Best Records Management Practices for Electronic Records

Vestina F. Crayton
May 21, 2014
10 Best Records Management Practices for Electronic Records
Start the Conversation
Executive Level Involvement Required
Make it a Priority
Training
Control the Gate
Standardization
Silos: Die or Modify
Get Your IT Department Involved
ACCOUNTABILITY

‘When accountability is inconsistent in application, it becomes nothing more than thinly-veiled blame-gaming.’

Source: hotoncollaboration.com/blog/tag/accountability
Communicate!
Review

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- Executive Level Involvement
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- Standardization
- Silos: Die or Modify Modification
- Get the IT Department Involved
- Accountability
- Communicate!
THANK YOU!

Best Records Management Practices for Electronic Records

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Electronic Filing Structure Reorganization Recommendations: Recycling Outreach Unit
Why Organize?
Organizing the electronic filing system of the Recycling Outreach team has been requested because the filing system has grown organically without review for some time, and some files are difficult to find quickly. A central organized system for files can avoid confusion, facilitate information sharing (saving time and money), and archiving can protect against or comply with legal regulations. The suggestions and system detailed below consider recommended best practices of record retention and organizing experts, the nature of the work, and the preferences of the workers on the team. This document suggests a new general electronic filing structure, and a method to add record classification.

Situation Assessment
Almost everything in the main folder H:\\USERS\\Waste Reduction Outreach (or WRO in this document) belongs to the Recycling Outreach team (Bill, Rick, Tom, Jan, Holly, or Marine). The WRO folder takes up 4.93 GB, has 9,894 files, and 1,290 folders as of 7/12/2013. Some Recycling Outreach team work also lives outside WRO. Waste Diversion and Recycling is the folder used second most often by WRO staff. Within Waste Diversion and Recycling, at minimum three large projects belonging to the WRO team: Charity Reuse Incentive (110M / 244 files / 41 folders), Beach Recycling Programs (.98 GB / 467 files / 104 folders), and Office Recycling Program (68.6M / 359 files / 34 folders). This is a minimum total of 6.08 GB / 10,964 files / 1,469 folders for Bill’s team at outset. Almost two years ago many files from WRO were removed from 2010 and before. Currently there is no formal method for archiving electronic files.

Screen capture of Waste Reduction Outreach folder on 7/12/2013

Physical Document Location Guidelines
Organizing a shared drive quickly bleeds into other areas. We begin by defining where electronic documents should live and why. Files that are meant to be shared should be located in a central location. Files that are not meant to be shared should be kept off of shared drives.
C Drive: The C Drive, or the computer’s drive that lives outside the shared drive, is not backed up by central servers and cannot be accessed by team members.

Recommendation: Do not use your computer’s C Drive for any reason. There are other ways to privately store email.

Desktop: The desktop is not backed up by central servers and cannot be accessed by team members. Because information kept here can be lost, work here is discouraged and should be minimized. If team members feel the desktop is important to their personal workflow, restrict use to shortcuts.

Recommendation: Regularly review the desktop and place all work onto the H drive within the appropriate file folder.

Shared drive (H:\USERS\Waste Reduction Outreach): All shared files should be kept in the Waste Reduction Outreach folder. This is where the majority of team member work files will live. The exception to this rule is when someone on Recycling Outreach works on another section/unit/larger division project. In that case the filing location and method of the project owner applies. For example, Jan’s work with Pinellas Partners in Recycling is filed under H:\USERS\Technical Management Committee\TMC Recycling Subcommittee. It is filed here because technical management committees are a project that is larger than Recycling Outreach and is managed by someone outside of Recycling Outreach, and Pinellas Partners in Recycling is part of that project.

Shared drive personal folder (H:\USERS\UTLSW??): This information is backed up by county servers, but cannot be seen by team members. This area is recommended for drafts of information not ready to be shared with team members, and personal work files.

CDs/flash drives/DVDs/external hard drives/other external electronic storage devices: External drives may regularly be used to share information with colleagues, or for presentations. For example, copying and using a power point in a presentation to school children, or taking files to a meeting across town. Archiving onto external media and deleting content on shared drives is restricted to the unit supervisor only.

Paper: Paper documents are needed when physically distributing or storing a document is the only practical method. Paper document archiving is done by the Records Management Department, and the current Solid Waste contact is Princetta McCoy.

Recommendation: Coordinate hard copy (paper) archiving first with the Unit Supervisor. Upon approval to archive coordinate the actual archiving process with Princetta McCoy.

Email: Email is backed up by county servers regardless of if it is deleted on your personal computer. Email is for use in daily communication. It should also be used as a business tool to document discussions or communication that isn’t recorded in another way (especially on contracts and grants). Documents or information that will be needed for future reference should be taken out of email and filed on the shared drive, but retaining large quantities of email is also discouraged.
Recommended File Structure

Organizing files is done to retain documents so that they can be found easily by the group that is currently using the file or by external parties at a later time. This principle should be considered in creating and organizing documents and folders. Files should be organized logically in a system that takes steps to accommodate all users.

The WRO level will only contain a restricted number of folders and no loose documents, much like the USERS folder. All folders under WRO will have multiple files in them, and only the Unit Supervisor can create folders under WRO. If there aren’t multiple files there doesn’t need to be a folder. A few documents on one topic can be left loose inside a larger folder. As few clicks from the Waste Reduction Outreach folder to the actual document needed is desirable. One ballpark rule that some organizers use is no more than three clicks should be used to reach a document. Because it takes three clicks to reach the WRO folder itself, it’s suggested to the three click rule begin with the WRO folder already being open.

A possible file outline structure is listed below. Numbers are main folders under H:\USERS\Waste Reduction Outreach (such as Administration). Indented lines labeled with lower case letters are files within the above folder (such as a Budget). Some folders have descriptions of the types of documents that would be filed in that folder (such as Budget and cost codes). Folders have letters beside them (Administration A). These letters are an optional organizing structure for finding and labeling files. For example, a file related to budget could be labeled “ABUD...” to indicate where it would be found. Some folders have numbers listed beside them for archiving purposes (such as Budget #88) and this will be discussed later in the document.

1) Administration (A)
   a. Budget (BUD)(#88): Budget and cost codes
   b. Contacts (CTA)
   c. Contracts, Leases & Agreements (CON)(#65)
   d. Correspondence (COR)(#17, 338, 33): Memos, meeting minutes, agendas
   e. Customer Requests & Complaints (CUS)(#94, 23)
   f. Personnel & HR (PER)(#378): Org charts, job descriptions (#38), memberships, awards, payroll schedules, interview templates, PAQs, Training of WRO Employees, volunteer info (#66), Travel Records (#52) Private personnel info is kept off public drives.
   g. Policies & Procedures (POL)(#186)
   h. Reports & Presentations, WRO (REP)(#124): Reports written by WRO staff with supporting documentation. DEI and SW reports are under Research.
   i. Strategic & Business Plans (STR)(#338): Strategic plans for DEI, SW, unit, etc. Personal goals under personnel.
   j. Templates & Forms (TEM)
   k. Vehicles (VEH)(#104, 224, 154, 78)

2) Education & Outreach (Marketing) (E)(#128) Marketing materials created by WRO staff to promote WRO Projects and Programs, or recycling/SW in general. Content that is part of a project or program is filed under that program.
   a. Articles, Press Releases & Technical Papers (ART)
b. Awards (AWA)
c. Collateral- Brochures, Posters, Bookmarks (COL): Things we print and give away (such as “No Such Place As Away”)
d. Green Tips (GT)
e. Photos, Graphics, Logos (PHO)
f. Recycle Today Directory (RTD)
g. SCOOP Newsletter (SCO)
h. Website & E-marketing (WEB): Website related activity of any kind, e-blasts, web banners, SEO activity, etc.

3) **Primary Projects & Programs (P)**(#338, 106, 291): Active projects & programs that average 20% or more of an employee’s time AND have been active or in development for at least a year.
   b. Beach & Park Recycling Programs (BCH)
   c. Charity Reuse Incentive (CRI)
   d. Cutting Waste at Work (CWW)
   e. Office Recycling Program (ORP)
   f. Tours, Presentations & Events (T&P)(#238) including Great American Teach-In

4) **Reference & Research (R)** Ideas from other programs and industry trends that don’t relate to an active project. Articles, stories, statistics, conference information, etc. A parking lot of ideas and a place for colleagues to share knowledge and resources. Info pertains to the group, not individual staff. Articles, etc. produced by WRO staff are under Public Education. Examples of topics include:
   a. Glass Processing (GP)
   b. Organics Recycling (ORG)
   c. Pinellas County data, statistics, etc. (PC)

5) **Secondary Projects & Programs (S)**(#338, 106, 291): Active projects & programs with dedicated resources (staff, money, and approval), that average less than 20% of an employee’s time, OR have been in operation for less than a year. Ideas and information for future projects are under Reference or Strategic Planning
   a. Annual State Recycling Support (SRS)
   b. Graphics for WTE 120 Training Room (GRA)
   c. Green Government Certification (GGC)
   d. Intern Project (IP)(#66)
   e. Municipal Recycling Grants (MRG)(#109)
   f. Operation Medicine Cabinet (OMC)
   g. Pinellas Park HS First Responders Haz Training (HAZ)
   h. Recycling Roadie (RR)
   i. Summer Camp (SC)

Significant WRO folders that live somewhere else are:
- H:\\USERS\\Technical Management Committee\\TMC Recycling Subcommittee (Jan’s work related to Pinellas Partners in Recycling lives here)
Follow the descriptions on where content should be placed. For example, training of WRO staff goes under administration, but training content created by WRO staff goes under public education. Educational materials used during tours are filed under the tour and presentation folder because those materials are part of the actual content of the program. Educational materials used to educate others about the tour program are filed under Public Education and Outreach materials because those promotional materials support the program. Creating duplicate files should be minimized when possible.

**Naming Documents and Folders**

It is important to organize files logically, and have that logic understood by as many users as possible. For some businesses, a blanket titling convention would work. For example, a lawyer’s office may name folders with clients names (“Last, First”) and a technical support company might organize documents by the date and time they took a call for technical assistance (“YYYY.MM.DD”). These types of systems enable speed and ease of file sorting. This Waste Reduction Unit cannot use a blanket rule for titling files because it operates a variety of programs. The A-Z Guide files may be logically organized based on types of items to recycle, while Cutting Waste at Work may logically organize files by customer company name.

It is important for users of public files to have some idea of a folder or document’s contents based on its title. Be specific but brief and clear. Avoid use of general words (such as communication, documentation, other, or miscellaneous) whenever possible. Avoid personal references or acronyms that wouldn’t be known by everyone in your unit. For this unit the abbreviation PC is Pinellas County, DEI is Department of Environment and Infrastructure, and SW is Solid Waste. Label folders and files by project, department, or type rather than by person (Replace “Info from Camille” with “2012 A-Z Guide” and replace “Holly tour notes” with “Tours and Presentations Guide 2013.”) This helps files stay with a job function. Some suggestions on specific filing names are listed below:

- Rephrase “12 Oct-Dec 13FY” as “Tour Bookings 2013”
- Rephrase “FY 2010-2011” as “Budget FY 2010-2011”
- Rephrase “Accident-Injury Incident Review (Supervisor)” as “Injury Report Form 2012”

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Employees are encouraged to use the letter file coding system noted in the filing structure above (A for Administration, CON for Contracts: thus ACON for Administration/Contracts) to label documents and folders and add footers stating what the document is titled (thus also noting where the document is filed.) Dates are encouraged to be listed by year, month, and day to allow chronologic sorting.

Rephrase “12 Oct-Dec 13FY” as “PT&P Tour Bookings 2013”
Rephrase “FY 2010-2011” as “ABUD Budget FY 2010-2011”
Rephrase “Accident-Injury Incident Review (Supervisor)” as “ATEM Injury Report Form 2012”
Rephrase “WMI_011513A” as “ACON_13.01.15_Site Memo”

Archiving and Getting Rid of Files
Files no longer needed must be removed from daily use areas to make it easier to find current files. Removing unused files also preserves finite storage space on the shared drive. Taking any business files off of shared drives permanently to archive is restricted to the unit Supervisor of Recycling Outreach for consistency, organization, and optimal record tracking. Identifying and labeling files to be placed into archives is the responsibility of all team members.

To archive or dispose of files, there are four major factors in determining why and how long records should be kept for:

1. **Administrative**: Does anyone still need this information to get the job done?
2. **Legal**: Do we need this to cover us legally in terms of an audit or grant/contract compliance?
3. **Fiscal**: Do we need this to keep financial records on payments or services received to stay in compliance with generally accepted best practices in accounting principles and laws?
4. **Historical**: Is it possible we might need this in the future to reference work of a past program, publication, or service?

**Administrative**: Users of files on a program are the best people to know if a file is necessary to continue operations on a project or program, or if the files are obsolete.

**Legal**: Any legally binding document, such as a contract or grant, requires documentation regarding exchange of payments and deliverables for proof of contract fulfillment. Employees in areas like legal, risk, purchasing, or
the clerk’s office maintain copies of contracts themselves, but managing daily documentation of a contract work is the responsibility of the contract project manager. What records should be kept depend on the contract or agreement. Creating efficient records for contract management is discussed below in “Archiving and Creating Files.”

Beyond contract work, Pinellas County and the State of Florida have an extensive system for file classification, retention, tracking, and disposal for all of their work. County employees have to follow certain rules for keeping and disposing of paper or electronic files to stay in compliance with laws.

Pinellas County follows guidelines developed by the state on how what files should be kept for how long, and uses the State of Florida General Records Schedule GS1-SL for State and Local Government Agencies to determine that. Below is a listing of GS1-SL items that may be most relevant to the Recycling Outreach team. Employees must retain copies of the types of documents listed below, and file them with Records Retention for retention and proper disposal.

**GS1-S RECORD RETENTION SCHEDULES**

- **BUDGET RECORDS: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS** Item #88
- **COMPLAINTS: CITIZENS/CONSUMERS/EMPLOYEES** Item #94
- **CONTRACTS/LEASES/AGREEMENTS: NON-CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT** Item #65
- **CORRESPONDENCE AND MEMORANDA: ADMINISTRATIVE** Item #17
- **CORRESPONDENCE AND MEMORANDA: PROGRAM AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT** Item #338
- **DIRECTIVES/POLICIES/PROCEDURES** Item #186
- **ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION COMPLIANCE RECORDS** Item #167
- **EQUIPMENT/VEHICLE MAINTENANCE RECORDS** Item #104
- **EQUIPMENT/VEHICLE USAGE RECORDS** Item #224
- **FEASIBILITY STUDY RECORDS** Item #106
- **GRANT FILES: GRANTOR AGENCY** Item #109
- **INFORMATION REQUEST RECORDS** Item #23
- **MINUTES: OTHER MEETINGS** Item #33
- **OPERATIONAL AND STATISTICAL REPORT RECORDS** Item #124
- **PERSONNEL RECORDS: OPS/VOLUNTEER/INTERN/TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT** Item #66
- **PERSONNEL RECORDS: SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION** Item #378
- **POSITION DESCRIPTION RECORDS** Item #38
- **PROJECT FILES: OPERATIONAL** Item #291
- **PUBLIC INFORMATION FILES** Item #128
- **PUBLIC PROGRAM/EVENT RECORDS** Item #238
- **PURCHASING RECORDS** Item #42
- **TRAVEL RECORDS** Item #52
- **VEHICLE ACCIDENT RECORDS** Item #78
- **VEHICLE RECORDS** Item #154

Longer descriptions of items and their retention schedules are found in GS1-SL. See examples below.

**BUDGET RECORDS: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS** Item #88
This record series consists of any documentation supporting budget matters, including but not limited to working papers, agency staff analyses, drafts, budget requests, or other supporting documentation relating to the development, modification, or implementation of an agency's final approved budget. See also "BUDGET RECORDS: APPROVED ANNUAL BUDGET."

RETENTION:
a) Record copy. 3 fiscal years provided applicable audits have been released.
b) Duplicates. Retain until obsolete, superseded, or administrative value is lost.

CONTRACTS/LEASES/AGREEMENTS: NON-CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT Item #65
This record series consists of legal documents, correspondence, reports, etc., relating to the negotiation, fulfillment, and termination of non-capital improvement contracts, leases, or agreements to which the agency is a party. In addition, it includes the various contracts, leases, or agreements entered into for the purchase of goods and services such as the purchase of gas, fuel oil, and annual purchases of inventory-maintained items. See also “CONTRACTS/LEASES/AGREEMENTS: CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT/REAL PROPERTY” and “BARGAINING RECORDS.”

RETENTION:
a) Record copy. 5 fiscal years after completion or termination of contract/lease/agreement provided applicable audits have been released.
b) Duplicates. Retain until obsolete, superseded, or administrative value is lost.

The listed items are a suggestion and not an inclusive list. It is suggested that selected items are reviewed annually to determine if additional items are needed. Many item descriptions are similar or may overlap. Items with a record retention schedule of “Retain until obsolete, superseded, or administrative value is lost” were not listed.

The suggested file outline includes numbers beside many folders. These numbers match current work with record retention policies. For example, Budget files list #88 because budget items are #88 on the record retention schedule. To archive old budget files they can be moved to an external media device, labeled with the year, document type, and item filing number, and sent to records retention for proper retention, and disposal. Annual review and archiving of records should be considered.

Fiscal: There are rules regarding documents pertaining to finance. Ensuring that the county is in compliance with laws is the responsibility of employees working in areas such as legal, purchasing, risk, and accounting. Accounts receivable and accounts payable retain copies of invoices and payments that move through their sections. Recycling Outreach employee responsibility is restricted to following the rules and policies regarding financial documents and to supporting accounting in joint work, for example, by ensuring the accuracy and timely processing of invoices before signing off on them.

Historic: After you’ve checked to see if a document is needed for administrative, legal, or fiscal reasons, a last consideration is if the document needs to be kept for historic reasons. Staff is asked to think creatively when considering historic use of a document. For example, this unit has produced a Recycling Directory for many years. That document has been widely distributed to the public and it has a lot of information in it. Though staff is not legally bound to keep twenty years of printed Recycling Directories, they may wish to do so incase those directories may be referenced in the future. When retaining historic files, dispose of unnecessary supporting documents and copies. Filtering what types of information are kept helps to maintain file storage space, and helps future users find what content is important quickly.

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Archiving and When to Create Files

One component to having a successful large shared file organizing system is to ensure that what is being saved needs to be there, what needs to be saved is getting there, and document copies are being made only when necessary. These factors are always a consideration, but are especially important when creating files is part of daily or regular operations.

Pinellas County backs up electronic files in shared drives, which means it is unnecessary to keep copies if files (paper, copies of email, and copies on a personal computer) in case the shared drive was deleted or lost in some way.

Printing or creating an electronic copy of an email or another document should only be done when other documentation doesn’t exist, and documentation may be necessary.

Employees making multiple versions of files (frequently noted with dates or version numbering abbreviations) are encouraged to delete drafts and working papers after their administrative value is lost. This practice is important anywhere to save server or disc space, but is especially important in a shared drive to make clear to colleagues which files are current.

When sending messages to members of your team referencing a document on your shared drive, consider posting the file’s path instead of attaching the file, to discourage email recipients copying the document themselves. Sending a path to a file instead of attaching it also shows team members how to find the information you’re referencing in the future.

Employees are encouraged to participate in the shared drive as a whole system, finding and using files in logical areas, rather than keeping individual organization and filing systems with personal copies of documents.

An example of when documentation should and shouldn’t be created and saved lies in the following workflow example:

The Tours and Presentations program requires use of buses, which the county uses under a contract with a vendor named Astro Bus. PCSW staff and Astro frequently communicate daily regarding schedules and schedule changes by phone and email. Astro Bus sends the county invoices biweekly, which are checked for accuracy by staff before they are sent to be paid. In this case:

- Phone conversations should be documented by personal notation and important phone discussions should be followed up by an email recapping the conversation, creating a physical record as an extra precaution.
- Emails exchanged that pertain only to work covered in biweekly invoices do not need to be copied off of Microsoft Outlook onto the shared drive or personal drives, because that information is retained in invoices. Staff is responsible for checking email as needed to determine invoice accuracy.
- Emails regarding changes to the contract as a whole (change in scope of contract, performance expectations, deliverable timelines, etc.), that are not captured in the biweekly invoice should be copied out of Microsoft Outlook and retained under Administration / Contracts.
Invoices do not have to be kept by Recycling Outreach staff, as they are kept by Accounting.

When choosing to store files, consider how many there are and how large they are. Keeping one biweekly invoice takes up considerably less space than keeping 40 emails that might be exchanged in two weeks, yet both might contain the same information. Having fewer files helps people who need information in the future find only the information that they need.

Some of the largest files are pictures and graphics. If a large number of photos are necessary for the program, consider taking smaller photos, taking fewer photos systematically, shortening the expiration date after which photos are removed from the shared drive, or obtaining more storage space permission or hardware.

When creating a large number of similar files, consider a central place to collect information in a condensed searchable form. For example, the tour program replaces about 200 individual tour booking documents with one Excel spreadsheet that can analyze and report on information such as participant numbers, and zip codes of citizens served with the program.

Next Steps
1. Decide on our top folders, and create a spare folder labeled “Archive Aug 2013”
2. Have reviewers move anything they want to get rid of into Archive Aug 2013 rather than deleting it.
3. Get all our stuff (WRO) in one place
4. Divide who sorts what