1-2. Goodmorning!

3. My name is Carmel Curtis and I'm the resident at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. I'm going to spend the first section of the presentation talking about Records Retention Schedules (RRS)--what they are, how to make one, and why they're useful. I know records management is a rough way to start out a symposium at 9am, so I understand if you need to refill your coffee while I'm speaking. Then Gen is going to talk about moving from creating documentation and policies into actual implementation of action. Then we'll open it up to questions and comments.

4. So! What is a RRS and does your institution even need one? There are many reasons why a RRS can be extremely helpful and practical regardless of the size of your institution. A RRS is a policy that defines what information is being created and identifies retention requirements based on legal, business, and preservation needs.

I don't know how many of you know this but BAM is the oldest performing arts center in the country. It has existed for over 150 years but the Archive has only existed for about 10-15. And about 10 years ago, a RRS was created. Prior to my residency, it had not been adjusted basically since it was created. It wasn't necessarily reflective of current departmental structures or workflows. Many departments and people did not even know that there was a RRS and like many of our institutions, BAM didn't have the infrastructure to ingest these increasingly (and now primarily) digital records even if a RRS had been being followed by staff. So why start now? Why have an NDSR fellow all this time to records schedules?

My background is in audiovisual preservation. I graduated from NYU's Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program last year and one of the things we learned was doing a collection assessment as a first step to get a handle on a collection to then make decisions around digitization, preservation, and access.
A RRS is kind of like doing a collection assessment. It is a way to get a lay of the land and outline and identify what kind of information is being created and what the requirements of these categories of information are.

5. At BAM, our RRS takes the form of a spreadsheet. We used these columns to identify legal requirements (for example, AD-7- Contracts are retained for 7 years), archivally significant material (for example, AD-3-Committee Presentations have historical significance and are retained permanently), and when things can be deleted (for example, AD-6-Departmental Budgets can be deleted after 3 years).

Through interviewing all divisions, departments, and sub-departments at BAM myself and my amazing mentor, Evelyn Shunaman, were able to create or revise RRSs for the entire institution. With this document we are now able to more accurately and strategically plan for long and short term requirements needed in a digital preservation environment.

I'm going to walk through some of the tips that I learned from though my process of interviewing departments and creating a RRS.

6. Work with IT! While the creation of a RRS does not necessarily require the technical expertise or someone with an information technology background, the eventual transfer of materials into the Archive and the management of an electronic repository will take some technical know-how. Collaborating with IT (if you have an IT department! It's ok if you don't!) at an early stage will only improve relations down the road.

7. Talk to as many staff as possible! Those who create records are the experts in the records they are creating. Trust their words and do not aim to alter their workflows. Work with them! Conduct an interview with a general framework, not a strict roadmap

8. Here are the basic interview questions that we established. We often did not do a strict question answer, question answer, but rather had a general idea of what we wanted to cover and used these questions as back up if we needed it.

9. Don't make people feel embarrassed. The Archive asking about records can have an intimidating feel. Few people are as organized as they would like to be. These interviews should not be about shaming people, but are an opportunity to listen and identify issues across your institution.

10. Think carefully about the decision to audio or video record these interviews. You want your interviewee to feel comfortable and you also want to be able to refer back to things you may have missed. Transcribing interviews can be helpful, but take a considerable effort. Consider the amount of time and resources that are available to you.

At BAM, we decided to audio record our interviews and take notes immediately after the interview. The longer we waited to synthesize our thoughts into notes, the harder it was to remember what was discussed.

11. Picking a format for your RRS will help you structure your information. There can be some back and forth between talking to staff and deciding the structure of your RRS--they will and should influence each other.

12. As I mentioned earlier, we deiced to go with a spreadsheet with the column headings: Item, Record Series Title, Description/Example, Total Retention, and Transfer to Archives.

13. To encourage compliance to a RRS, it is recommended to have the categories be as reflective of workflows within your institution as possible. If you think of it as a map or a crosswalk, developing a RRS to mirror record types and folder structures currently being used will only make things easier. Directly referencing language used by departments within the Records Series Title or Description will facilitate the process of compliance.

14. Determining how longs records should be kept for and when they can be deleted is in some ways the most challenging part of this process.

15. I created this decision tree to help walk through some questions that can determine time periods.

16. For record series with legal considerations, consult your legal department. If there is no legal department, look at existing records retention schedules and at your local legal requirements.

BAM does not have a legal department that we had access to at the moment so honestly, we did a lot of googling. We looked at existing RRSs—New York State Archive's RRS was particularly helpful—and we searched for laws relating to issues of Unions, HR, Building Operations, Finance, etc.

17. To help mitigate duplication, consider limiting records transferred to the Archive to exclusively the creating department. In other words, for information shared across departments or created collaboratively across departments, consider having the department that holds the final version transfer the record to the Archive as opposed to all departments that have a copy.

Additionally, we decided to appoint a specific records retention coordinator in each department in the hopes of dissuading finger pointing. If every department has a specific records retention coordinator, there will be a point person with whom the Archives can communicate with, thus improving likelihood of compliance. We also instituted a policy where this coordinator will have to give yearly approval of the RRS to ensure it continues to reflect current workflows and practices.

18. Make note of any information that is stored in databases or other systems—especially if this information is historically significant and needs to be transferred into the Archive. Make sure these record categories are flagged and a specific archival ingest process is developed for these records.

Hopefully these tips will be useful to others in creating or revising or maintaining a RRS. However, developing documentation, creating this policy is only part of the journey. At BAM, now that we have completed revisions on our RRS we are using this document to estimate how much and how many dig records will need to be transferred to the archive and what their preservation needs will be (in terms of file formats, metadata, storage, etc.). Gen is now going to fast forward a little and talk about actions that can be taken once some of this planning has been worked through.