

Public Records Brief

A RECORDKEEPING UPDATE FOR QUEENSLAND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES – FIRST ISSUED SEPTEMBER 2004
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What is a Public Record?

What is the definition of a public record?

A public record is any form of recorded information, both received and created, that provides evidence of the decisions and actions of a public authority while undertaking its business activities.

The *Public Records Act 2002* covers all public records irrespective of the technology or medium used to generate, capture, manage, preserve and access those records.

What are the characteristics of a public record?

A public record can be found in any format – not just traditional paper records.

Information can be recorded in a range of formats including, but not limited to:

- Paper, microfilm, electronic
- Documents or files, maps, plans, drawings, photographs
- Data from business systems, word-processed documents, emails
- Computer files on a floppy or hard disk
- Audio or video media such as cassettes and video tapes
- Optical media such as CDs and DVDs.

An appropriately managed public record will provide:

- An information asset that supports transparent, informed and quality decision making and planning
- An information resource that can be used to demonstrate and account for agency activities

Examples of what is and what is not a public record.

The following table provides some examples of what is and what is not a public record. This list is not exhaustive.

What is a public record?	What is not a public record?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any data within a database or information system that documents and records business processes or actions (eg rates payments, licence applications and approvals, salary payments)• Information that has been published on a webpage or website that relates to the business functions of the agency• All agendas, minutes and papers that were presented at meetings within the agency• A report or analysis of an external publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An external database that was used for reference purposes only• Drafts of information prepared for publication on a webpage or website that were never circulated for comment, approved as a final version or published• Information downloaded from the Internet• All agendas and minutes from a staff social club meeting• An external publication

What is a public record?	What is not a public record?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft documents that contain significant annotations or were submitted for comment or approval by others • Any internal advertising or training brochures of a work related event or publication • An internal media release of a work related event or incident • An internal price list • Handwritten notes that document a decision or action • A message slip when the message relates to the business functions of the agency • A master set of internal manuals and instructions, including superseded versions • Letters or emails from clients requesting information or action • Records generated from a project including project plan, project estimates and costing, resourcing requirements, background research material – these can be electronic or paper based, spreadsheets, letters, audio-visual material and could be in different files or business areas across the agency • A work related email that documents an action or decision (eg an email that approves the purchase of new computers). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafts of reports, correspondence and/or routine calculations that were not circulated internally or externally, or finalised • Any advertising or training brochures from an external provider • Press cuttings and other external media reports relating to the agency and its activities • Informational material that includes lists of suppliers, catalogues, directories, address and contact lists • A message slip when the message does not relate to the business functions of the agency • Any manuals and instructions from an external provider • Unsolicited letters or emails advertising products or services • Project templates • Routing slips or transmittal sheets that do not add informational content • An email about an afternoon tea for a work colleague who is leaving

Reference should also be made to the *Australian Standard AS ISO 15489: Records Management*, which is available from Standards Australia, www.standards.org.au.