



Records Management Guidance

Text Messages on County Cell Phones or Other County Devices

Electronic text messages on County cell phones or other County devices are considered public records if they relate to County business. This document provides guidance on creating and managing these records.

Text messages are public records.

If a text message relates to the conduct of public business (which means it is about the work of King County), then it satisfies the definition of a public record in chapter 40.14 RCW and chapter 42.56 RCW.

State law requires such text messages be retained and managed properly. Unless the content of the text message is statutorily exempted or prohibited from public access, the records are subject to disclosure under the Public Records Act, chapter 42.56 RCW.

Text message communications should remain transitory

Text messages can be challenging to capture, retain, or produce for public disclosure or legal discovery. We recommend that text messages be transitory in nature, meaning non-substantive communications. For example, messages such as “Will you be joining our meeting at 2pm?” or “I am picking up a cake for John’s retirement party” are considered transitory.

Use other official county applications whenever possible

If substantive communications need to be sent using a cell phone, do so via email using your King County Outlook email account via the Outlook app. The County Outlook app stores the record on a county system and not on the cellphone, which ensures the messages are searchable in the event of disclosure or discovery and can be retained for their required retention period. You can also use the Teams app for transitory chat communications. You can download the either app to your phone from Google Play or the App Store and link your King County account.

How to capture text messages for retention

If you choose to, or have used, text messaging on a County issued phone for County business, you have a responsibility to retain the messages for their retention. Contact the Records Management Program for assistance. In the event of a public records request contact your department’s Public Records Officer or the Public Records Program for instruction on how to produce those records.

Text messages must be preserved before you turn in your County phone for an upgrade.



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