

Nonprofit Document Retention Guidelines

What to Keep When Simplifying Paperwork

Over time, nonprofit organizations accumulate a lot of paperwork. Eventually, someone is going to want to simplify and reduce the amount of paperwork – but what do you keep and what can you toss?

Nonprofit organizations should have a document retention policy on file as a guide for what to keep and specifically identify what can be destroyed (and when), as well as in what form that file storage takes.

Below are minimum guidelines – your organization may choose to retain certain records for a longer period of time.

NOTE: “Digital” means that you should permanently retain DIGITAL records of the documents, regardless of whether you can dispose of paper records.

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Type of Record	Length of Retention	Digital or Paper
Corporate records – Foundational Documents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles of Incorporation • Bylaws (including revision histories) • Meeting minutes • Policies/Resolutions • Report to Secretary of State’s office • Fixed asset records • Application for IRS Tax Exempt Status • IRS Determination (Exempt Status Granted) letter • Sales Tax Application for Exemption • Sales Tax Exemption (Retail Merchant Certificate) • Insurance Policies (even if no long in force) • Real Estate Documents (all documents pertaining to RE) • Intellectual Property (copyright, trademark) 	Permanent	Both preferred – keep originals in paper form
Corporation records – General Documents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts (including real estate leases) • General Correspondence • Funded Grants (unfunded retain for 1 year) 	7 years after expiration	Digital

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<p>Financial Records – Permanent File</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRS 990 • Annual Financial Statements • CPA Audits and Reviews 	Permanent	Both
<p>Financial Records – Can be disposed of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invoices • Cash Receipts • Credit Card Receipts • Check Registers • Bank Deposit Slips • Depreciation Schedules (after disposal of asset) 	7 Years	Digital
<p>Donation Records – Other</p>	10 Years	Digital
<p>Employment Records – Permanent File</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment/Termination agreements • Retirement/Pension documents • Payroll records • State unemployment records • Employee handbooks (including revisions) 	Permanent	Both
<p>Employment Records – Can be disposed of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payroll tax documents (941/W2, etc) • Accident Reports 	7 Years	Digital
<p>Employee History Documents – Can be disposed of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resumes, Employment applications • Timesheets, compensation history • Performance appraisal/disciplinary • I-9 Forms 	4 years after separation from employment	Digital