



Working with a Scanning Vendor

Thinking of hiring a vendor to scan your paper documents? How do you choose a vendor? And how do you get the best results? Below are some helpful tips on picking the best scanning service for your project.

Experience. A scanning company should have employees who have been trained to do scanning, and the vendor should be able to document how the staff are trained (by showing a training manual or presentation, for example). Ideally, most of the staff have several years of experience. The vendor's staff or lead contact should be able to aid with any issues or problems that may arise and answer all questions you have regarding your project. They should be able to provide local government references and be familiar with the PHMC's retention and disposition schedules as well as the policy regarding permanent digital records. It is also helpful to local governments if the vendor is a COSTARS contract holder or is willing to be part of the COSTARS program.

Core business. Is scanning the vendor's main business? A company that focuses on scanning is more apt to work with you on specific requirements and be flexible and customize to your needs. Be aware that larger companies may not scan your records locally and may send them to another location. Consult your solicitor to determine whether this is an issue. The vendor should be able to document how they ship records to other locations and what security measures they take to protect records while in shipment and at the other location(s). As you talk to the company representative, remember to focus on *your* needs, not what *they* require.

Facility. A vendor should allow you to tour the facility where scanning will take place. Make sure that they have quality control procedures in place and use best practices, such as those outlined in the [State Archives' Scanning Guidelines](#). Many documents contain sensitive information; therefore, a customer must be assured that security and chain-of-custody procedures are well defined and articulated. The vendor should track records as they come into and move through the scanning facility. They should provide security to prevent access to the facility by unauthorized persons and to prevent theft or damage by their own employees. The facility should have adequate fire protection and be well organized, dry, clean, and pest-free.

Process. A vendor should be able to walk you through the whole process of scanning your documents. Some questions to ask:

- How long will the process take?



- Can you access your records while they are with the vendor? (Easily? Infrequently? In an emergency only? Never?)
- Will a sample test be done with your documents to ensure the proposed solution is correct and satisfactory?
- Can the vendor provide you with a proposal outlining volume and cost estimates, timeline, and logistics?
- Who will remove staples, paperclips, rubber bands, and straighten folded paper prior to scanning? Does the vendor expect you to do this?
- How many people will have access to your records during the process?
- How much quality control (QC) is done of the scans? What are they looking for when reviewing the scans? (In addition to accuracy they should look for quality—is each image straight and legible, for example) Do they QC 100% of the records or only a certain percentage? For some record series a QC of only a sample (10%, 50%, 80%) may be adequate, especially if you intend to store the original documents for a period of time after the scanning is complete to allow you time to discover any issues with the digital images. For the most critical records, or records you expect to destroy at once, a 100% QC may be necessary.
- Can they do the kind of indexing you need? The vendor may be able to help you decide how to index your records, though talking to your professional peers may be helpful as well.
- Are your documents secure while waiting to be scanned?
- Are your scans secure, and are they backed up?
- If you do not want your paper documents back, are your documents shredded in a confidential manner after they have been scanned? Who does that destruction, and what does the process look like? Can you get a certificate of destruction? (Be aware that many shredding vendors carry large amounts of paper to a central facility where they may sit for days or weeks—protected or unprotected—before the actual destruction takes place.)
- Can the vendor give you at least three references from other customers for whom they have done similar work? At least one of these should be a government of similar size/focus as your own. Don't just collect information about references—call them!

Always remember that, while a good vendor is willing and able to help you plan your project, the vendor's main motivation is making money (and rightly so). Your needs may conflict with the vendor's goals, so always keep your own needs and wants at the front of the conversation. If you clearly define your own goals and expectations, a vendor can be an excellent partner in the scanning process.