Information
Management

# Managing Information @ Work

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GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

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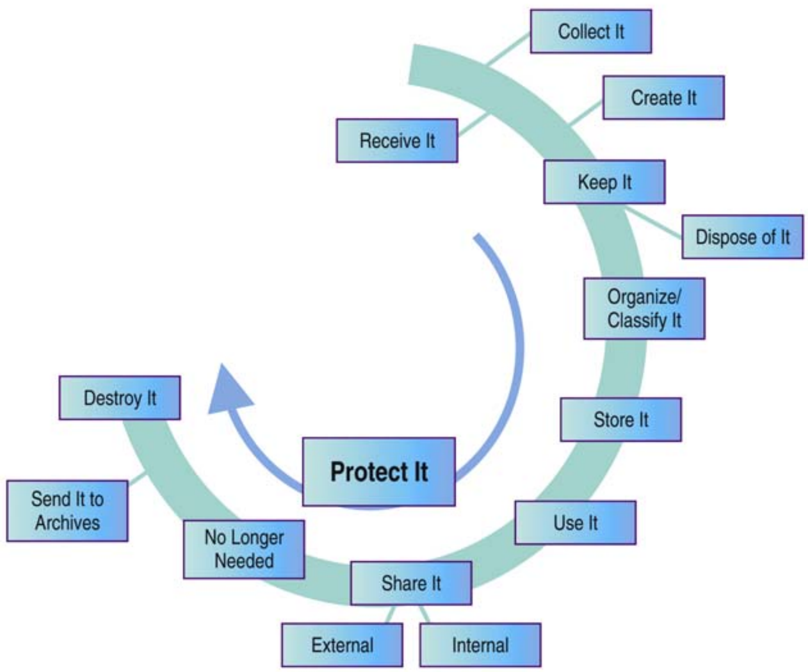
# 1.
# Introduction

This booklet provides you with a summary of practical tips for each stage of the "information flow". It is designed for you to use as a quick reference for each stage you are at in the information life cycle. As a result, you will find some of the points are intentionally repeated.




**Government of Alberta's Vision for Information Management:**

"The Government of Alberta will manage its information in a disciplined and coordinated manner to optimize the value of our investment in information assets, support effective and efficient operations and improve the delivery of service to Albertans."
From Information Assets in Government: A Management Framework
It's Up to You!

# 2.
# Applying the Information Management Principles

## Accessibility

We need to manage our information in a way that anyone who needs it and is authorized to see it can access it efficiently.

## Usability

We need to ensure the information is designed to meet the needs of employees and stakeholders and is timely, relevant, accurate and easy to use.

## Accountability

We don't own the information; it belongs to the Government of Alberta. It is, in fact, a strategic asset of government. We are the guardians of this information and we are accountable to manage it accordingly.

## Integrated Approach

Making decisions to manage and protect information at every stage of its life cycle is the key to an effective information management strategy.

## Planned and Coordinated Approach

We need to plan and coordinate the management of our information as part of a broader, strategic approach to planning our business and information technology.

## Optimize the Value of Information Assets

Information is a valuable asset. It's our job to ensure that it's managed today, that it's available if a disaster occurs, and that it's preserved permanently when needed for research.

# 3.
# Receive It

Regardless of the format it is in, make your information management decisions as soon as you receive information rather than holding and piling it as it comes in.

- ☑ Do I need this to do my job?
- ☑ What is the source?
- ☑ Is this for my information?
- ☑ Is this confidential?
- ☑ Is this for my action?
  - ☑ When and how?
  - ☑ Who else should I involve?

## Sort and label immediately

Decide how to label the information, share it, organize it, format it and determine what you and others will use it for as soon as you receive it.

It is at this point that you start to make important information management decisions.

## Set up electronic files similar to your paper files

Set up e-mail in-box folders with the same classification scheme used by your department. Some people find it useful to set up 3 main folders for the e-mails of: Action, Waiting and Read.

## Schedule specific times to deal with e-mail

Get into a habit of dealing with your e-mail in batches rather than continuously facing e-mail interruptions throughout the day.

> "Fighting data asphyxiation is difficult but possible."
> William Van Winkle

# 4.
# Collect It

Keep the end in mind so you and others can get the most strategic value from the information.

- ☑ What do I need to do my job?
  - ☑ What do I need to collect? Why?
  - ☑ How will I and others use it in the future?
  - ☑ Does this show how the decision process or business transaction was made?
- ☑ Is this personal information?
- ☑ Do I have the authority to collect this?
- ☑ Do I really need this? Is the collection required or authorized?

## Collect personal information only if you need it and have authority to do so

Many people collect personal information simply because it has always been done that way. This is not a good enough reason.

The FOIP Act limits the collection of, and provides specific processes regarding, personal information. When in doubt – check it out!

## Use a process that enables access and protection of the information

Ask yourself whether you will need to share the information with others and how you can protect personal information. For example, when creating a table, keep personal information in one column that you can sort and hide before sharing the information.

## Make sure it's correct and in context

Validate input to make sure it is accurate when you start. Maintain information in a manner that ensures the original intent and context remains.

## Practice "just in time" collection

Make a plan for the exact information you will need and when you will need it. Collecting information too far ahead of time may make it necessary for you to ensure the data is current when you require it.

> "Our two greatest problems are gravity and paperwork. We can lick gravity, but sometimes the paperwork is overwhelming."
>
> Dr. Werner von Braun

# 5.
# Create It

Create records so you and others can see the complete and objective picture in the future.

- ☑ How can I best communicate direction or recommendations to others?
- ☑ Will this prove how I have done my job?
- ☑ Will this information be needed for future use?

## Write professionally and objectively

How comfortable would you be seeing your record printed in your local paper?

Stick to facts, data and recommendations rather than opinions. Pay close attention to e-mails; avoid using a casual tone, multiple topics and broad distribution lists.

## Create records that are clear and complete

Get to the point, yet provide enough background so that information won't be misinterpreted. Ensure it contains a date and that you can track versions (draft vs. final).

## Use consistent and meaningful subject lines

Use a title that will explain it most simply for others and make retrieving the document easy. Most information is filed and retrieved by subject using common or standard language.

## Use one subject per document, when possible

Using one subject per document, whenever possible, will simplify filing and retrieving the information. Be particularly aware of e-mail – avoid including many subjects in your e-mails.

# 6.
# Keep It or Dispose of It

Review the value of information, records and documents to assess whether to keep it or dispose of it.

- ☑ What future value might this have?
- ☑ Is this required to maintain/provide evidence of business transactions?
- ☑ Is there a legal obligation?
- ☑ Do you and others still need to refer to this?
- ☑ Does your office have a Retention and Disposition Schedule for this record?
- ☑ Does this have only short-term value?
- ☑ Is this only a memory jogger?
- ☑ Does someone else have a master or original?
- ☑ Has the information been summarized in another record?
- ☑ Can I support why I disposed of this?
- ☑ Am I disposing confidential, sensitive and personal information securely?

## Keep if a FOIP request is received

If you destroy records at this time, you are breaking the law.

## Secure "confidential" shredding

Make sure your confidential shredding is kept in a private, secure location.

## Destroy transitory records when use has passed

A "transitory record" is one that has only immediate or short-term value to an organization and will not be required again when its use is over. This calls for individual judgement, as one employee may consider a document transitory and another may consider it to be official due to their roles and the way they use information.

## Dispose of records in all formats

When disposing of paper files, do not forget your computer files.

## Make sure the final version is on the official file

Make sure your file is complete with the final version on the official file.

When in doubt – check it out!

## Protect against unintentional or unauthorized disclosure of information

Do not discuss individual client or government business in public places. Keep your desk and computer screen clear of sensitive information when you are away from your workstation.

## Follow the FOIP Act when disclosing personal information

FOIP legislates us to protect personal information. The Act outlines very specific, limiting criteria for disclosing personal information in a secure way. When in doubt – check it out!

# 7.
# Organize/Classify It

## Organize/Classify It

Organize so you and others can use information effectively and efficiently.

- ☑ How is this information used?
- ☑ How does my organization classify/file this type of information?
- ☑ How would someone find this in the future?
- ☑ Who else will need to use this?
- ☑ How will this be protected?

## Keep related information together

Most people retrieve information by subject. Keep project information together. Your organization's classification scheme will provide a good guideline.

## Use the same file naming scheme for electronic and hardcopies

Remember to create the same naming schemes for your electronic information.

## Organize it by subject, sub-category – then chronologically

Put like information in sub-categories together in your broad subject files for easy retrieval. For example, a project file might have sub-categories related to meetings, contract information and background.

## Use internal guidelines when organizing records

Remember to use the classification scheme your organization uses and organize your files in a similar fashion.

## Tackle the most recent documents first

If you're buried in information, don't let the process overwhelm you. Start with what you get today, then chip away at the older documents later.

# 8.
# Store It

Store information with accessibility and security in mind.

- ☑ Does this need to be accessible to others?
- ☑ Are the files I'm working with stored so others can access them?
- ☑ How will I limit access to personal, sensitive or confidential information?
- ☑ Do others know that I have these files?

## Put personal and confidential information away when not in use

Follow a "clean desk policy". Get in the habit of putting information away as you go. Not only will it keep you more organized, but it will help reduce stress, keep you focused, and ensure security of personal information.

## Make sure your work is accessible to others

Make sure those who need the information you are working with can access it when they need to – even if you are away. Keep files you are working on safe and incorporate them into the official file system.

## Put all similar information in one place

Remember to file and store according to your department's classification scheme and other guidelines that your work unit uses.

When in doubt – check it out!

> "60% of the average worker's time is spent processing paper documents."
> David Shenk,
> Author of "Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut" (1997)

# 9.
# Use It

Use information in a way that adds value to this strategic asset.

- ☑ Is this personal information?
- ☑ Do I have the individual's consent to use this for a different purpose?
- ☑ Is this use consistent with the initial purpose of collection?

## Follow the FOIP Act when using personal information

Review the FOIP Act limitations regarding the use of personal information.

## Limit access to other sensitive information on a need-to-know basis

Make sure your colleagues can access the information they need to do their jobs. This does not mean they need to see information unrelated to their activities.

## Protect the integrity of the data

Make sure that errors don't sneak in through data entry. Make interpretations of data consistent with the use it was collected for.

# 10.
# Share It

If you have followed the nuggets to this point, you have developed a stewardship approach that helps share information inside and outside your department.

*INTERNAL*

- ☑ Is the organization getting the best strategic value?
- ☑ Who downstream could benefit from this "output"?
- ☑ Is accessibility balanced with protection?

*EXTERNAL*

- ☑ How can we share public information with the public?
- ☑ What is the "harm" if shared and if not shared?
- ☑ What limits are there on the recipient's use?
- ☑ How do I get it there securely?
- ☑ Is accessibility balanced with protection?

## Identify opportunities for "routine disclosure" and "active dissemination"

It is not "your" information. You need to share it to increase the value it has to offer.

If the public, other units or departments routinely request certain information, find routine ways to disclose this information (e.g., web site = routine disclosure) or ways to send it to those groups who can make good use of it (e.g., mail outs, brochures = active dissemination). Obtain the necessary approval before sharing information externally.

# 11.
# No Longer Needed

Over time we generally find that we refer to old information less and less. At this point we may want to make decisions to store the information elsewhere.

- ☑ Is the information of ongoing value to the organization?
- ☑ How often are you or your co-workers using this?
- ☑ Is this taking up valuable cabinet or disk/system storage space?
- ☑ Is there a lower cost storage solution?

Set up a routine review of your files to determine their value; quarterly for the files you are working with, and annually for the files in your general filing system. If the value of keeping it close at hand is greater than the cost of storing it, keep it.

Use the Records Retention and Disposition Schedule to determine what to do with files that have less value.

# 12.
# Protect It

Your role in protecting the government's strategic asset is critical throughout the information flow. Here are some protection tips and techniques that are organized by different information media and processes.

- ☑ How sensitive is this information?
  - ☑ restricted, confidential, internal use only, public
- ☑ What are likely threats or windows of risk?
- ☑ How do I best protect my information in all forms or formats?

## Paper

- Use secured storage areas.
- Follow a "clean desk policy".
- Locate fax machines in restricted areas.
- Place in folders, rather than keep loose.
- Use the locks on your cabinets and desks.

## Computer

- Keep public and personal information in separate directories.
- Dispose of all computers (including personal data devices) through your IT group.
- Use the screen saver function to limit casual access to your documents.

## Portable Devices

- Keep portable computers physically secured in a proper storage area at all times when not in use.
- Do not leave unattended in a vehicle or public area.
- Use passwords to protect.
- Don't store sensitive material on the hard drive.

## Passwords

- Use one!
- Protect it

- Select a password that is not obvious to others.
- Don't tell others what your password is.
- Write it down and keep it in a secure place.
- Don't leave it near your computer.
- Change it frequently.

## Telecommuting / Off-Site

- Limit taking sensitive information out of your secured area.
- Avoid using your home computer to process sensitive information.
- Don't leave information where unauthorized people can access it.
- Leave a list of what you take home at the office.
- Protect it with firewall/virus protection.

## Transmission (fax, e-mail, cellular phones)

- Use caution when sending or receiving information through e-mail, intranet and internet.
- Limit transmission from non-secure sites (e.g., your home).
- Call the person you are faxing to before and after transmission.
- Limit discussing personal information over cell phones.

## Transporting Documents

- Double check when sending information.
- Send to a specific individual.
- Ask the recipient for confirmation of receipt.
- Include your complete contact information.
- Seal it.
- Don't label "confidential", instead use "To be opened by addressee only".
- Use reliable carriers.
- Get a shipment reference number.
- Use registered mail for sensitive information.

## Disposal

- Follow IT standards to dispose of all computers and electronic storage media.
- Remember that deleting a file doesn't remove it; it's still retrievable.

- Keep a record of disposal information.

# 13.
# Where Can I Go For More?

## Resources in your Department:

- Senior Records Officer
- FOIP Coordinator
- Chief Information Officer

## Other Resources:

### *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy*

Web site: www.gov.ab.ca/foip/
FOIP Help Desk: (780) 427-5848
FOIP Help Desk E-mail: foiphelpdesk@gov.ab.ca

### *Government Information and Records Management Program*

Web site: www.im.gov.ab.ca
Telephone: (780) 422-2657

### *Office of the Corporate Chief Information Officer*

Web site: www.gov.ab.ca/cio/
Telephone: (780) 422-8545
CIO E-mail: cio@gov.ab.ca

### *Government of Alberta IT Security Policy*

Web site: www.sharp.gov.ab.ca [internal site]

### *Provincial Archives of Alberta*

Web site: www.cd.gov.ab.ca/preserving/paa_2002/index.asp
Telephone: (780) 427-1750

### *Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner*

Web site: www.oipc.ab.ca/home/
Telephone: (780) 422-6860
OIPC E-mail: generalinfo@oipc.ab.ca

## Other Related Training:

- FOIP
- Records Management Orientation
- Time Management

Check out the ACSC Course Calendar for these and other courses designed to help you work more effectively and efficiently.
http://acscinfolink.gov.ab.ca/