

Archives Advice No. 15

Selecting a Micrographics Service Bureau

Considerations for Government Officials

Introduction

When deciding to use a service bureau to film records, public officials should remember that the film must meet the standards as set out in “Standards for Microfilming Records” by the Georgia Archives. These standards carry out the requirements of O.C.G.A. § 50-18-120.

Public officials can select either a government or commercial vendor to provide microfilming services. Because there is considerable variety in the quality of film produced by vendors, vendor selection should be made carefully. Careful vendor selection will guarantee that film meets standards and adequately preserves the information officials must protect. Poor choices may result in wasted money and risk the loss of valuable information or records.

This leaflet sets out the steps public officials should follow when selecting a service bureau.

Step 1—Identify the kind of service needed.

If the agency fails in this, it could select an inadequate service bureau, draw up inappropriate specifications, receive unrealistic bids, and ultimately incur costs that exceed estimates. To better determine needs, agencies should address the following points:

- What is the extent of the agency’s filming need – one-time or continuous?
- What size and type of film is required?
- What types of copies are required and how many?
- What is the volume of records to be filmed?
- Are the documents single-sided or double-sided?
- What are the physical characteristics and condition of the documents to be filmed?
- What targets are required and how many?
- Will the records be filmed on- or off-site?
- What are the agency’s security requirements?
- What are the minimum quality standards?
- What are the delivery requirements?
- How will the film be used?



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Step 2—Get recommendations.

Ask other local government and state agencies for recommendations based on their experience with microfilm vendors. The Georgia Archives Records and Information Management Services can provide names of individuals in state and local agencies whose experience in outsourced filming can assist you with vendor selection.

Step 3—Contact and investigate service bureaus.

If possible, visit their premises, talk to their staff, and inspect their facilities. Ask the following questions:

- How long has the bureau been in business? Has it done business with another state agency or local government?
- What are the qualifications and experience of the bureau's staff?
- Is the physical facility clean?
- What are the service bureau's procedures for quality control?
- How does it track a job from beginning to end? (Could it lose a work order?)
- Will the service bureau guarantee the work will meet quality standards? If the film is substandard, will it refile without additional charge?
- What is the turnaround time?
- What happens if equipment breaks down or the service bureau loses staff? (Does it have backup processes, or will the agency's job have to wait?)
- Can it film the records in the office or must they be sent to the bureau? If the agency's records go off-site, can the service bureau provide adequate security?
- What services are covered by the price it quotes?

Step 4—Sign a contract.

Once a service bureau is selected, protect the agency and eliminate the chance of a misunderstanding by signing a written agreement that includes all requirements.

Include in the contract:

- The type of microfilm (silver, diazo, vesicular)
- The size and type of microform (16mm, 35mm, microfiche)
- The number of film copies required
- A description of the record to be filmed, including volume and physical characteristics
- The dates when filming is to begin and end
- Where the filming is to be done and who is responsible for any transfer of records
- The security required to protect the records
- The reduction ratio and image orientation
- The standards for density and resolution
- The type, number, and placement of identification, quality control, and certification targets and who is responsible for their creation
- A statement identifying who will prepare the documents for filming

- A statement identifying who will pay for retakes and in what circumstances retakes will be made
- The maximum level of residual thiosulfate

Step 5—Inspect.

The agency should make some provision for quality inspection. Although the vendor will run tests to check the microfilming or processing contracted for, the agency should, ideally, contract with a third party to spot check the vendor's work and provide a certified copy of the tests. The agency is responsible for insuring that the complete records have been captured by the film.

If you need further assistance, please call the Georgia Archives at (678) 364-3790.