

Records Management Basics: Files and Filing Toolkit

For Use by Local Agencies





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1. Preface

Internship Background

The 2022 Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU) & Minority Institutions of Higher Education (MIHE) Internship is a partnership with NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) with North Carolina's HBCUs and MIHEs to expose, engage, and educate students with tangible, real-world experience with various divisions within the department. As a community records liaison, I work in collaboration with the Records Analysis Unit and the Community Building Committee. The goal of my internship is to adapt workshop material and curriculum, currently used to train and aid state agencies and local government agencies, into a toolkit to better service a broader audience of counties, municipalities, agencies, as well as community organizations. The toolkit will live as a means to help reach underserved populations and strengthen connections between these regions and the State Archives so that they feel confident in managing and protecting their records.

Public records, as defined by N.C. Gen. Stat. § 132-1, mean "[a]ll documents, papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, films, sound recordings, magnetic or other tapes, electronic data processing records, artifacts, or other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance in connection with the transaction of public business by any agency of North Carolina government or its subdivisions." The theory of North Carolina Public Records Law is that when a government creates or maintains records for its own business reasons, the public enjoys a general right to inspect and copy those records. The Records Analysis Unit of the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources works closely with public records, to offer records management services to public officials, consultation on creating, maintaining, and disposing records, conducting records management workshops, and many more functions.

Community Building Committee Overview

The committee was meant to examine the state of outreach and collaboration with communities within the state, particularly historically excluded communities. This involved a survey of existing collaborations and relationships, a literature review and suggested trainings for SANC staff, and a review of what the institution could offer to communities. The committee hopes to facilitate conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion with the larger SANC staff, create more support for staff doing community outreach and relationships, integrate our work into the larger work of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR), and begin doing outreach to targeted communities.

Cassidy S. Patterson,

2022 Community Records Liaison



2. Pros and Cons of Paper Filing

Pros vs. Cons of Paper Filing

Pros

What are the advantages?

- Easier to control
- Easier to prove authenticity
 - Trustworthy
- Easier to maintain over long periods of time
- Suitable for permanent retention

Cons

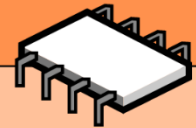
What would be the drawbacks?

- Prone to damage
 - Fire or natural disasters
- Prone to security issues
 - Lost, stolen, or mishandled
- Hard to maintain if lack of storage space
 - Higher costs
- Editing problems
 - Limit of communication and collaboration





3. Pros and Cons of Electronic Filing



PROS VS. CONS OF ELECTRONIC FILING

PROS

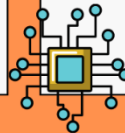
What are the advantages?

- Accessible by many at once
- Accessible over multiple locations
- Efficient for frequently accessed records
- Easier to retrieve
- Saves time, money, and transportation costs

CONS

What would be the drawbacks?

- Security risks
 - Theft or hacking
- Software and hardware malfunctions
- Investment in secure computer security and software
- Hard to maintain if issues persist with internet






4. How to File?





5. Clear the Deck

STEP 01 CLEAR THE DECK



01 → **02** → **03**

INVENTORY YOUR FILES (2 METHODS)

1. Delve into the files themselves and document them at various levels of detail.
- i.e File by File, Folder by Folder, Drawer by Drawer, File Directory Tools
2. Ask the people who work with the files about what they create, where they're stored, and how they use them.
- Questionnaire Inventory

ELIMINATE DUPLICATES & REFERENCE COPIES

You can throw out duplicates of the same file, transitory records, and any records that you know another office is a custodian of.

DESTROY RECORDS THAT HAVE MET RETENTION

As you inventory your files, you should compare them against the retention schedule, and once you have determined that the records have met retention and have no legal holds, you should destroy them.

You may be completing these tasks concurrently as you go through each file



6. Analyze your Records

STEP
02

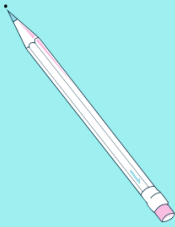
ANALYZE YOUR RECORDS



REVIEW THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO DETERMINE USER NEEDS

- **Which records are difficult to file?**
- **Which records are difficult to find?**
-Need a stronger organizational system, or people to file more consistently.
- **Which records are accessed most frequently?**
-Stored in an electronic shared or closet file space closest to the employees that need them.
- **Which records are essential?**
-Need multiple, secure locations or enough documentation to locate them and preserve them quickly if damaged.

CONSOLIDATE AND REORGANIZE YOUR STRUCTURE

- **Avoid overlapping terms**
 - **Avoid vague and outdated terms**
 - **Determine appropriate granularity**
 - **Reorganize for destruction**
- By consolidating and renaming your records, you can make things clearer.
- 





7. Make a New File Plan

Who We Are

Background

The Division of Archives and Records is part of the Office of Archives and History and the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The name "Archives and Records" reflects the dual role of the division: to provide guidance concerning the preservation and management of government records to state, county, city and state university officials; and to collect, preserve and provide public access to historically significant archival materials relating to North Carolina.

The first role is handled primarily by the Government Records Section, while the second is the focus of several specialized sections, which are collectively called the "State Archives of North Carolina."



Visit Us

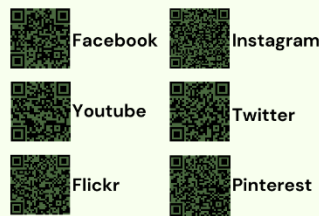
State Archives of North Carolina

109 E. Jones St. Raleigh, NC
27601
4614 Mail Service Center
(919) 814-6840

The State Archives of North Carolina is a Division of



Engage with us on:



"Don't let past filing techniques, derail future practices. Today is a new day, make it count."

STEP 03

MAKE A NEW FILE PLAN



Make a New File Plan

1. Should tell employees
2. Build your system before populating it with records
3. Plan in user-friendly improvements
4. Can be this-point-forward or retrospective

#1: Inform employees

- Where to find new records
- Where to find old records
- How long records are kept

The new file plan should state where the records can be found, so now it is time to make final decisions about where they should be located - physically if they are paper records. You will then have to move your existing records into the new file plan, which involves careful planning and work.

Here are a couple of pointers on setting up physical and electronic folders, and how you can add user-friendly improvements to your system to do more thinking for you.



#2: Build the new system

Get as much done in advance as possible!

Setting up Paper Folders

- Paper folders should have typed labels, not hand-written ones.
- You should not have to open a folder to know what's inside.
- Folder structures should conform to the file plan no matter where they are.

Setting up Electronic Files

- Electronic folders should use underscores and avoid special characters.
- You should not have to open a file to know what is inside.
- Include dates in the file name.
- Strike a balance between clarity and brevity.
- Be consistent!

Labeling Electronic Media

- Department name
- Files by record series
- Computer type
- Software and version
- Date of files
- Access restrictions



#3: Create user-friendly improvements

- Get the system to "think" for your users as much as possible
- Embed filing and disposition instructions into your records
 - Putting shorthand information about retention periods into/onto the folders themselves.
- Use color coding where possible
 - Use a limited number of colors
 - Communicate information people need to manage the files
 - Make sure the information communicated via color-coding is accessible elsewhere

#4: Implement moving forward or retrospectively

The Move

(This section applies if you are moving files around to cover all the records created from this point forward)

- Make sure people have what they need to keep working while files are inaccessible (paper files)
- Have everyone who uses the share drive shut off their computers and move everything on a weekend (electronic)
- Don't forget to compare paper and electronic duplicates



8. Care and Keeping

STEP
04

Care and Keeping



"Maintain the system, and ensure it works"

Check for duplicates and reference copies before you file

- Think Before You File!!
- Is this...
 - A Reference Copy?
 - A Transitory Record?
 - The Record Copy?
- Am I the custodian of this record?
- Document which files have been modified offline and need to be reintegrated into shared storage



Track file "adoptions"

- Check-Out Systems
- Out cards will record:
 - What was removed
 - Who took the record
 - When it was taken



Annual destruction days

- Ensure time is set aside each year to do some cleaning
 - Clear out your records, paper and electronic on a regular basis
- These are called "RID" Days, for Record and Information Destruction





9. Best Practices for File Naming



FILE NAMING BEST PRACTICES

PAPER VS. ELECTRONIC



Paper folders should have typed labels, not hand-written ones.



Electronic folders should use underscores instead of spaces and avoid special characters.

You should not have to open a folder to know what is inside.

You should not have to open a file to identify it.

Folder structures should conform to the file plan no matter where they are located at.

Include dates in the file name but strike a balance between clarity and brevity.

If you use abbreviations, they need to be commonly understood by all staff.

Be consistent with the format.



10. Glossary of Terms

Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan

An effort within individual agencies to ensure that they can continue to perform their essential functions during a wide range of emergencies, including acts of nature, accidents, and technological or attack-related emergencies.

Custodian

The person that has physical custody and control of the books, records, documents and maintains them in the ordinary course of business.

Destruction

A disposal process that results in the obliteration of records. In NC, paper records can be burned, shredded, placed in acid vats, or sold as wastepaper. Electronic data and metadata should be overwritten, deleted, or unlinked.

Essential records

Records needed for the Continuity of Operations (COOP) of a government agency during and following an emergency. They are records an agency must have to perform one or more of the following critical functions: operate during an emergency; resume or continue business after an emergency; re-establish the legal, financial, and/or functional status of the agency; rebuild the community after the crisis passes.

Inventory

The process of surveying the records in an office, typically at the series level.

Public record

“Public record” or “public records” shall mean all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, films, sound recording, magnetic or other tapes, electronic data-processing records, artifacts, or other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance in connection with the transaction of public business by any agency of North Carolina government or its subdivisions.

Retention

The continued possession, use, or control of something.

Records inventory

A detailed listing of the types, locations, dates, volumes, equipment, classification systems, and usage data of an organization’s records, made in order to evaluate, appraise, and organize the information.



Reference copy

1. A copy of a record kept for easy access to the information it contains, as opposed to its intrinsic or evidential value.
2. A copy of a record distributed to make recipients aware of the content but not directing the recipient to take any action on the matter.

Record copy

The single copy of a document, often the original, that is designated as the official copy for reference and preservation.

Record

Recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristics, made or received by an organization in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.

Records management

The systematic and administrative control of records throughout their life cycle to ensure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition.

Retention schedule

A document that identifies and describes an organization's records, usually at the series level, provides instructions for the disposition of records throughout their life cycle.

Transitory record

A record that has little or no documentary or evidential value and that need not be set aside for future use.



11. Additional Resources

Record Inventory



archives.ncdcr.gov

4615 Mail Service Center, Raleigh NC 27699-4165

919-814-6900

Records Inventory

Date		Employee Name		Phone	
Division		Section		Branch	
Location(s) of Records					

Title	Description (purpose, use, subject content)	Media (Paper, Electronic, Scanned)			Restrictions (Audit, Confidential)		Statutory Regulations	Date Range	Volume (linear feet or file drawers)
		P	E	S	A	C			



Questionnaire

Sample Inventory Questionnaire

Part 1

1. What are the main reasons for the work that you do?
2. What are the business processes you use to carry out your work?
3. What kinds of records are created during these business processes? (Categorize by business process)

Part 2 (use for each record series listed in pt. 1)

1. What do you call these records in daily business?
2. Are they sent to another office for additional work when your tasks are complete? If so, which office?
3. Where are all the locations (to the best of your knowledge) where these records are stored? Remember electronic copies as well as analog ones.
4. If the records exist in multiple locations, where do you go *first* to find a record?
5. How are the records organized within their location?
6. Do you ever need to locate these records using criteria that *aren't* evident in the way they're organized?
7. How often do you need to access the records for your work?
8. Are there any problems you run into when you try to access them? (Can't find them on the share drive, need to travel too far to pick up physical copies, need to check too many locations, etc.)
9. When you need an existing record for your work, how long do you need to have it on hand?
10. In the event of an emergency or disaster, are these records necessary to resume essential services?
11. Do these records need additional access restrictions?
12. What is the *oldest* record (relative to when you accessed it) that you needed for work purposes?



Additional Sites

To learn more about records management explore the educational materials and resources provided by these institutions and organizations.

- **State Archives of North Carolina (SANC)**
Archives.ncdcr.gov
 - **The G.S. 132 Files**
ncrecords.wordpress.com
- **Council of State Archivists (COA)**
statearchivists.org
- **Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA)**
arma.org
- **National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)**
archives.gov



12. Contact Information

For questions about public research or Division of Archives and Records administration:

Phone:

(919) 814-6840

Email:

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