Frequently Asked Questions

What is Records Management?
Records Management is the professional management of information in the physical form of records from the time records are received or created through their processing, distribution, and use to placement in a storage and retrieval system until either eventual elimination or identification for permanent archival retention.

In California records management is required by all state agencies within the Executive branch of government per the State Records Management Act (Govt. Code 12270-12279). State law dictates that the Secretary of State is responsible for the establishment and administration of the program as well as defines the responsibilities of each agency head (Govt. Code 12272). Procedures for records management are further outlined within Section 1600 of the State Administrative Manuel (SAM).

What is a record?
California law defines a record or public record "to include, but is not limited to, any writing containing information relating to the conduct of the public's business prepared, owned, used, or retained by a state or local agency regardless of physical form or characteristic" (Govt. Code 5204 and 6252).

The State Administrative Manual (SAM), Section 1600 further defines the term official record as "recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristics, made or received by an organization that is evidence of its operations and has value requiring its retention for a specific period of time." To have value a record must fall under one of these categories: Administrative, Legal, Fiscal, Research, Historical, or Archival.

What's the difference between Archives & the Record Center?
The State Record Center (SRC) is part of the Department of General Services and houses state records that are semi-active and inactive (see life-cycle of a record). Storage at the SRC is temporary and provides state agencies with low-cost secure storage and service. State agency records stored at the SRC are under the jurisdiction of the agency and can only be accessed by the originating state agency. The records remain under the jurisdiction of the originating agency up until the records are destroyed or transferred to the State Archives for review and possible permanent retention per their agency records retention schedule.

The California State Archives is the official repository, under the direction of the Secretary of State, as the "public archives of the State." (Govt. Code 12220 and 12221) As part of the records management process, records "flagged" on an agency records retention schedule for further Archives review must be transferred to the Archives at the end of their retention period as part of the appraisal process. Once records are transferred to the Archives, they become the responsibility of the Secretary of State and no longer fall under the jurisdiction of the originating agency.

How do I look up a scanned records retention schedule?
All scanned records retention schedules can be found on ATHENA.

How long do I keep records?
You can find the General Records Retention Guidelines on the CalRIM website.

What is the Life-Cycle of a Record?
Per the Society of American Archivist website glossary, "the life cycle model for managing records…portrays the life of a record as going through various stages or periods, much like a living organism. In stage one; the record is created, presumably for a legitimate reason and according to certain standards. In the second stage, the record goes through an active period when it has maximum primary value and is used or referred to frequently by the creating office and others involved in decision making. During this time the record is stored on-site in the active or current files of the creating office. At the end of stage two the record may be reviewed and determined to have no further value, at which point it is destroyed, or the record can enter stage three, where it is relegated to a semi-active status, which means it still has value, but is not needed for day-to-day decision making. Because the record need not be consulted regularly, it is often stored in a off-site storage center. At the end of stage three, another review occurs, at which point a determination is made to destroy or send the record to stage four, which is reserved for inactive records with long-term, indefinite, archival value. This small percentage of records (normally estimated at approximately five per cent of the total documentation) is sent to an archival repository, where specific activities are undertaken to preserve and describe the records.

The life cycle model not only describes what will happen to a record, it also defines who will manage the record during each stage. During the creation and active periods, the record creators have primary responsibility for managing the record, although records managers may well be involved to various degrees. In the semi-active stage, it is the records manager who takes center stage and assumes major responsibility for managing the records. Finally, in the inactive stage, the archivist takes the lead in preserving, describing, and providing access to the archival record."