Records Management for University Employees

Why is Records Management Important?

We all have a stake in ensuring that university records are appropriately managed to facilitate the transaction of business, ensure public accountability, and preserve the University's history. The benefits of effectively managing records include more efficient information retrieval, reduced operating costs, and reduced redundancy. Good records management also ensures that administrative, legal, audit, research, and historical interests are served.

Your Responsibilities for Records Management

As a university employee, you create and receive records that document the university's activities. The public records and information you manage as part of your job responsibilities belong to the University and the State of Wisconsin.

You are responsible for:

- Identifying and appropriately managing public records created and received as part of your job duties at the university
- Filing and organizing paper and electronic documents so they are readily accessible
- Retaining public records for the appropriate length of time
- Disposing of public records in accordance with an approved records retention schedule – sometimes referred to as a Records Disposition Authorization (RDA)
- Maintaining confidential and sensitive information appropriately
- Disposing of information that is not a public record
- Knowing where to go for help when you have questions about managing records

Wisconsin Laws & UW Policies on Records Management

Employees should manage university records in accordance with established State laws and University policies. The laws and policies that guide records management practices at UW-Madison include:

- Wisconsin State Statutes
  - §19.32(2) – defines "records" for purposes of records access and disclosure provisions of §§ 19.31–19.39 (known as the public records law or the open records law)
  - §16.61(2)(b) – defines "public records" for the purposes of records retention and disposition
- Wisconsin Administrative Rule 12 – electronic records management standards and requirements
- Board of Regents Policy 3-2 – Public Records Management

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What is a Public Record?

Public records are determined by content and can exist in any format (e.g., paper or electronic). Public records may document university activities and actions, support financial obligations or legal claims, and communicate organizational requirements.

Examples include, but are not limited to, correspondence, agreements, studies, reports, requests, calendars, meeting minutes, project records, contracts, grants, case files, guidance documents, social media posts, maps, policies, and procedures.

What is a Non–Public Record?

- Reference materials and stock forms *(e.g., catalogs, manuals, technical journals, blank forms)*
- Convenience copies *(e.g., duplicate copies of correspondence or reports)*
- Drafts and working papers *(e.g., drafts without substantive comments, rough notes, or calculations)*
- General announcements and unsolicited correspondence *(e.g., all staff emails, spam)*
- Auto-generated response or confirmations (e.g., automated calendar requests and notifications

How Long Do I Keep Public Records?

Public records must be kept for the period specified in an applicable records retention schedule. Records retention schedules:

- Group and describe related public records
- Mandate how long public records are kept
- Mandate what happens to public records at the end of the retention period

Records retention schedules approved for use at UW-Madison are listed on the Records Management [website](#).

How Do I Manage Records?

- Learn your unit's records management policies and procedures or develop them, if none exist
- Know what records retention schedules apply to your unit's records
- Dispose of or transfer records to the University Archives based on approved records retention schedules
- Do not destroy records before the retention period has been reached, if there is a pending audit or litigation involving the records, or if the records do not have a records retention schedule

Where Can I Get Help or Additional Training?

You can ask questions and get additional help by contacting the [Records Management Program](#). We also have additional training on records management topics on our [website](#).