Document Retention & Destruction Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Document Retention & Destruction Policy is to ensure that the Rescue maintains accurate, complete, and secure records; complies with legal and regulatory requirements; protects sensitive information; and manages documents responsibly throughout their lifecycle. This policy supports transparency, accountability, and good governance.

2. Applicability

This policy applies to:

- Directors
- Officers
- Committee members
- Volunteers handling records
- Contractors with access to organizational documents

It covers all records created, received, or maintained by the Rescue in any format, including paper, electronic files, emails, photographs, and digital communications.

3. General Principles

a. Accuracy and Integrity

Records must be maintained in a manner that preserves their accuracy, completeness, and reliability.

b. Security and Confidentiality

Sensitive information — including donor data, adoption records, foster information, financial documents, and internal communications — must be stored securely and accessed only by authorized individuals.

c. Compliance

The Rescue shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding record retention, privacy, and destruction.

d. Consistency

Records shall be retained and destroyed according to the timelines and procedures outlined in this policy.

4. Record Retention Schedule

The following categories of documents shall be retained for the minimum periods listed below:

a. Permanent Records (retain indefinitely)

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws and amendments
- IRS determination letter (501(c)(3) approval)
- Board meeting minutes
- Annual reports to the state
- Conflict of Interest Policies and annual disclosures
- Organizational policies
- Major contracts and agreements
- Property and asset records

b. Financial Records (retain 7 years)

- Bank statements
- Reconciliations
- Budgets
- Expense reports and reimbursements
- Invoices and receipts
- Donation records
- Payroll records (if applicable)
- Annual financial statements
- Tax filings (federal and state)

c. Program and Operational Records (retain 3–7 years)

- Foster applications and agreements (7 years after last activity)
- Adoption applications and agreements (7 years after adoption)
- Animal medical records (7 years after adoption or transfer)
- Volunteer applications and agreements (3 years after last activity)
- Incident reports (7 years)
- Transport logs (3 years)

d. Communications (retain 1–3 years)

- Routine emails (1 year)
- Internal communications related to decisions, policies, or incidents (3 years)
- Social media messages related to adoptions, fosters, or incidents (3 years)

e. Grant Records (retain 7 years)

- Grant applications
- Grant agreements
- Grant reports
- Supporting documentation

5. Document Storage and Security

a. Physical Records

- Must be stored in a secure, locked location
- Access limited to authorized individuals
- Protected from damage, theft, or loss

b. Electronic Records

- Must be stored in secure, password-protected systems
- Backed up regularly
- Access restricted based on role and need

6. Document Destruction

Documents shall be destroyed when:

- The retention period has expired
- They are no longer needed for legal, operational, or historical purposes
- Destruction is approved by the Board or designated officer

Acceptable destruction methods include:

- Shredding (for paper records)
- Secure digital deletion
- Permanent deletion from cloud storage and backups

Prohibited actions:

- Destroying documents relevant to an investigation
- Destroying documents subject to a legal hold
- Destroying documents to conceal wrongdoing

If litigation, audit, or investigation is anticipated, **all destruction must immediately stop** until the matter is resolved.

7. Legal Holds

If the Rescue becomes aware of:

- a lawsuit
- an investigation
- an audit
- a formal complaint
- a government inquiry

…the Board President or Secretary shall issue a **legal hold**, suspending destruction of relevant documents until the matter is fully resolved.

8. Responsibility and Oversight

The Board of Directors is responsible for:

- Ensuring compliance with this policy
- Reviewing retention practices periodically
- Updating the policy as needed

The Secretary is responsible for maintaining organizational records unless otherwise delegated.

9. Annual Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Board and updated as needed to reflect legal requirements, operational needs, and best practices.

Approved by the Board of Directors

Date: 06-06-2026