



Records Management Bulletin

Records management advice prepared for GNWT employees
by the Records Management Unit of Public Works and Services
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Sharing Information

Information wants to be shared. If you do not believe that, just ask someone to keep a secret for you. The news always spreads. Yet some of us find it hard to share our work-related information with others.

The Importance of Sharing

All organizations run on information. We create it, look for it, find it, use it, and make decisions based on it. However, none of this can happen if you do not share the information that you have with the people who need to know about it.

What this Means in Real Terms

In order to share information with other people, you need to put it in a place where they can get to it. The best way to do this is to set up central areas to keep information.

Sharing Physical Records

Physical records include paper files, as well as things like CDs and DVDs, videotapes, and microfilm. The best way to share these types of records is to keep them in an area that many people can access. You can do this easily by placing all of the filing cabinets in one central location in the office.

Once you have placed all of the physical records in one location, create a file list for them. This is a list of all of the files that are currently in the office. Tell everyone in the office where the list is. That way, everyone will know where the records are. There are many different ways to set up your file list. Check with

your department's records coordinator to find out which method your department is using.

Sharing Electronic Records

Electronic records, such as Word and Excel files, should be saved in a common directory structure on a shared network drive. This works best if everyone in your office agrees to use the same file directory structure. Ideally, your department's network directories should mimic the paper filing system.

Some people protect their documents with a password because they do not want other people to edit them. You should avoid using passwords, because they can make it difficult for others to use the documents. There are other ways to share documents and protect them from changes. One method is to convert the document to a PDF format.

Sharing E-mail Messages

E-mail messages are a special case. Usually, the only person who can access an e-mail message is the person who has the message in his or her e-mail account. It is difficult for others to access the information when that person is away.

Save e-mail messages that contain information that others need in a shared place on the network. Save them as a MSG file. That way, anyone who needs the information can access it.

Sharing Records through E-mail

A common way to share electronic records is to send them from one person to another as an attachment to an e-mail message. Sharing information this way is very easy, but it creates a lot of copies of the record. A single attachment to an e-mail message can end up in many places, including:

- The senders' sent items folder.
- The recipient's in box.
- Any server in between the sender and the recipient.
- The sender and the recipient's network directories.
- Network backup tapes.

All of these copies can lead to confusion over which one is the most up-to-date version. It also costs us money, because we have to pay for and maintain the storage space.

You can reduce the confusion and the number of copies by saving electronic records into a common location on the network. Then, when you want to share a record with someone, you just have to tell him or her where to find it.

Security Issues

While most of the information in your office can be made freely available to everyone who works there, some things should not be shared widely. Some of the types of information that should be less widely shared include:

- Confidential information about clients and employees.
- Legal opinions and issues.

- Decision papers and other materials that may be confidential to the Executive Counsel or the Financial Management Board.

Confidential materials like these should be kept in secure areas. Use locking cabinets or locked file rooms to secure physical records. Give out keys to the cabinets to only a small number of people. The administrative assistant, the manager, and your department's records coordinator should all have keys. These people can be contacted whenever anyone else needs access to the records. At least two people should have keys to the cabinets, in case one of them happens to be away when you need a file.

Save confidential electronic records on network directories that have access restrictions placed on them. These directories only allow certain people to open them and view the contents. The Technology Service Centre (TSC) can set up restricted directories for you.

Summing Up

Information is the backbone of government. In order to serve the public and do our jobs well, we need to share information with our co-workers. The best way to share information is to put it in a place where others can find it.

To make sharing work, everyone in your office needs to agree on where and how information will be stored. Your department's records coordinator can help you decide the best way to store and share your office's information.

For more information, contact your department's records coordinator, or contact the Records Management Unit at 920-3009 or 873-7446