

Steps to Establishing a Records Management Program : Guidance for School Authorities

This document outlines the steps to follow to establish and maintain a records management program for a school authority / division, a particular school, or a Division's department.

Each day you create, collect and use records. Administrative Procedures usually establish governance for the use and eventual disposition of all records.

It is your responsibility to protect records in your custody. Good records management allows you to:

- Improve access and retrieval of information
- Control growth of content
- Reduce costs
- Minimize risk from content destroyed without authorization, or kept beyond its retention
- Safeguard vital information
- Support evidence based decision making

Step 1. Determine who is responsible, what records are needed and if there is a particular challenge you are trying to solve.

This is a discovery phase allowing you to prioritize what you are trying to achieve based on an analysis of the current state.

Each school authority / school / department has records to manage. Having a Records Retention Schedule allows you to identify what records you are to manage, and who is responsible. An Administrative Procedure establishes the processes for managing information.

The Records Retention Schedule provides information on how long records are to be kept, and what happens when they are no longer needed.

Step 2. Identify the records you need that document the activities and functions of your work and where you will store them.

Review the materials you create against the Schedule. Identify how you are creating records and where they will be stored (e.g. shared drive, paper in cabinets, an electronic application, such as Atrieve or Laserfiche, SharePoint, PASI, etc.).

Multiple versions need not be stored in many locations. Identify who is the Responsible Department and **they** are accountable for having the identified records. Sometimes you are responsible for ensuring that the school authority / division has essential information.

The Student Record is often governed by an Administrative Procedure. The management of Human Resources are also governed through Administrative Procedures.

A Checklist is sometimes used to identify only required content.

Step 3. Establish your procedures (recordkeeping requirements).

Once you know what you are accountable to have, determine:

- Whether records will be kept in a "centralized" area (or server), or "decentralized" at individual work stations. Preference is often centralized unless access needs to be tightly controlled.
- The type of documents that are included in files or folders
- How draft documents and working papers will be handled

Non-record materials (or transitory records) such as convenience copies, drafts, and personal papers, are often maintained separate from records. This content can be securely disposed of when no longer needed.

Step 4. Prepare a "file plan."

Using the classification scheme found in the Records Retention Schedule, identify a file plan for storing your records.

When you know what records you need to have based on a review of the Record Retention Schedule, organize your records. 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 that everyone can follow. It helps you:

- Document your activities
- Effectively identify records
- Consistently retrieve records
- Disposition records no longer required
- 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 examples of common methods of arrangement within folders or files.

- Chronological
- Numeric
- Alphabetical
- Alpha-numeric

Help is available to set up a system.

Step 5. Document your recordkeeping decisions and procedures to create a manual of procedures.

Use your file plan to document decisions on:

- How your records are organized and maintained
- Who is responsible for various roles
- When records are inventoried or cleared out
- Strategies for maintaining your system
- Procedures that are implemented at your site or department
- How files and folders will be named and who is accountable for the system that is created

Step 6. Clear out records which are beyond the approved retention periods.

Using approved processes clear out records that have met retention requirements.

Step 7. Organize your remaining records.

After clearing out records, implement your file plan on an ongoing basis with the records you are required to keep.

Prepare folders and organize documents within the folders. Follow the procedures established in your file plan.

Step 8. Maintain your records on an on-going basis.

Once everything is organized, it is important to keep it current and up-to-date.

Ongoing maintenance requires staff to:

- File new materials regularly
- Protect records containing personal information
- Provide an orientation to all new staff
- Establish accountability for maintenance
- Ensure staff know the expectations for managing information
- Attend training to learn about changes
- Review Administrative Procedures for guidance on processes to be followed
- Establish a process for compliance that supports staff success