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# Best Practices for Certifying Copies (# 1, Date of Issue)

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*There are still known deficiencies in format which PRIA's Style Committee will clean up following final approval.)*

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## Introduction

It is widely accepted across the United States that government offices generate both electronic and paper certified copies of documents in their custody for a variety of purposes. This paper sets forth the consensus reached on best practices for certified copies of land records.

Usually, a certified copy is accepted as a true and accurate representation of the document on file with the custodian. There are indications in state statutes that a certified copy is as effective as the original. By [law](#), electronic certifications carry the same force and effect as a paper certification.

An initial review of state statutes reveals that there are varying definitions for certified copy content. The list of state statutes reviewed is available on the PRIA website at the following URL:

[https://member.pria.us/files/resource\\_library\\_files/Real\\_Property\\_Law\\_Legal\\_Issues/Statutes\\_Research\\_POST.pdf](https://member.pria.us/files/resource_library_files/Real_Property_Law_Legal_Issues/Statutes_Research_POST.pdf)

## Best Practices

The following seven statements contain the best practices and attributes for a certified copy.

1. The document to be certified should originate from the recorder's repository.
2. Certified documents should meet applicable statutes, guidelines, and legal requirements.
3. A certified copy should contain the following attributes to indicate that it is indeed certified:
  - Signature of authorized person in the Recorder's Office
  - Jurisdiction seal
  - Jurisdiction and state identification
  - Date of certification
  - Number of pages the document contains
  - Certification statement, for example, "I hereby affirm that this document is a true certified copy of the document recorded in the land records of ABC County..."
4. Only entire or complete documents should be certified, with the certification mark on either the first or last page of the document.
5. The certification mark should be distinct and easily identifiable from the document text.
6. The certifier of the document should be the custodian of record and it should be possible to identify and authenticate the signer of the document as the custodian of record.
7. Jurisdictions are encouraged to provide a method to verify that the certification is valid.

The following are specific to an electronically certified document:

1. The certified document should be tamper-evident.
2. A secure electronic signature should be utilized.

## Benefits of Electronically Certified Documents

- Consistency and acceptability across the nation.
- Detection of altered or forged certified documents.
- Ability to have a distinguishable certification mark on each page indicating that page number in relation to all pages in the document for easy validation, i.e., page one of five, page two of five, page three of five.
- Increased online accessibility.
- Improved customer service.
- Enhanced business continuity.
- Reduction in labor and supply costs for recorders offices.
- Confidence to recipient that the copy is an exact reproduction of the original.

## Summary

PRIA acknowledges that the practice of making and sending certified copies is well-established. This paper establishes best practices for certifying copies so that movement towards national consistency will evolve.

PRIA recognizes there may be differences in adoption by recording jurisdictions due to statutory or regulatory specifications. To the extent possible, recorders are encouraged to align their operational practices with these recommended best practices.