FOLDER STRUCTURE standards

# Why?

Standardizing and maintaining a structured folder system for electronic files will:

1. Assure that users can readily retrieve information they need;
2. Allow users to remove non-record information on a regular basis thereby reducing risks associated with uncontrolled data storage growth; and
3. Streamline the file purging process according to LCC’s requirements for records disposal.

# What To Do

## Document Current Practices

Create documentation explaining the current folder structure of your department, indicating what types of files are currently stored in which folders.

## Develop an Organized Folder Structure

The process of developing a practical and easily understood “folder structure plan” or “file plan” for your department can be an involved process, but with the assistance of the Records Information Specialist it can be done without undue difficulty.

As much as possible, your department should organize your shared folder structure areas according to your designated core activities and in line with the unique types of work conducted by the department. **For example**, a department whose work is primarily project-based may need a folder structure primarily based on project titles and a department whose work is primarily report-based may need a folder structure primarily based on report titles.

Incorporated into your folder structure should be a way to facilitate the regular process of purging files. Some files must be retained for a pre-determined number of years past the date of creation while other files must be retained for a pre-determined number of years past the date that some specific work is completed (grant, construction project, etc.). In some instances, files must be retained until they are superseded (equipment manuals, policies) or until some unpredictable date occurs (death of an employee).

This means that somewhere within your department’s folder structure, folders will have dates in their titles indicating specific years (FY19; FY20) or dates plus events (FY19\_Complete; FY20\_Superceded). Where the time component factors in will vary depending on the type of work your department most often engages in. **For example**, departments engaging in accounting or budgeting work may indicate the year on a high level of their structure, whereas a department focused more on project work may have the time indicated in a lower sub-folder.

We understand that after looking at their current folder structure, some departments will determine that they are fairly well-organized already. If this is the case, big changes will most likely be unnecessary.

## Document Organized Folder Structure

Whether you have few changes to make to your department’s folder structure or major changes, your department should document your updated organized shared folder structure in a “folder structure plan” or “file plan.”

Included in this documentation should be:

* A hierarchical structure of folders on your computer/shared drives,
* Clear descriptions of what will be held in each folder (including example documents and major record types), as well as
* How the time component is included in the folder structure.

This will allow for regular and effective purging of record and non-record materials.

# How To Do It

To establish your department’s folder structure (or file) plan, you can complete the following steps:

* 1. Review the current folder structures used by your department to manage various files. Identify the folders most current and most important to the work your department engages in. Create a list of these folders and where they “live” on the file system or other systems your department uses to manage your work. (You can create this list electronically or use a separate sheet of paper to document the folders.)
  2. Identify the types of work your department engages in. You can refer to any formal documentation of your department’s core activities and/or your general knowledge of your department. **For example**, your list may say “Our department engages in work that is ***Accounting-based***, ***Administrative-based, Budgeting-based, Business Process-Support-based, Grant-based, Payroll-based, Procurement-based,*** or ***Project-based***”
  3. Review your current folder structure identified in Step 1. Based on your answers to Step 2, ask the following questions:
     1. How does our current folder structure support our department’s type of work?
     2. How do we include the time component in our structure?
     3. Can our current structure be easily modified to more clearly reflect the type of work our department does?
  4. Your answers to the above questions will shape your next steps.
     1. If you determine that your department’s folder structure is in need of a major overhaul, contact the Records Information Specialist ([LCC-RIM@lcc.edu](mailto:LCC-RIM@lcc.edu)) to develop a more effective structure.
     2. If you determine that your department’s folder structure is satisfactory with only a few minor changes, you can move on to the last step, Step 5.
  5. Create documentation that shows how your new (or existing) folder structure is organized and provides clear descriptions of what will be held in each folder (including example documents and major record types). Be sure the time component is included in the folder structure.

***TIP:*** *Sub-folders can be created on an as-needed basis. As sub-folders are created, make sure to create folder titles that are concise and clear about what will be included in the folder. This can eliminate redundancies in filenames and make it easier for anyone looking for files*.

# Sources:

Northumbria University School of Computing, Engineering & Information Science, DATUM: Research Data Management. Folder and File Name Guidance. 2014.

University of Illinois, Records and Information Management Services. [Folder Structure](https://uofi.app.box.com/v/FolderStructure). 2015.