

Document Retention and Destruction Advice for Monthly and Quarterly Meetings of New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Purpose

Every Meeting should have a set of written guidelines that ensure that important documents are retained and that confidential records are handled correctly. These guidelines should be made available to everyone in the Meeting. Recordkeeping and document retention policies ensure that permanent documents (such as deeds) are both accessible when needed and archived safely. They prevent the accidental sharing of confidential material about individuals. And, last but not at all least, a thoughtful recordkeeping and retention policy allows a Meeting to document its own history, the changing life of the Meeting, and the Meeting's relationship to the world in the ways that make sense to each Meeting.

The Archives & Historical Records Committee of NEYM has created a set of guidelines, based on known best practices, intended to help Monthly and Quarterly Meetings (especially Monthly & Quarterly Meeting Clerks, Recording Clerks, Committee Clerks, Recorders, Treasurers, and Historians) develop their own retention policies. We hope this set of guidelines will help Meetings identify permanent records, distinguish these from records that have only transitory value, and think deeply about how to document and preserve the history of their Meetings. Some of these guidelines may not apply to your meeting.

The table below will help you determine:

- What to keep
- How long to keep it
- When an item becomes ready to archive or, alternately, to dispose of
- Which documents should BOTH be archived and kept available to your Meeting at all times

In 2015, the Archives & Historical Records Committee selected UMass Special Collections & Archives as the repository for NEYM's historical records. This committee also recommends that records pertaining to Quakers in New England be archived at UMass, for the benefit of researchers who wish to visit a central repository to study Quaker history. However, some Meetings choose to archive their historical records with other repositories. The NEYM Outreach Archivist, supervised by this committee, is available to advise Meetings on where and how to archive historical records for preservation and research access. While it may be tempting to keep original historical records in your Meetinghouse or in a private home, this is much more likely to expose them to damage, environmental hazards, and loss than archiving them with a repository that applies best practices in records preservation and access.

General guidelines:

1. Meetings should not rely on members' personal computers for long-term storage of electronic records. Final versions of records should be moved to Meeting secure storage (such as a Google drive) at regular intervals and upon completion of one's service in a role such as Clerk, Recording Clerk, or Treasurer. When the Clerk has completed their service, records should be turned over to the next Clerk by an electronic method or by providing access to the meeting's secure cloud drive. Once the transfer is safely complete, those records should be deleted from the individual's personal computer. The same applies for other leadership positions.
2. For records in electronic form, Meetings are advised to use a secure cloud-based service or a server with robust back-up protocols. Digital records should always be backed up in multiple places. This could be under two, different cloud-based accounts or entities (Google and DropBox for example), or one cloud-based service and one computer or external hard drive. If you store your backup to your Meeting's computer or external drive, do regular checks for file corruption. Replace external drives every 3-4 years and computers or their hard drives every 5-6 years. USB drives are not a secure form of storage. Use widely available formats for documents and images and convert any documents stored in formats that are likely to become obsolete to a widely-accepted format.
3. All Clerks, Recording Clerks, and committee clerks who keep minutes and permanent records, and persons in other key roles, should use thoughtful and clear file-naming practices for electronic records so that the final version of any document (for example, minutes) is the one archived. The file-naming and file-storing procedure you use should be easy to understand and easily transferred when positions of responsibility change. Saving final versions of text documents as PDFs is one practice that serves well, but bear in mind that many programs exist to edit PDFs. Meetings still need consistent practices around storing final PDFs so that they are not accidentally deleted or altered.
4. The repository for NEYM records is the Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archive Research Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (SCUA). We recommend that Meetings also archive their records here, but our NEYM Outreach Archivist can also provide advice if you choose not to. If a Meeting chooses to use an alternative archive, we request that the NEYM Archives Committee be informed so that we can respond to research inquiries. More information regarding how to submit records to SCUA is available on the New England Yearly Meeting website. It is best practice that each Meeting sends materials to the archive at SCUA no more frequently than every 2 years.
5. All Meetings that archive records at SCUA must bear in mind that, even though SCUA does accept digital and born digital records, they cannot act as your online hosting service repository for current records. Even if you specify that a certain type of record may be added to their digital collection without restriction, Meetings are likely to see at least a 6- month delay before that record appears. Meetings wishing to create digital access to current records or publications, either just for their members or for the public, are responsible for finding/creating and maintaining their own hosting platforms (example: website, Google Drive) for doing so.

6. If a Meeting is aware of pending or anticipated government proceedings or private litigation, relevant documents may need to be held longer than specified in the table below..

Record Retention & Destruction Schedules

Permanent Records

Item	Duration (Permanent and recommended for submission to Archives)	Recommended Duration locally held	Examples	Comments, Why this recommendation
<i>Finance related :</i>				
Account payable ledgers & schedules	Permanent	7 years after paid to your organization	As part of General Ledger	Following the 7-year retention requirement, we recommend that these records be archived.
Audit reports	Permanent	7 years		
Checks, receipts, contracts, rental agreements (important payments & purchases)	7 years or the life of the specific piece of equipment	7 years or for life of specific piece of equipment	Anything related to the building & grounds, such as boiler, alarms, wiring etc.	Or for the life of the specific piece of equipment
General Ledger	Permanent	7 years	Accounts Payable, Donation Records and other income such as grants or rentals	Following the 7-year retention requirement, we recommend that Only the General Ledger and not backup documents be archived.
Retirement and pension records	Permanent	7 years		

Item	Duration (Permanent and recommended for submission to Archives)	Recommended Duration locally held	Examples	Comments, Why this recommendation
Year-end financial statements	Permanent	7 years		
<i>Property Related:</i>				
Cemetery Burial Records	Permanent	Permanently	Records of what plots are leased or sold and records of those buried with or without stones	Local Meetings need to maintain local, secure access to these records as well. Meetings may wish to archive copies or the original records at SCUA.
Deeds and Titles	Permanent	Permanently		Critical records: Once recorded with local government, the original may be archived or stored in a secure vault. Keep a local copy for reference.
Maintenance records and building specifications for original building, repairs, and additions	Permanent	7 years following the end of the facility or proper discharge of the property		
Mortgages and bills of sale	Permanent	Until completion of Mortgage or terms of sale, then 7 years		Following the 7 year retention requirement, we recommend that these records be archived.

Item	Duration (Permanent and recommended for submission to Archives)	Recommended Duration locally held	Examples	Comments, Why this recommendation
<i>Clerk, Recorder, Treasurer -Business Meeting related:</i>				
Clerk's Correspondence	Permanent	end of Clerk's term, plus 3 years	Correspondence to public officials, other meetings, letters of transfer	
Correspondence (e.g.legal, with public officials on behalf of the Meeting, relating to property, or membership, or on discontinuances or on other matters of enduring impact)	Permanent	10 years	Correspondence with public officials and other Meetings, letters to public officials from the Monthly or Quarterly Meeting or Committees; Letters of Transfer, requests for membership, births/deaths/marriages ;routine correspondence such as planning or with vendors	Letters for membership or other correspondence specific to individuals may be restricted from open research for 20 or 40 years.
Minute books, bylaws and charter, hand-books or procedure documentation	Permanent	10 -15 years for local reference or until superseded		These are of use for maintaining institutional memory
Monthly Meeting Minutes and reports to Monthly Meetings	Permanent	Archive the final original, every 2 to 5 years. Keep a local copy at least 15 years for local reference	Approved Minutes of Monthly Meetings or Quarterly Meetings for Business	This also includes: Memorial Minutes and State of Society reports, etc.

Item	Duration (Permanent and recommended for submission to Archives)	Recommended Duration locally held	Examples	Comments, Why this recommendation
Vital records, records of the Meeting Recorder	Permanent	7 years	Membership lists, records of weddings, births, deaths	Recommend that records showing date of birth be restricted from open research for 20 years, to prevent identity theft
<i>Meeting Life:</i>				
Meeting histories, member oral histories, spiritual journeys, past committee rosters ...	Permanent			Release forms from authors or individuals interviewed. Past committee rosters can be a great aid in writing Memorial minutes
Meeting Newsletters, Pamphlets or books published by the Meeting	Permanent (one copy)		Booklets on membership or death and dying created by Meeting for the Meeting	
Photos, slides, presentations of Meeting events	Permanent (one copy)		Photos should be captioned. Release forms for photos of children. Release forms from authors of presentations should be obtained wherever possible	

Item	Duration (Permanent and recommended for submission to Archives)	Recommended Duration locally held	Examples	Comments, Why this recommendation
Travel Minutes with endorsements	Permanent			Original letter with endorsements should be archived through the issuing Meeting.

Records to Keep then destroy

Type of Record	Examples	Number of years to keep	Comments
Bank reconciliations		3	shred
Bank Statements		7	shred
Correspondence (general- logistics of scheduling, etc. This would not be correspondence specific to Monthly Meeting business, but may relate to presentations, retreats, etc.)	Setting up presentations or making arrangements for an event	3	Or dispose of when no longer needed

Type of Record	Examples	Number of years to keep	Comments
Correspondence ¹ with vendors		3	
Depreciation schedules		7	
Duplicate deposit slips		3	Shred
Non-historic expired checks, receipts, mortgage notes or leases		7	After expiration
Employment applications		3	Shred; do not put in recycling without shredding.
Expense analyses/distribution schedules		7	
Insurance Policies		7	
Insurance records, accident reports, claims		7	See Guideline 6.
Internal audit reports		3	

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Type of Record	Examples	Number of years to keep	Comments
Inventory records		3	AV equipment holdings (inactive), etc.
Invoices		7	
Payroll records and summaries		7	Shred; do not put in recycling without shredding.
Personnel files (terminated employees)		7	Shred; do not put in recycling without shredding.
Tax returns and worksheets		7	Shred
Timesheets		7	Shred; do not put in recycling without shredding.
Withholding tax statements		7	Shred

Resources

- National Council of Nonprofits <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org>
- BoardSource Record Retention and Document Destruction Policy <https://boardsource.org/product/epolicy-sampler-ethics-accountability/>

- Independent Sector <https://independentsector.org/resource/is-records-retention-policy/>
- AICPA Management of an Accounting Handbook—2003 and IRS Appendix Document
- Guide to Record Retention Requirements in the Code of Federal Regulations: Contact the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 204029325
- Skupsky, Donald S. JD, Certified Records Manager, Recordkeeping Requirements: The First Practical Guide to Help You Control Your Records...What You Need to Keep and What You Can Safely Destroy!, Denver: Information Requirements Clearinghouse, 1994.

Based on Retention Schedule Approved by Permanent Board 2/15/2019 Revised by the Archives Committee with permission of the Permanent Board
Documentation-Policy-Guide\Records Retention\2019-02-15 Retention Policy