



# Managing Vital Records

## DEFINITIONS

**Vital Records** are essential for the continuation or survival of an organization if a disaster occurs. Such records are necessary to recreate legal, financial and operational status and to determine the rights and obligations of employees, customers, students and faculty. These usually consist of about 3-7 % of records created.

**Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)** is a procedural document that identifies essential functions and plans for the continuation of these functions during a disaster or emergency.

**File Plan** documents a department/unit's records management procedures. Assists with identifying and effectively managing university records and providing accessibility.

**\*The 8 Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles®**

1. **Accountability**
2. **Transparency**
3. **Integrity**
4. **Protection**
5. **Compliance**
6. **Availability**
7. **Retention**
8. **Disposition**

*Best Practices for Management of University Records*

**SUMMARY:** In collaboration with UW-Madison Information Technology, UW-Madison Police Department and UW-Madison Office of Risk Management the University Records Management Program has developed this Job Aid to affirm the importance of **University Vital Records**. A vital records plan should be included in addition to a [Continuity of Operations Plan \(COOP\)](#).

It is the responsibility of each department to effectively manage their records and be in compliance with university, state and federal laws. Vital records management is a necessary aspect of records management for continuing operations in the event of a disaster. Time and resources will be required to develop a vital records plan. Managing university records is an *ONGOING PROCESS*; these plans ought be reviewed and updated regularly.

## WHAT ARE VITAL RECORDS?

All records created in the course of university business are important, however only a small percent (3-7%) are considered **VITAL** to the function of the university. These records are fundamental for the continuance of operations and contain information critical to the continuation or survival of an organization during, or immediately following a crisis.

### There are two types of Vital Records:

1. **Emergency Operating:** These are essential to the continued functioning during an emergency situation (within the first 72 hours).
  - ✓ In addition to the COOP, other essential operations required to continue business functions include, but are not limited to: organizational charts, staff list, policies and procedures.
2. **Legal and Financial Rights:** These are essential to the protection of university assets and rights.
  - ✓ This includes, but is not limited to: accounting, payroll, personnel files, leases, contracts, licensing and compliance records.

## STEPS TO IDENTIFY VITAL RECORDS:

- ✓ Identify staff to carry out this process and those who will have essential responsibilities during an emergency.
- ✓ Examine functions of the department and essential records associated with them.
- ✓ Know what records you create and maintain a [File Plan](#).
- ✓ Recognize the stakeholders who depend on your services and those you depend on.
- ✓ Review records retention schedules, identify relevant statutes, regulations and standards.



# Job Aid

## STEPS TO CREATE A VITAL RECORDS PLAN:

1. Risk Assessment and Business Impact Analysis
  - ✓ Conduct a site survey to identify current risks; location, format, security controls and vulnerable areas.
  - ✓ Identify potential risks; physical, environmental human error, hacking, etc. Then assess probability and risk of threats.
  - ✓ Implement a priority scale for vital records; 1.) Records that are necessary for emergency response (e.g. COOP), 2.) Records necessary to resume and continue operations (e.g. Payroll) and 3.) Records required for the protection of legal and financial rights (e.g. Contracts).
  
2. Establish Record Protection Strategies
  - ✓ Take the necessary steps to minimize the likelihood of loss of records.
  - ✓ Increase security off-site storage, backups, duplication and dispersal, or off-site storage.
  - ✓ Have a File Plan to maintain good records management practices.
  - ✓ Purchase supplies and equipment for protection or recovery. Rolls of plastic sheeting, work gloves, protective face masks, fire proof cabinets or secure off-site storage, list of vendors.
  
3. Implementation
  - ✓ Train essential staff of procedures that would take place in an emergency.
  - ✓ Maintain multiple copies of the final report and/or procedure manual in different locations.
  - ✓ Update or review the plan, replace obsolete copies or media, consult with the retention schedules.

<b>Vital Record Information:</b>	
<b>Record Series/Title:</b>	<b>GRS #:</b> UWXX0001
<b>Format:</b>	<b>Priority:</b> 1-3
<b>Location:</b> Where and how are these records currently stored? File cabinet, folder, shared drive. Are there duplicates?	
<b>Potential Issues:</b> What are possible circumstances in which these records could be damaged? I.e., water damage, human error, and obsolete media.	
<b>Protection Strategy:</b> What steps are taken in case of a disaster? If a disaster were to occur, what will the procedure be to preserve these records? I.e. In case of water damage paper records will be digitized and stored in an external hard drive (or) copies of records will be transferred to the State Records Center.	

### Further Information:

- For more information and guidance please see; *University Employee Guide: Creating a Vital Records Plan* or contact the University Records Officer at (608)-262-3284 or email [recmgmt@wisc.edu](mailto:recmgmt@wisc.edu).
- Information was gathered using ANSI/ARMA 5-2010 and University of Missouri System’s vital records guides.