

Digitization of Physical Records

Digitization projects are often undertaken for one of the following reasons:

- reduce the costs associated with storage;
- minimize the resources required to manage the records;
- reduce the time required to locate or retrieve the records;
- increase efficiency and improve access, search and retrieval of the records;
- preserve long term or fragile records by providing access to a digital copy;
- provide access to records via a digital platform or website.

With digitization projects, staff need to consider which approach is most appropriate for the scope and outcome of the project.

- 1) Convenience Digitization is the digitization of the physical record for convenience purposes only to facilitate sharing and access while maintaining the physical record as the Official Record.
- 2) Official Record Digitization is the process of digitizing the physical record for the purpose of replacing it with the digitized record as the official, authoritative record.

Official Record Digitization requires that a consistent process is followed, with quality assurance checks embedded in the process, to ensure that the digitized records are sufficiently authentic, trustworthy and reliable to serve as the official HWDSB records.

When physical records are converted to digital form, HWDSB must be able to demonstrate that the digitized records are a reliable substitute for the original document. Digitized records must meet the criteria of the Canadian General Standards Board, Standard 72.34-2017, Electronic Records as Documentary Evidence to ensure that they are able to serve as the authentic records, and hold up as evidence in a court of law, if required.

In order to meet the national standard, staff must follow the digitization process steps set out below. The steps do not apply to Convenience Digitization however, it is recommended that the records meet the same quality standards.

Digitization Process Steps

1) Consultation

The first step in the process requires a review of the HWDSB Records Retention Schedule record series relevant to the proposed project, in consultation with the Privacy and Information Management Officer.

The review will establish:

- if any of the physical records must be retained in their original format due to their historical significance or other value;
- the appropriate disposition of the physical records after digitization; and,
- how the physical records and digitized records will be managed before they are disposed of, transferred to long term storage or transferred to the HWDSB Archives.

The following should also be evaluated when considering a digitization project:

- assess the value of digital conversion (e.g. frequency of access, searchability, access required by multiple teams or sites, etc.);
- assess if digitization can be completed in house (e.g. small volume of records, digitized on an ongoing basis), or if outsourcing required (e.g. large, backfile conversion project or technology and resources not available in house);
- if outsourcing is considered, staff must follow the established Purchasing process, which includes a privacy and security review, when selecting service providers. Staff must also consult with Information Technology Services to ensure that the file conversion will be compatible with HWDSB systems and that the scanned files will meet the security standards for ingestion into HWDSB applications;
- official records must be readable and accessible for the duration of their lifecycle, as defined in the HWDSB Records Retention Schedule. This means that the records must be migrated through any hardware and software changes to ensure their continued readability and accessibility.

A Digitization Plan ([Appendix E](#)) should be completed and approved before proceeding with a digitization project.

2) Preparation

The physical records should be prepared and organized before starting the digitization process. This will contribute to a more efficient process and it will increase the quality of the digitized records.

Sort records:

- a) disassemble attached or stapled documents;
- b) fix torn documents or use plastic sleeves to protect damaged documents;
- c) make photocopies to improve quality or to resize documents.

When deciding on the best method of capture for digitizing, the following physical record qualities should be taken into consideration:

- paper density or type of paper (e.g. card stock, parchment, printer paper, etc.);
- size (e.g. a large scanner may be needed for oversized documents);
- condition (e.g. stapled, brittle, creased, rolled, etc.);
- orientation (e.g. requires rotation of documents);
- unique finishes (e.g. transparent, semi-transparent or opaque);
- colour (e.g. quality of colour capture, file size, etc.);
- binding (e.g. staples, paper clips, fasteners, spiral binding, etc.);
- post-it notes (should be separated from documents and scanned as the next page immediately after the document it was attached to); and
- embossing (e.g. seals).

Note: Some documents, such as notarized documents, have embossed, imprinted or raised seals. A specialized scanner and/or camera that allows angled or one-directional lighting to capture the

embossed information may be required for the digitization process. This type of capture requires advice and assistance.

3) Digitization

Scanners and/or cameras are used to digitize records. Scanner settings should be set before starting the process. Quality control checks should take place throughout the process and after digitization is completed. This should be tracked in the Digitization Log ([Appendix F](#)).

4) Quality Control

Quality control is an important step to ensure that the digitized record mirrors the physical record. Errors can occur during digitization due to the poor quality of the physical records, scanner mis-feeds or technical malfunctions. Staff should be aware of potential errors and address them as they occur, which may require re-digitizing affected records, and repeating the process until no errors are detected. If digitizing large volumes of records, ensure that regular quality assurance batch checks occur throughout the digitization process and that the process is documented.

5) Quality Assurance Review

Once the records have been digitized, a review is required to confirm that the records are a reliable substitute for the hard copy records. Departments/Schools should consult with the Privacy and Information Management Officer at this stage. The review must take place before the physical records can be authorized for destruction.

References and Consultation

Standard 72.34-2017, Electronic Records as Documentary Evidence, Canadian General Standards Board
Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles, ARMA International
Information Management Standard – Creating and Managing Digitized Records, City of Toronto