

What to Keep and For How Long? Records Retention in Landscape Architecture



Agenda:

- What are “records” and why does it matter to Landscape Architects?
- Creating a defensible records management system
 - Phase 1: Planning the System
 - Phase 2: Implementation
- Lessons Learned
- Next Steps

What is a Record?

- A records is information created, received, and maintained as evidence by organizations or people to meet legal obligations or in the transaction of business.
- Records are proof of transactions – they are *evidence*
- Determining the meaning of “records” are vital if they are to be considered evidence

Characteristics of a Record

- Interrelatedness (Archival Bond)
 - The relationship of one record to another and to the action in which they participate gives meaning and evidentiary value
- Impartiality
 - The agnostic nature of the record; they are not trying to tell a story
- Naturalness
 - Records are not collected artificially, but accumulate naturally in offices for practical purposes

Characteristics of a Record

- Uniqueness
 - Each record has a unique place and role in a records retention system
- Authenticity
 - Can be presumed through time when legitimate, continuous, procedural custody can be shown

Why Should LA's Care?

- Liability Protection
 - Legal discovery
 - Smoking gun
- Reclaiming Physical Office Space
 - Drowning under paper
- Complexity of Digital Records
 - Vulnerable
 - Harder to capture context
- Mobilization of Internal Knowledge

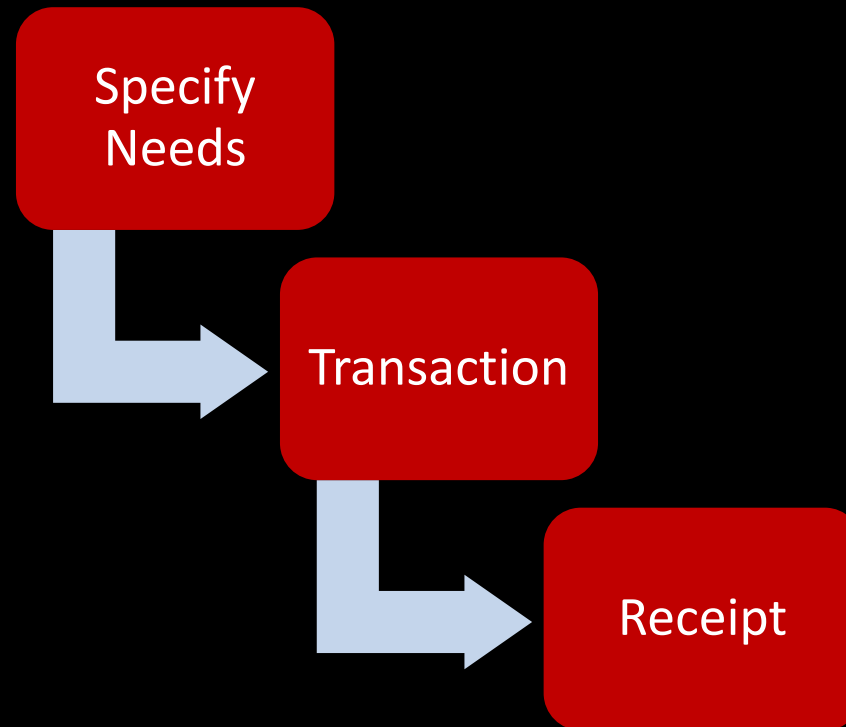
Uniqueness of LA Records

- Business records, artists' records, research, development records
 - Specialized digital and physical records
 - Architectural drawings
 - Variety of material samples

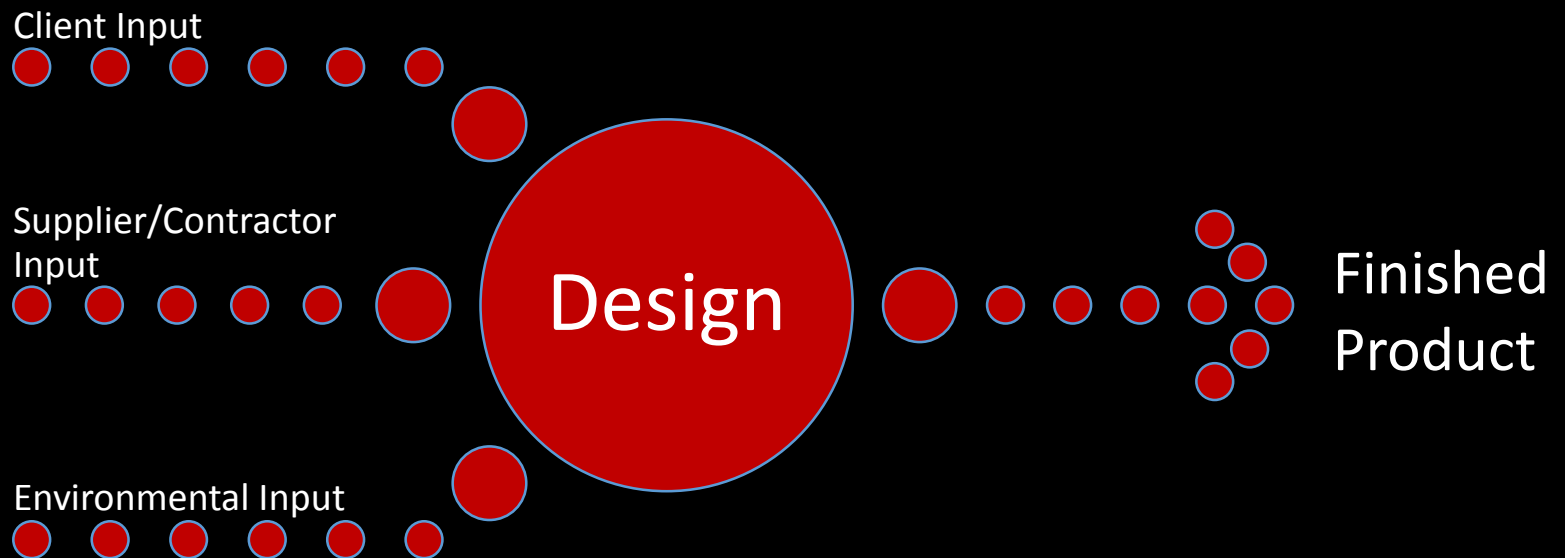
Appraisal of LA Records

- Five fundamental difficulties with the appraisal of records for any design office, but especially in Landscape Architecture:
 - Dispersed
 - Often duplicated
 - Voluminous
 - Transitory/Temporary
 - Vulnerable

Simplified Commercial Transaction



Simplified LA Transaction



What Do We Document?

- Administration
- Design Process
- Realized Project
- Theory/Research

What to Keep and for How Long?

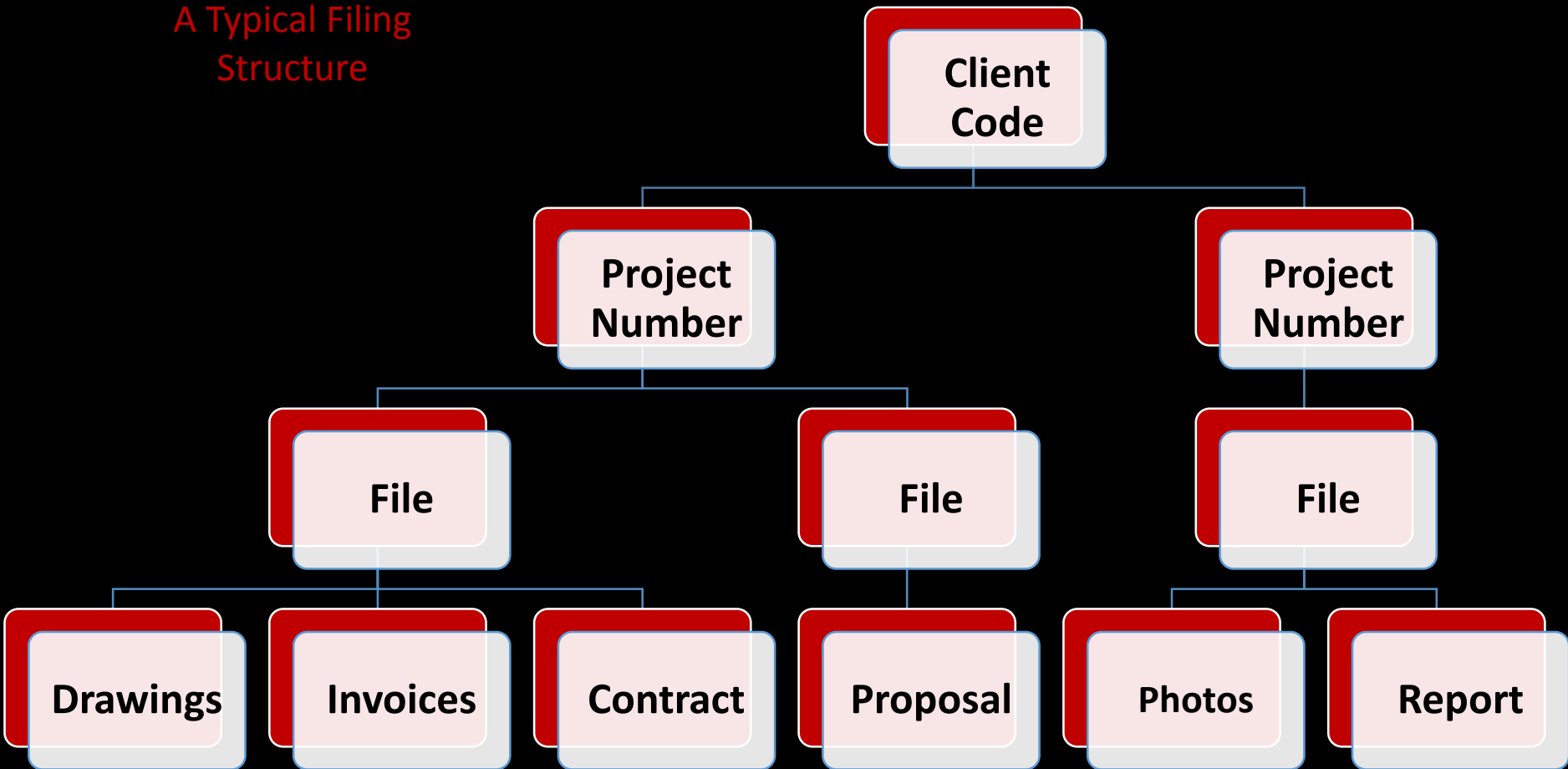
- Phase 1: Planning the System
 - Inventory of Physical Records
 - Creating a Framework
 - Developing a Retention Program
- Phase 2: Program Delivery
 - Straddling the Digital Divide
 - Cull Records
 - Scanning
 - Destruction Documentation

What Do We Have?

Creating an Inventory

- Importance of a *searchable* inventory of physical records
- Needed to collect all project files from office
 - Physical control (location on shelf(s)!)
- Capture **extent of records** and **context of creation**
 - Intellectual control (what the records are!)
- Assign appropriate metadata (data headings)
 - Utilized existing client codes and project numbers
 - Messiness of strings; need to anchor dispersed records to project

A Typical Filing Structure



Transformation: Before



Transformation: After



Material Samples

- We had over 600 material samples
- We created an inventory with multiple searchable facets
- Identified and removed samples that were duplicates or did not have provenance
 - Removed six bankers boxes of samples! Over 200 samples (1/3 of stuff!), hundreds of pounds!
- Built a searchable catalogue





Material Samples Physical Storage



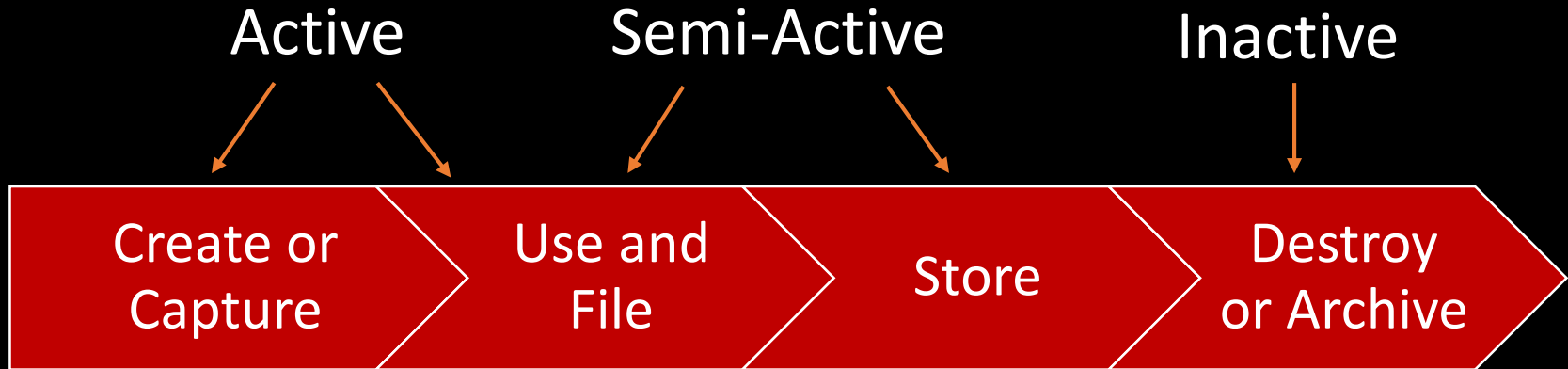
Materials to be Removed



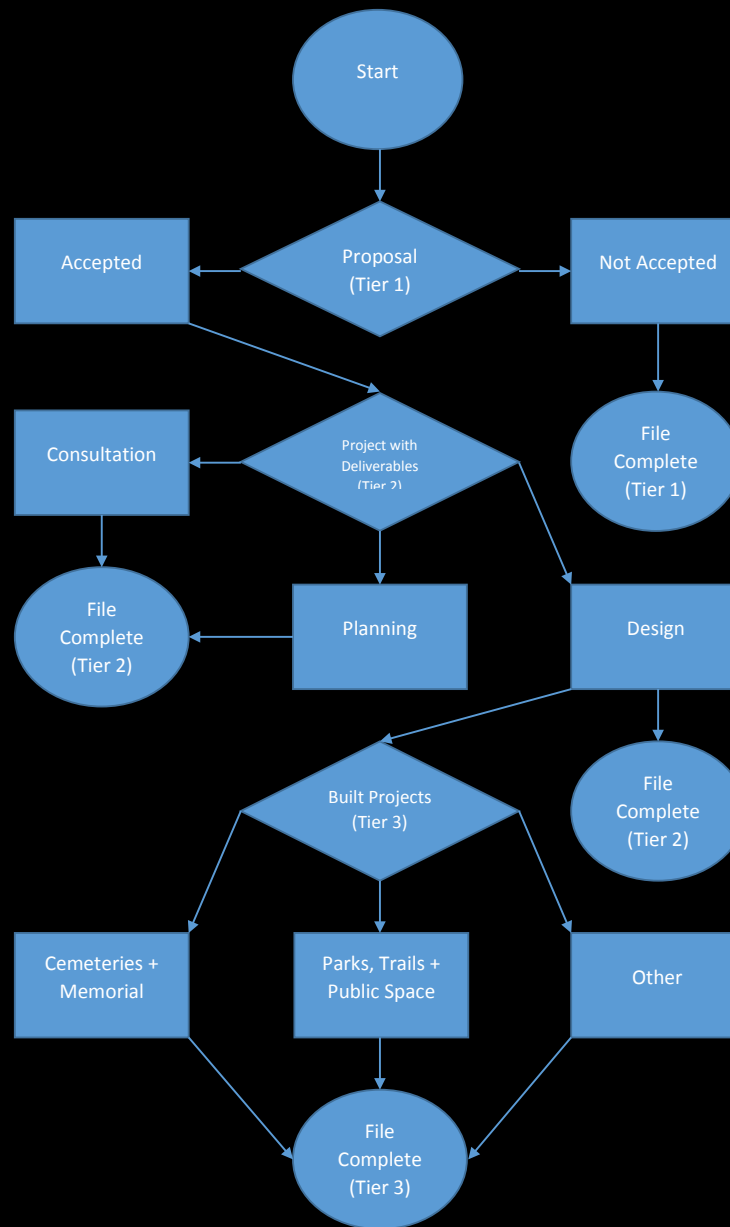
Material Sample Catalogue

Location	Name	Material	Colour 1	Approx. Dimensions	Finish 1	Supplier	Project #	Image
Shelf 3 GRANITE	GNI Nero Impala	Granite	Black	0.5"x3"x3"	Polished	C & S Distributors		
Shelf 4 Bin 2	Nero Impala	Granite	Grey	0.5"x2.75"x2.75"	Flamed	Margranite Industry Ltd.		
Shelf 4 Bin 3	Nero Impala	Granite	Black	0.5"x3"x3"	Satin	Margranite Industry Ltd.		
Bottom Shelf	"Whister White"/Gariba Idi	Granite	White	1.25"x12"x6"	Sandblasted	Margranite Industry Ltd.		

Framework: Records Lifecycle



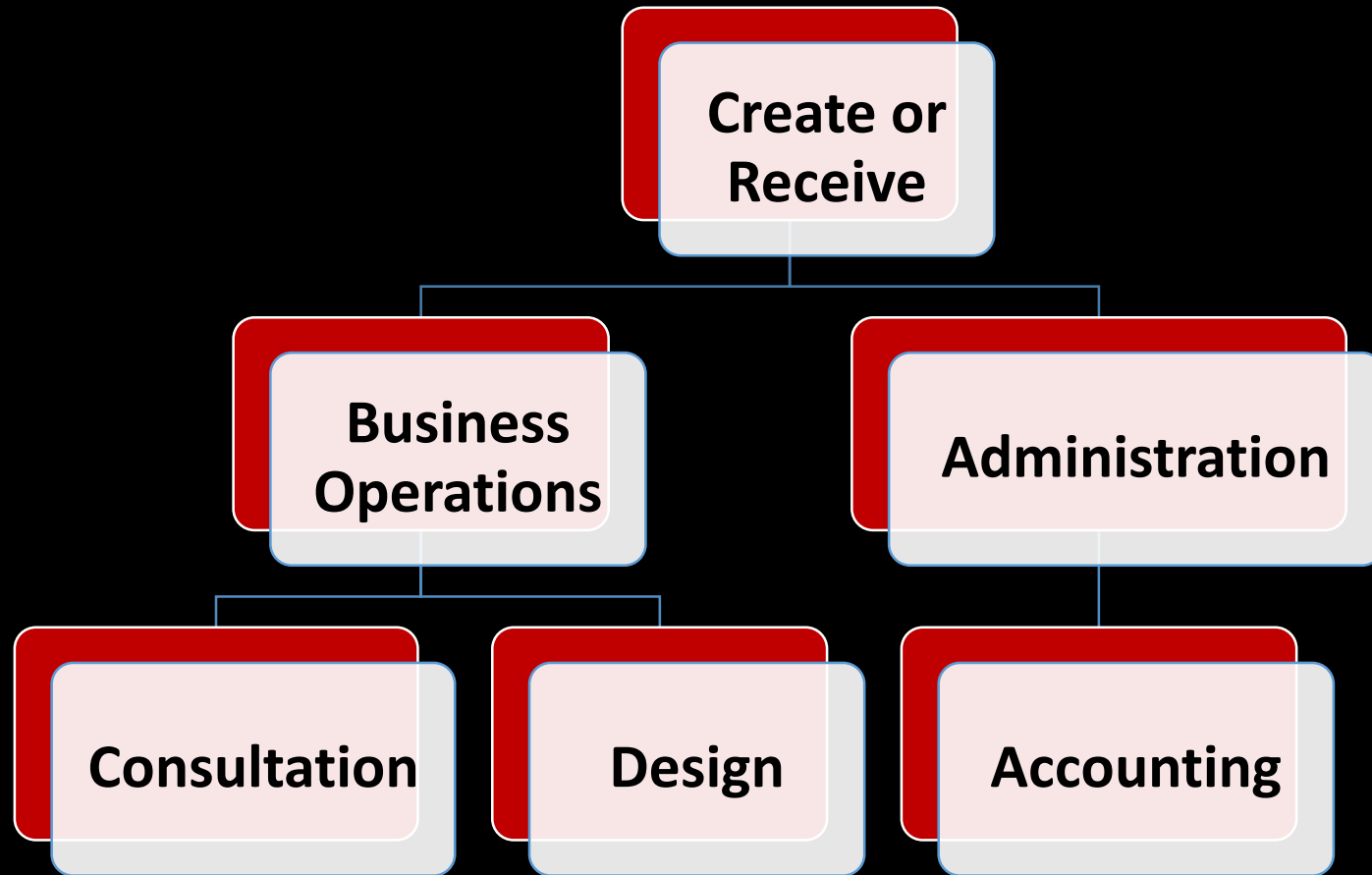
Project Record Pathway



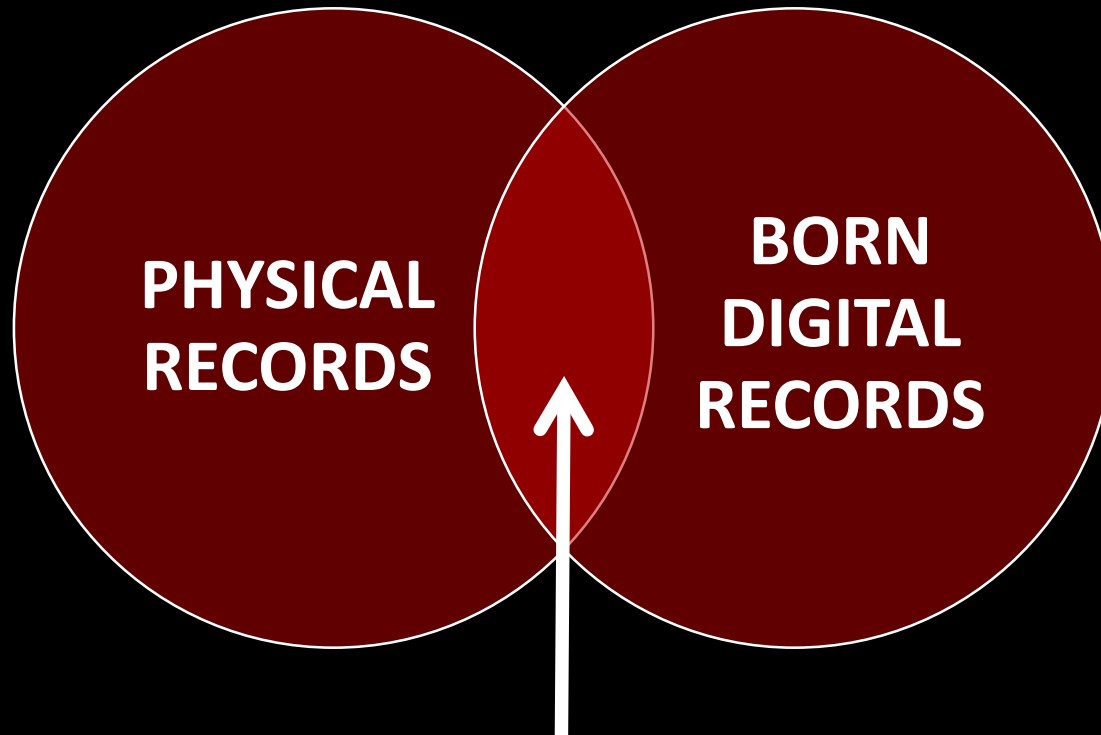
Developing a Retention Schedule

- Built for both internal and external purposes:
 - Liability Protection + Mobilizing Information
 - Institutional Memory + Cultural Heritage
- Divide all records into highest-level categories which are then sub-divided into further records “series”
- Assign retention criteria at each lifecycle stage of each level of records
 - Legal framework provided by government legislation (i.e. Limitation Act)
- Retention applies to both physical and digital records

Records Classification



Straddling the Digital Divide



Straddling the Digital Divide

- 2 TerraBytes of data on our Share Drive alone (just one of our servers)
- Wild west; people save things according to individual logics (or no logic at all!)
- Need to apply same anchoring strategy to digital records as for the physical records (in our case: client code and project number)
- Need to go through and determine which records captured in digital form

Cull Records

- Destruction of records according to the retention schedule
- Phased process due to the digital divide
 - All transitory/temporary records go first
 - Duplicates of born digital records of value go next
 - Ex. printed emails or drawings without annotations
 - Born physical records upon end of their approved retention lifespan

Scanning

- After culling physical records, scan essential records for ease of **access**
- ESI (electronically stored information) is admissible in court
- But... electronic information is more difficult to preserve over the long term
- Keep physical records for **best evidence**, as well as for their cultural value

Destruction Documentation

- Remember: show custody of records from creation to destruction
- The retention schedule provides status of record up until final disposition (destruction or archive)
- Document destruction to show that the records were destroyed securely at the appropriate time

Lessons Learned

- Cannot be done off the side of a person's desk
- Large amount of time spent recreating context
- Legal costs if caught without a records management system
- Optimize efficiency
- Consider the future well in to the future!
- We cannot treat physical and digital records differently

Next Steps

- EMAIL (a BIG component!)
- Implement a Content Management System
 - Automation will play a major role depending on size of firm
- Long term preservation of digital files
 - How to protect against hardware and software obsolesce
 - CAD and GIS files vulnerable
- Develop a Vital Records / Business Continuity Plan

Discussions

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Sources

- ISO 15489-1: 2016 [Information and Documentation – Records Management – Part 1: Concepts and Principles]
- Lowell, Waverly B., and Tawny Ryan Nelb. 2006. *Architectural records: Managing design and construction records*. Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists
- www2.gov.bc.ca. (2018). *Information Schedules - Province of British Columbia*. [online] Available at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/services-for-government/information-management-technology/records-management/information-schedules> [Accessed 1 May 2018].