

Vendor Qualifications for Converting Public Records

Overview

When you are looking for a vendor to convert your records from one format to another, it is essential to keep some basic qualifications in mind. If you have never embarked on a conversion project, this guide can help you plan for a more successful outcome. If you have worked on a conversion project before, this guide can act as a handy reminder.

Types of Conversion Projects

Paper to Digital

Paper to digital conversion is the process of converting physical paper records to digital files. Paper can be anything from a box of 8.5"x11" documents, to maps and other oversized items, to bound books and ledgers. Digital outputs are most commonly TIFF, JPEG, and PDF. Some offices may choose to maintain a master copy of their permanent or critical records on paper, while using the digital files as an access copy for everyday use. Some offices choose to discard the paper in favor of only maintaining the digital files. If you choose to discard the paper, please ensure your digital files follow OCPD Policies 20-01 and 20-02. If they are in compliance with these policies, the paper can be considered a duplicate and destroyed when you are ready – no form or permission is needed from IARA.

Paper to Microfilm

Paper to microfilm conversion is the process of writing physical paper records to microfilm. Paper can be anything from a box of 8.5"x11" documents to newspapers. Microfilm continues to be an industry best practice for maintaining permanent or permanent and critical records. When stored properly microfilm can be viable for up to 500 years, it is relatively easy to store and handle, and the only cost is up front (opposed to electronic files which require an ongoing financial commitment to store). Some offices may choose to maintain a master copy of their permanent or critical records on microfilm, while using the digital files as an access copy for everyday use.

Microfilm to Digital

Microfilm to digital conversion is the process of converting microfilm to digital files. Offices that have microfilm but find that the film is not conducive to their day-to-day business purposes, may convert their film to digital images that can be easier to read and access. They may then keep the microfilm as the master copy and use the digital images as their access or every-day copy.

Digital to Microfilm

Digital to microfilm conversion is the process of writing digital files to microfilm. The digital files can be either born-digital or scanned from paper and are most commonly TIFF or PDF formats. Some offices will maintain a master copy of their permanent or critical records on microfilm, while using the digital files as an access copy for everyday use.

Selecting a Vendor

When selecting a vendor, it is important to do your due diligence. Don't be afraid to ask vendors questions or push them to answer if they are vague. You want your time and money to be well spent and to have the best possible outcome at the end.

In essence, you want a vendor that is trustworthy, can do the work, is able to meet deadlines, charges a sustainable but not exorbitant rate, and has a well-established reputation.

Questions to ask when selecting a vendor

- Is the vendor able to meet State of Indiana requirements?
 - Can the vendor meet [60 IAC 2](#) for microfilm, and [Oversight Committee on Public Records Policy 20-02](#) for digital files?
- How long has the vendor been in business?
 - Tip: If they are an Indiana based company, use the Business Search feature of [INBIZ](#) to begin gathering background information.
- Has the vendor done this type of conversion work before?
 - You don't want to find out later that you are the first job of this kind they have ever done.
- Can the vendor share references or testimonials?
 - Tip: Prioritize vendors that allow you to speak to former customers directly, particularly if you are embarking on a large conversion project.
 - Tip: Ask colleagues if they have used, or know anyone who has used, the vendor and reach out to anyone who has.
- Is the vendor responsive?
 - Does the vendor – including sales representatives – respond to questions in a timely manner? When they respond do they answer questions directly and succinctly and do you feel you have sufficient information to proceed? If the answer is no to either of these, consider using a different vendor. Particularly when it comes to records that are designated as Critical because you want to be able to trust the vendor.
- Can you tour the vendor's facilities?
 - Ask to take a tour so you can see staff, equipment, facilities, and security arrangements for yourself.
- What kind of security does the vendor have in place?
 - Particularly for confidential or sensitive records, ensure the vendor has sufficient security to meet your needs. For records that may be disturbing to view, ensure the vendor is capable of handling sensitive materials and has a history of doing so successfully.
- How are documents or microfilm handled?
 - Especially for historical or delicate materials, it is good to ensure the vendor knows how to correctly handle these materials. Ask for examples of similar projects they have done in the past. Ask how they proceed if an item is damaged.
- Is the vendor insured?
 - What happens if there is a flood while your materials are with the vendor? What steps does the vendor take to protect your materials, and what can they promise you in the event your materials are severely damaged while in their care?
- Can you access your materials while they are at the vendor?
 - If you have a public records request or a business need to see your materials, will the vendor provide reasonable access and within the timeframe you would require? If you have a 2 day turn around on a request, and the vendor can only guarantee you access within 4 days of your request that won't work.
- Can the vendor fulfill your project plan or help you write a project plan?
 - If you know what file formats, resolution, type of film, file naming convention, metadata, and other similar outcomes you want to see, share your project plan with the vendor and make sure they can meet all elements. If you don't have a project plan, ask the vendor to help you create one.
- Can the vendor meet your budget, and will they stay within that budget?

- Some vendors are more expensive than others, so do your homework and shop around. Don't go with someone suspiciously low, but also be aware that more expense does not always equate to better quality. Get at least 3 quotes – more if the quotes vary significantly.
- Does the vendor offer temporary back up services for electronic files?
 - If you have never stored electronic files or are using a new system, this can be a nice safety measure if something happens to your copy. You may need to pay for this service, so be sure to include it in your initial costs, but it may be worth it in the long run.
- How will materials be scanned or filmed?
 - Bound items may require the spines to be removed or other permanent alteration in order to be properly scanned and converted. Ensure that you have a full understanding of how the vendor will process (and potentially dispose of) your materials if such proves necessary.
- Will the vendor provide a sample?
 - Particularly for difficult paper materials such as onionskin paper or very light text, and for badly done microfilm (too dark or too light), it can be crucial to receive a sample before embarking on the entire project.

IARA does not recommend vendors but is happy to talk through this list with you if you have a vendor(s) in mind. We also highly recommend that you reach out to your peers and ask if they have any recommendations.

For questions about County/Local records conversion contact cty@iara.in.gov

For questions about State records conversion contact rmd@iara.in.gov.

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