Filing Public Records

Government employees are responsible for the efficient management and maintenance of the records they create and handle. Public records[1] document the conduct of government business. They must be filed in a way that allows for easy access to these records over time.

Records can occur in any media including, but not limited to, paper, electronic, and microfiche/film. They can also be found in multiple formats such as MS Word documents, spreadsheets, PDFs, html pages, databases, email messages, photos, videos, and films.

The same basic principles that apply to filing paper documents apply to electronic records. File electronic records in folders that mirror paper files and ensure records are on a drive that is regularly backed up by the agency's IT department. This guidance applies to records in all media.

Four Steps for Easy Filing

1. Identify the Official Record

The official record is the most complete version of a document. It is retained by an agency to provide evidence of the how the agency has carried out its official duties.

2. Choose a File Arrangement and Create Folders

Agency program areas may already have established file structures and naming conventions. Use these if they are in place. If none exists for your program area:

- Create folders and group or classify them by topic or activity (think of the yellow pages in the phonebook). It may also be helpful to identify files by year for easy access, retrieval, and retention management (see examples below).
- Name folders and files to aid in locating, retrieving and managing records. Keep file names as short as possible: some electronic systems limit file name length.

Home Example

- Insurance
  - Car
    - Accident Claim
  - Homeowners
  - Life
  - Medical
- Bills
  - Loans
  - Mortgage
    - Refinance
  - Vehicles
  - Utilities
    - Power
    - Water

Office Example

- Budget
- Correspondence
  - A-M
  - N-Z
- Training Material
- Teams, Projects, Workgroups
  - Team 1
    - Agendas
      - 2008
      - 2009
    - Minutes
  - Team 2
    - Membership
    - Project Plan

Wisconsin Public Records Board (PRB): Protecting the legal, financial and historical interests of the state in public records.
For more information visit: http://publicrecordsboard.wi.gov

3. File Records

- Eliminate non-records* and any duplicate materials.
- File records into the appropriate folder.

4. Manage Records

- Identify how long the records need to be kept by working with your agency records officer and reviewing applicable Records Retention/Disposition Authorization (RDA) or General Records Schedule (GRS).
- Check how the records must be disposed.
- Check with the agency contact for any disposition holds that may be in place before disposing of any public records, (litigation, audits, open records, retention/disposition policy changes).
- Dispose of records at the end of their life as specified by the applicable approved RDA or GRS.

Contact your Agency Record Officer with any questions or for additional assistance.

*** Non-Records** : Examples of information that need not be retained as a public record:

- Personal information not related to business.
- Reference material
- Duplicate copies maintained for convenience purposes only
- General announcements (received by all staff)
- Computer-generated responses or confirmations

[1] Public records are defined by statute 16.61(20)(b) as all books, papers, maps, photographs, films, recordings, optical disks, electronically formatted documents or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made, or received by any state agency or its officers or employees in connection with the transaction of public business (except the records and correspondence of any member of the State Legislature), and documents of any insurer that is liquidated or in the process of liquidation under ch. 645.

Wisconsin Public Records Board (PRB): Protecting the legal, financial and historical interests of the state in public records.
For more information visit: http://publicrecordsboard.wi.gov