

A 10-Step Records Management Plan for Your Unit

This document outlines the primary steps to follow to establish and maintain a records management program for your unit. Why is this important?

First, as a university employee, you will be creating and using university records. There are rules governing the use and destruction of all university records. For example, it is your responsibility to protect university records in your custody, and there are legal implications for destroying records without the proper authority.

Second, following good records management practices will not only help you meet legal requirements, they will benefit you and your unit in many ways such as:

- Improving access to information;
- Controlling the growth of materials taking up valuable office space;
- Reducing operating costs;
- Minimizing litigation risks;
- Safeguarding vital information;
- Supporting better management decision making; and,
- Preserving university history.

Here is the 10-step records management plan for your unit.

Step 1. Determine who will be responsible and what resources will be needed.

Each unit should have an identified records liaison assigned to manage the units' records and to work with the University Archives & Historical Collections.

Step 2. Identify records needed to document the activities and functions of your office.

Conduct an inventory of the materials in your unit. Document, at a minimum, where materials are located, how much there is, and the format (e.g., paper, electronic, maps, etc.).

An inventory will help you identify which materials are:

- Records,
- Reference materials (non-records),
- Personal papers (non-records),
- Extra copies of documents, publications, and forms (non-records).

The inventory will also help you identify which records would need to be immediately available in the event of an emergency (vital records).

Step 3. Establish your procedures (recordkeeping requirements).

Now that you know what you have in your unit, the unit needs to determine:

- If records will be kept in a "centralized" area (or server), or "decentralized" at individual work stations;
- The type of documents that are included in the record files;
- How draft documents, working papers, and concurrence copies will be handled.
- Who will be responsible for maintaining the record copy (records custodian).

Remember – Non-record materials such as convenience copies and personal papers need to be maintained separate from records.

Step 4. Match your records to the records schedules.

The next step in the project is to match the records identified in your inventory with the *records retention schedules*. Records schedules provide information on how long records are to be kept in the office and what happens when they are no longer needed in the office. Retention periods as stated in the schedules are **mandatory**.

Records retention schedules can be found on the UAHC website, http://archives.msu.edu/records/retention-schedules.php?records_retention.

Step 5. Prepare a "file plan."

Now that you know what records you have and what the appropriate records schedules are, you can begin to organize them. A file plan lists the records in your unit, and describes how they are organized and maintained. A good file plan is one of the essential components of a recordkeeping system, and key to a successful records management program. It can help you:

- document your activities effectively
- identify records consistently
- retrieve records quickly
- disposition records no longer needed
- meet statutory and regulatory requirements

A file structure is the framework of your file plan. There is no one arrangement scheme that is best for all records. Here are the major methods of arrangement:

- Chronological
- Numeric
- Alphabetical
- Alpha-numeric

The second part of a file plan is to arrange the folders or documents within a records series. Records series are those files or documents kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, maintenance, or use.

Step 6. Document your recordkeeping requirements and procedures.

Prepare a document, a *file plan*, which gives details on:

- How your records are organized and maintained,
- Who is responsible for doing what,
- When it should be done (e.g., retention),
- What happens to the records when they are no longer needed in the unit.

Include all the decisions you made in steps 1 through 5 (e.g., what happens to draft documents).

Step 7. Clean out records which are beyond the approved retention periods.

Once you have documented your file plan you can begin to organize your records. First, however, it is a good idea to get rid of those materials in your unit which are not needed. If authorized by the retention schedule, you can transfer inactive and permanent records which are no longer needed in the unit to the University Archives.

Step 8. Organize your records.

Now you can begin to implement your file plan.

First, prepare folders and organize documents within the folders. Follow the procedures established in your file plan.

Create reference sheets in folders, when necessary, to refer users to the location of related non-paper materials such as maps, drawings, videotapes, etc.

Step 9. Maintain your records on an on-going basis.

Once everything is organized, it is important to keep it current and up to date. Be sure to:

- File new materials on a regular basis (e.g., weekly).
 - Protect records containing confidential information such as confidential business information (CBI) or personal information.
 - Clean out inactive records on a regular basis, usually at the end of the year (as per your written procedures).
 - Transfer inactive records to the UAHC per the retention schedule.
 - Clean out superseded or obsolete reference materials.
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Step 10. Train Your Unit

Congratulations! Now you have a file plan. You've cleaned out all the unnecessary records and organized the necessary ones. Your job isn't over yet! You need to be sure all staff members know about their recordkeeping responsibilities.

To help you, the UAHC offers:

- Training sessions, including basic records management and records retention;
 - Presentations and handouts you can tailor for your particular unit; and
 - Email and phone support.
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References

“A 10-Step Records Management Plan for Your Office.” Environmental Protection Agency.

<http://www.epa.gov/records/tools/10plan.htm>

“File Plan Guide.” Environmental Protection Agency.

<http://www.epa.gov/records/tools/toolkits/filecode/index.htm>