

Public Records and Risk

What is public records risk management?

As a Queensland Government employee, you make, keep and use public records every day. These public records document key decisions, daily operations, and preserve the history of our state. But have you considered the risks they face? Data breaches, unauthorised access, system failures, natural disasters and poor records management can all place public records at risk. Managing these risks is about more than protecting information. It is about maintaining public trust, ensuring business continuity, and meeting legal obligations under the *Public Records Act 2023*.



Risk management for public records isn't a standalone task. It's a critical part of your public authority's overall risk management strategies, working alongside legal, security, and operational planning, to ensure that records are managed with care and responsibility.

Why does it matter?

Public records are more than just files; they're evidence of decisions, actions and services. They help ensure transparency and protect accountability. When public records aren't managed properly, it can lead to the following consequences:

- Important information can be lost
- Legal and compliance requirements may not be met
- Services can be disrupted
- Decisions may be made using incomplete information
- Trust and reputation can be damaged

What do I need to know?

Some examples of risks can include:

1

Security Risks – Data breaches, unlawful disposal or unauthorised access

These incidents can result from human error, inadequate security controls, or malicious activity. When sensitive information is exposed, it can cause harm to individuals, erode public trust, and breach obligations under the *Public Records Act 2023*, resulting in legal, financial and reputational issues.

2

Over-retention of public records

Over-retention occurs when public records are kept longer than minimum requirements under disposal authorisations (e.g. retention and disposal schedules) and other legal authorities. This increases storage costs, makes information harder to find, and raises the risk of data breaches and reliance on outdated information.

3

Data Loss – Conversion and migration risks

Converting or migrating public records can improve accessibility and efficiency, but if not managed properly, information may be lost, corrupted, or stripped of important metadata and context, affecting the records' authenticity, reliability and usability.

4

Knowledge Gaps

If staff do not understand records management requirements or their responsibilities, public records may be improperly created, managed or disposed of, increasing the risk of errors, inefficiencies and non-compliance.

5

Business Continuity – System failures, natural disasters and technological obsolescence

System failures, natural disasters, and outdated technologies can damage, destroy or make public records inaccessible. Effective backups, disaster recovery planning, and timely migration help ensure records remain available and usable when needed.

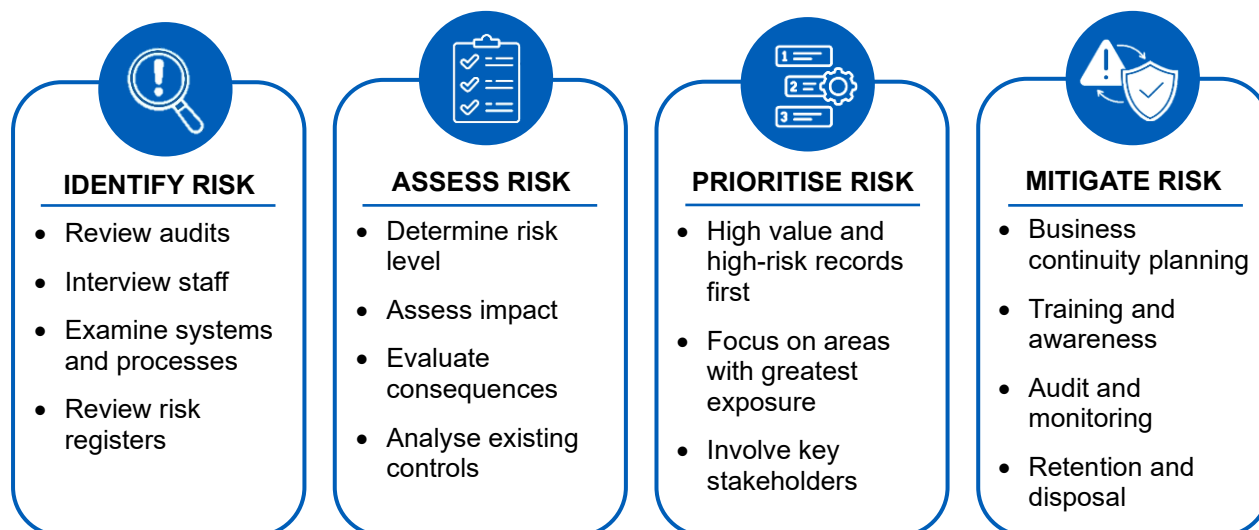
Assessing risk to public records

Assessing risk helps your public authority understand what could occur, how likely it is, and what the impact would be. Start by reviewing records requirements, processes, and systems, considering the factors within and outside your public authority that could create or increase risk.

Internal environment	External environment
Functions, structure and culture	Legal and regulatory requirements
Records processes and staff capability	Government priorities and restructures
Systems, technology and organisational change	Community expectations
Risk appetite and existing controls	Cyber threats and technology obsolescence

Once risks are identified, assess their likelihood and potential impact on records, services, and people, taking into account how well existing controls reduce them. Use your public authority's risk management framework to rate and prioritise risks, paying particular attention to high-value and high-risk records.

Make risk assessment part of routine planning and compliance reviews. Reassess risks after incidents or complaints, and whenever processes, services or systems change or are retired. Work with your risk manager or internal audit team to ensure a consistent approach across your public authority.



Where do I find more information?

Queensland State Archives (QSA) has comprehensive guidance on records management, including:

- [Assess and manage your recordkeeping risk | For government | Queensland Government](#)
- [Disaster management for public records | For government | Queensland Government](#)
- [High-value, high-risk and vital public records | For government | Queensland Government](#)

For further guidance on records risk management, visit the [Queensland State Archives website](#). For specific queries, please contact us at rkqueries@archives.qld.gov.au or phone us on (07) 3037 6630.