

State of Michigan Records Management Services

Guide: Organizing Records

Users are responsible for organizing folders and documents. Effective management of records does not happen by accident - it is the result of good planning. The goal is to have a filing system that makes retrieval of information fast and easy, especially if the records will be retrieved years after the person who originally filed them left the office. This guide provides advice about managing both paper and electronic filing systems.

Filing Tips:

- **Chronological Retention Periods:** Applies to records that will be destroyed a specified amount of time after they are created. Organize the folders chronologically, creating separate folders for each month or year. It may be useful to organize a year's worth of files alphabetically or numerically for easy identification. Pull all of the folders for the month or year when the retention period is met, instead of looking through the entire filing system to find the correct folders, or weeding the contents of folders. It is recommended that the folder name contain the relevant date.
- **Conditional Retention Periods:** Applies to records that will be destroyed after they become inactive, because a case or project closed, a contract or license expired, an event took place, etc. Organize the folders by entity (such as a person, business, group, location, project, object, assigned number, etc.). Pull entire folders as they close, instead of waiting until the end of the month or year. Make this the last step in the standard operating procedures for closure. If you don't do this, you will need to create a process for identifying closed files, like putting closure dates in the folder name, flags, or color coding. Some computer systems allow a "closed" date to be entered, which can be used trigger retention for data and electronic files. Do not weed the contents of active folders (for example, a license renewal or a revised application), unless it is authorized by a Retention and Disposal Schedule.
- **Mixed Retention Periods:** Applies to records that are kept for a specified amount of time after they become inactive. Organize the folders by entity while they are active, and physically move them to a different location when they close. Then, organize the folders by closure date, so a batch can be destroyed when the retention period is met. Be aware that sometimes closed files re-open and need to be moved back to the active filing system.
- **Alphabetic Filing:** Establish naming conventions for how names will be displayed and modified, if necessary.
- **Numeric Filing:** Create a tool for looking up assigned numbers, since numbers may not be known by users.
- **Large Files:** It may be helpful to create sub-folders to separate document types, such as applications, licenses and case-related correspondence.
- **Check Out:** Establish a system (such as out cards or logs) for identifying who checked out a file and when it was checked out. Document check in for returned files.

File Plans:

File plans provide a tiered structure for organizing records. They are especially useful for coordinating a centralized filing system. There are many types of file plans. The following table is an example of a hierarchical file plan structure that will make disposition easy to implement.

File Plan Level	Content	Naming Example	Explanation
I 	Record Series	Case Files (Active)	A record series, like a file cabinet, contains all files related to a particular business process. A Retention and Disposal Schedule will define how long these records are kept.
II 	Folder	Case #123 (Opened 2015, Closed TBD)	Folders contain all documents related to a specific entity within the record series. Naming conventions will promote consistency and help with retrieval. Retention is applied at this level, as the records for the entity age or close.
III 	Documents	Case #123 Application 2015, Case #123 License 2015	Document within a folder should have the same retention period to avoid weeding individual documents. Sub-folders or tabs can be created for document types, if it will make retrieval easier.