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Preparing Electronic Records for Transfer to the State Archives

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INTRODUCTION

The following document provides recommendations about how to best prepare electronic records for transfer and permanent storage at the State Archives. The State Archives accepts electronic records from state agencies and local units of government that are governed by a records retention schedule with a disposition of transfer.

It is the responsibility of the creating agency to appropriately manage records prior to transfer, with good faith effort made by the records creator or records manager to delete non-records, transitory records, and purely personal material. State Archives staff are not familiar with the inner workings of each state agency, so while State Archives staff will make efforts to screen for those items, that work should be done by the agency prior to transfer. The ultimate goal should be to send only well-managed content that is governed by an approved records schedule designating them for transfer.

RECORDS INVENTORIES

In order to understand the electronic records held by your agency, it may be necessary to conduct some type of inventory or assessment. If your agency implements an electronic records management system, you may be able to leverage the capabilities of that system to conduct an assessment of records to be transferred.

The State Archives also has an inventory template available for agencies to implement if needed. This template can help you identify what kinds of electronic records you have and the applicable General Record Schedule (GRS) or records Retention/Disposition Authorization (RDA). This can help you determine what needs to be transferred to the State Archives, what should be retained at your agency, and what can be deleted.

See the State Archives [guidance on managing electronic records](#) for more information.

ITEMS THAT SHOULD NOT BE TRANSFERRED

Not all electronic files are public records. This section lists several different types of files that you may come across and can be deleted as non-records as well as highlights items you would likely purge from your system as a matter of following appropriate drive management best practices.

- **File copies** – According to [Wis. Stat. § 16.61\(2\)\(b\)](#), file copies are not public records and should not be transferred to the State Archives. Individuals often use the words “copy” or “backup” attached to file or folder names to hold multiple versions of projects they are working on. You should be able to do a keyword search for these words on the targeted file folders to quickly locate and eliminate these items.
- **Draft / Version documents** – According to [Wis. Stat. § 16.61\(2\)\(b\)\(5\)](#), drafts of documents are not public records. Unless there is a valid business reason for doing otherwise, such as drafts with substantive comments or that have been shared beyond your work group, send only the final copy of a document. Where multiple versions are deemed to be important, they should be clearly labeled as such to eliminate any confusion as to which is the final item of record.
- **Rescued or recovered documents** – Recovered files usually result from files that were accidentally deleted and later recovered from another source. Oftentimes, the word “recovered” will be attached to the folder or file name. If they are valued documents, rename and categorize them correctly. If they have no further value, they should be deleted.
- **Empty file folders** – Empty folders contain no records and have no long-term value. Delete them and do not transfer them to the State Archives.
- **-.tmp files** – These files tend to live at the root of file folders. They are temporary files created by the system and can be safely deleted.
- **.zip files** - .zip files are packages of compressed files that are often used to move files from one location to another or are method for packaging applications or files that are downloaded. Once received, the files are “unzipped” and moved to a location where they can be used. Since the files are likely in use elsewhere, the original .zip packages should be deleted and not transferred to the State Archives.
- **Application Files** – Application files are often found in personal drives and shared drives for specialized software that is used by a department or division. Do not transfer application files (.exe) unless they are needed to read records in proprietary formats that are unable to be migrated to any other format. Application files rapidly lose their value over time since they either become obsolete or are replaced by an upgraded version. If a specific application file is needed for access to the records, please discuss with the State Archives prior to sending.
- **Supplementary files that provide no additional long-term value** – These files often appear alongside other objects or within large projects. If they are not critical to the functioning or understanding of the primary documents of record, they do not need to be sent. Examples might be notes, reference information for a report, documents sent from other organizations that are not needed in the understanding of the kept content, or a folder of images that were later embedded in a document.

MAKE SENSE OF YOUR RECORDS

Once your digital content has been reviewed for the items in the previous section, the remaining records need to be organized in preparation of transferring to the State Archives.

- **Organize your records** - State Archives staff may perform some basic arrangement/organization on your records when they are transferred, but organizing your records prior to transfer will help ensure a smooth transfer process and ensure the records make sense when accessed by the public. It will also help you identify non-records and confidential records that need to be flagged. If records do not already have an organization scheme, make an effort to group them in a meaningful way (e.g. chronologically, by division, by project). Clear folder names are extremely helpful.

At the very least, *the top-level folders in the transfer should be labeled with an RDA number*. The file structure beneath this top level will vary depending on the files being transferred, but all the files inside a single top-level folder must belong to the same RDA.

Example folder structure for transfer:

```

└─ LocalGovCorrespondence_00003000/
   └─ Email Correspondence 2010/
   └─ Email Correspondence 2011/
└─ StateArchivistSubjFiles_00019000/
   └─ Reports/
   └─ MOU/
   └─ Correspondence/
└─ OrgPlanningDocs_ADM00017/
   └─ Publication X/
      └─ Photographs/
      └─ Correspondence/
   └─ Publication Y/
      └─ Correspondence/
      └─ Donor Files/
```

The State Archives has developed a number of [guidance and best practice documents](#) to help you organize and manage your electronic records. Following these practices throughout the lifecycle of the records will help manage the eventual transfer or deletion of the records according to records schedules.

- **Review groups of records as a series** – Identifiable groups of records related to a specific topic (ex: a specific project or program) are sometimes best viewed as a discrete collection within a whole body of documents. Using this technique, it may be easier to identify items of record within a folder and its sub-folders.
- **Image collections** - If you are transferring large photograph collections, it will help the State Archives if you include a spreadsheet with metadata about images, such as date, event, and key people and places. This will enable State Archives staff to organize these photographs and make them accessible. If you are including a spreadsheet or other type of inventory in your transfer, please identify it for State Archives staff.

RECORDS THAT MAY REQUIRE SPECIAL HANDLING

There are some records that will require discussion with the State Archives prior to transferring. These are records that may have special use restrictions at the State Archives or may be in a format that would be difficult to preserve and access.

- **Files containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII)** – [Wis. Stat. § 19.62\(5\)](#) defines personally identifiable information (PII) as information that can be associated with a particular individual through one or more identifiers. This often includes items such as addresses, phone numbers, and Social Security numbers. Files containing this type of information should be strictly evaluated. If they are sent to the State Archives for long-term preservation, they should be organized and identified. A discussion of how this material will be managed at the State Archives will take place prior to the transfer of the material.
- **Restricted records** – Public records can only be kept confidential if a statute, administrative code, or federal regulation designates them as such. All records which are confidential while in the possession of the creating agency maintain their confidential nature when transferred to the Wisconsin Historical Society ([Wis. Stat. 16.61\(13\)\(d\)](#)).

It is the responsibility of the originating agency to identify records restrictions on the RDA which governs the records. Further, records restricted by attorney-client privilege or other legal mandates must be organized and identified. A discussion of how this material will be managed at the State Archives will take place prior to the transfer of the material.

- **Items in proprietary formats or unknown file extensions** – While the State Archives can accept many file types, proprietary formats offer a special challenge. If you are using some unique program it may be possible to save the information as a .pdf file or some other more common format. Agencies will need to work with State Archives staff to transfer these formats and test options. See [Best Practices for the Selection of Electronic File Formats](#) for further information.
- **External dependencies** – Some files require connection to outside resources in order to work correctly, such as form letters or a spreadsheet populated by a database. These documents will not function when separated from their source documents. If it is necessary to keep an example of this type of document, it would work better to save an example of it in another format such as a .pdf and label it as such (e.g. "StandardConferenceInvitation.pdf").
- **Files that are password protected** – Remove password protection or encryption on all files prior to transferring the record(s) to the State Archives.

TRANSFERRING YOUR RECORDS

If you have not already done so, complete an [Electronic Records Survey](#) and submit it to State Archives staff at govarc@wisconsinhistory.org. This document summarizes the materials that have been identified for transfer and will be reviewed by State Archives staff, who will then contact you with any questions or concerns and initiate the actual transfer of the records using Exactly software.

For an overview of the electronic records transfer process, please refer to [Transferring Electronic Records to the State Archives](#). For detailed instructions on Exactly, the software application used by the State Archives for electronic records transfer, please refer to [Transfer Records to the State Archives with Exactly](#).