

Shared Drive Document Management Guidance

Records Management and Shared Drives:

As university employees, you will create all kinds of electronic documents in your daily work. Some of these documents will be considered university records, which must be retained either permanently or for a specific period of time. Some examples of temporary electronic records are fiscal documents, student files, and general correspondence. Examples of permanent electronic records may include, but is not limited to, meeting minutes, agendas, official memos, photographs, and audiovisual materials. Please review the university's [records retention schedules](#) to identify the records among your electronic documents.

While the University Archives can accept transfer of permanent electronic materials, such as photographs, memos and meeting minutes, in [a variety of ways](#), the University Archives **cannot** accept transfer of temporary electronic records at this time. These electronic documents must be retained in your office until they have reached the end of their retention period. Then, you may dispose of the documents in accordance with the [Institutional Data Policy](#) and the university's [Best Practices for Disposing of Computers and Storage Devices](#). You will also need to complete and submit an [In-Office Records Destruction form](#) to authorize and document records destruction.

University Archives recommends retaining electronic records in a shared drive rather than on an individual's hard drive. Using individual hard drives for storage may limit employee access to necessary documents, require employees to initiate proactive back-up procedures, and may result in the creation of multiple copies of crucial documents.

Using a shared drive for document storage can provide the following benefits to departments:

- Increases collaboration between employees
- Utilizes one central copy of a record to avoid duplication of files
- Easier to back up and control access to one central drive rather than for multiple computers

While departments and offices may feel free to utilize other electronic records management systems, such as Perspective Software, shared drives are a low cost way to provide basic electronic records storage for many departments.

Shared drives can be a wonderful tool for document management. They can help centralize the disparate files that are often located in multiple locations within university units. However, without department employees working together to develop a comprehensive electronic file structure, the shared drive will quickly sprawl out of control into a hodgepodge of files and folders, making it difficult to locate documents quickly. Shared drives require time and effort on the part of employees to create and maintain a useable structure. The guidelines below will assist you as you develop an electronic file structure for your unit.

Organizing Your Shared Drive:

As you plan a file structure for your shared drive, please keep in mind that the goal of shared drives is to share documents. All users of the shared drive should have access to all the documents in the drive (except in the case of confidential/private information). This means that you will need to work together and compromise to make sure your drive structure works for all your stakeholder parties. It is not just you working on the drive; other people will need to be able to find files as well. It can be difficult to encourage user adoption in a shared drive, particularly if one has never been used before, and by collaborating and including multiple stakeholders in the planning process, it is more likely that users will find the shared drive useful to the storage of their documents and utilize the service appropriately.

Creating an Electronic File Structure:

Most electronic file structures are created in a hierarchical format. Documents are found by drilling down through the folders until you reach the correct level and document.

The following is an example of a potential electronic file structure:

```
OFFICE/DEPARTMENT
  ADMINISTRATION
    Meetings
      All-Team Meetings
        Agendas
        Minutes
          FY2014
            Meeting Minutes.docx
      Policies and Procedures
        Approved
          Manual.docx
        Drafts
          ElectronicOrdering.docx
  FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
    Audits
      On-Going
      Completed
        FY2013
          FinalAuditReport.docx
    Operating Statements
      FY2013
        Operating StatementJune2013. Docx
```

When you are creating an electronic file structure on a shared drive, consider the function of your documents over the form of the organization. It is tempting to organize your file structure

in accordance with the unit's organization chart, but often org charts do not accurately reflect business processes. Even if they do, organizational structures can change, and if your unit is reorganized, your file structure will need to be reorganized as well.

Thinking in terms of functions is a challenge for many units; this is a very different way of thinking from previous forms of document management. Still, many functions can be identified for units.

Many units will have similar functions; for instance, almost all units will have administrative functions (such as recording meetings, policies, procedures), financial management functions (such as documenting the money coming in, bills going out, etc), and human resources functions (hiring, employee evaluation, promotion and tenure, etc.).

Other functions may be defined by your particular unit. For instance, if your unit develops training for other units at the university, you may want to keep your records in a folder called "training". When trying to identify team specific functions, ask yourself, "What are my teams' goals? What do we do? What documents do we create?" You can also consider what you are asked to report on to your bosses or other supervisory units. Often that information relates directly to your unit's functions.

Brainstorm and consult with multiple people when considering functions. There may be a primary function that you are unaware of in your daily role.

After you have identified your unit functions, please keep in mind business processes for your unit. Every unit will have a unique workflow as they conduct their daily business. This workflow should be reflected in your file structure. For instance, while some projects/functions are on-going, a unit might want to keep those files and documents separate from completed projects. Then, once the project is finished, you would move all the documentation into the completed folder, designating that project as completed. This is illustrated under the audits folder in the example file structure above.

Another example of workflow processes involves the creation and uses of drafts. It may be important to your unit to separate drafts of your work from official documents. In this instance, some units will create employee folders, often using the employee's name, to store employees' drafts of documents that are on-going, not completed, or not official. These employee folders could also be a place for individual employees to store non-records that they might need to refer to. When documents are completed and approved, they would be published to the appropriate general folder located elsewhere on the shared drive. That copy would become the official record, and the others would be considered non-records, and could be disposed of when no longer administratively necessary. Other units may create separate drafts folders without the specific employee designation.

Shared Drive Access:

Access to documents on the shared drive should be limited to the appropriate university personnel.

Departments should work closely with IT support in order to control shared drive access. If the department must store confidential or protected information on a shared drive, it is best to store those documents in a separate folder and limit access to only those with the appropriate permissions. Types of documents that typically have confidentiality or privacy concerns include students file, hiring/personnel evaluation, and certain fiscal documents.

Keep in mind a shared drive is meant to be a “shared space”. If all of your documents are confidential or limited access, perhaps the shared drive environment is not the best place for them to be stored. You may want to consider a removable hard drive or another method of storage.

Please note that university records, even those in electronic form, may be producible in discovery, FOIA request, or other legal matters. For more information, contact the General Counsel’s Office.

Shared Drive Back-Up:

You will not be adequately preserving or retaining the records if your drive is not being backed up regularly. Every department should work with their department information technology administrator to ensure that their shared drive is appropriately backed up.

The timing and nature of the back-up process may depend on the type of storage used, the nature of the documents on the shared drive, and the resources of the department. Your department information technology administrator can provide information regarding your department’s policies on backup. In general, most departments do backups of files on the network server on a systematic basis.

Helpful Tips:

Include as many collaborators as possible when designing your structure. Participation in this process can increase user adoption.

Keep in mind that your structure must work for your unit. No two electronic file structures will look exactly alike. If you try to force employees to follow a structure that does not match up with your functions or workflow, you will not be successful.

Try to limit the number and level of folders. In general, using 3-4 clicks to find documents is the most people can handle. Anything after 4 clicks will start getting messy and confusing for users.

Use a standardized naming convention to help identify and locate documents. Examples of naming conventions can be found here. You should customize your file naming convention to meet the specific needs of your unit.

Documenting Your Work:

No matter what file structure or naming convention you choose, please document these decisions in a file plan or guide, and make it available to all employees in your unit. If information is readily available, it will encourage user adoption. This is particularly important for new employees, who may not be familiar with the established folder structure. An excellent place to store this documentation is in the Shared Drive itself, at a high-level, with a note "READ ME FIRST".

The University Archives can assist you with designing this documentation. For more information, please contact the Archives at archives@msu.edu or 517-355-2330.

Where Can I Go for Additional Assistance?

University Archives is happy to consult with you regarding your file plan structure. We can assist you with planning and designing your structure. However, individual work on the part of the unit will be required for the shared drive to be successful. For more information, please contact the University Archives at archives@msu.edu or 517-355-2330.