local government bodies, and

universities). This report is in pdf format and 29 KB. This report will be useful if your public office wants to compare its performance with other organisation in the same sector.

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**ISBN 0-9752176-3-1**



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Last updated Tuesday, 08 March 2005

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