Naming Conventions (to be used with ARMS2014 or approved ORS)

The purpose of this document is to assist Government Institutions in the establishment of standard naming conventions for electronic files and folders. In order to properly apply an approved records schedule and efficiently manage the storage and retrieval of records, an Institution must develop and implement naming conventions and filing procedures. While the following document refers specifically to electronic records, similar procedures and conventions should be adopted for the classification of paper records as well. This will ensure consistency in the identification of records regardless of format.

The creation and maintenance of a well-organized electronic directory is extremely important as this will be the key to filing and retrieving records. Because many offices use shared drives and users share the information within these drives, it is important that the creator of a record follows standardized conventions when assigning a filename to a file (as well as the folder structure). Filenames that are clear, consistent and logical will allow users to browse and retrieve files more effectively and efficiently. The following recommendations are split into "Folder Naming Conventions" and "Document Naming Conventions" sections; however, some of the material may apply in both circumstances.

Please note: there are a wide variety of ways to name electronic records – what works for one Government Institution may not work for another. Consult this document, perform online research, talk with other staff members and come up with consistent, easy-to-follow rules that work for your Institution. Ensure your institution's guidelines are communicated to all staff members and are applied consistently. It may be necessary to appoint someone to oversee and monitor the process and ensure compliance with internal procedures.

Folder Naming Conventions

• Folders must be "tagged" with the classification number and title from the approved records schedule (see the example on the next page). This ensures that, in the future, a retention period can easily be attached to the contents of the folder. Folders and documents which do not have classification numbers attached will need to be retroactively classified – a time consuming project for employees.

• A file path in Windows can consist of, at most, 255 characters. This includes main shared drives, unit or branch level folders, subfolders, document names, etc. Instruct users to keep folder and filenames short!

• Try to restrict the number of subfolders that users create. Different operating systems have different capabilities in terms of the number of subfolders you can create and search effectively but in general, try not to go deeper than seven levels "down" into the filing structure. A deep folder structure can be difficult for users to search and utilize efficiently.

• Avoid repeating elements which are contained in folder names or higher levels of classification. Take a look at the example below:

The words "Outreach Committee" are repeated even though the subfolder that they reside in is called "Outreach Committee." This repetition takes up extra space in the file path and needlessly lengthens the folder names.
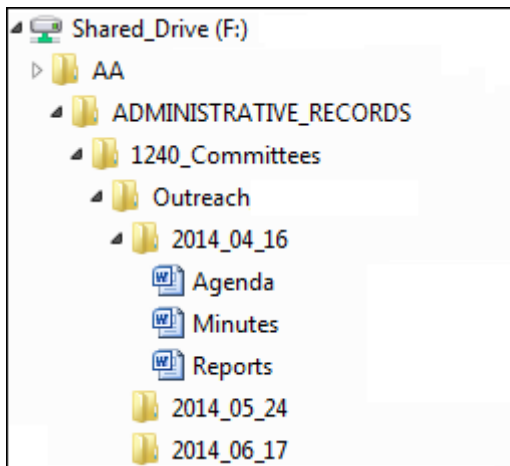
In the example to the left, the extra words have been removed, streamlining the filing structure. The word "Committee" could also be removed from the "Outreach_Committee" folder name as it is already reflected in the folder above.

Document Naming Conventions

- Filenames should be short but meaningful. The filename should accurately describe the record and should be clear enough that it makes sense to others if the record creator is unavailable. When considering the use of acronyms or abbreviations, keep in mind that they should be commonly understood and not overly technical. Acronyms and abbreviations that are easily understood today may not be relevant in several years.

- Do not use articles, conjunctions and other common words in document name unless they help with retrieval (e.g. "the," "and," "for," etc.).

- Create a list of internally-approved "file extensions" that can be used to denote the status of a record or the type of document. Examples include: "dft03" for "draft 3," "fin" for "final," "ltr" for "letter," "v01" for "version 1," etc.

- Use underscores, dashes, or capital letters to separate words. Avoid using spaces or punctuation as it may affect search functions. Spaces are also problematic if material is posted to the Internet – every space may be replaced with a placeholder such as "%20" or "+" which makes addresses hard to read and remember.

- Order the components of a filename in the order that the document will most likely be retrieved. If a document is likely to be searched for by the date it was created, put that element first. If users need to find the document based on a description of the record, put that component first.

- If dates are used in your filenames, the commonly accepted international standard is to use the YYYY_MM_DD format. For example, a record created on July 1, 2013 would use 2013_07_01 in its filename. This format keeps records in chronological order when users sort documents by filename.

- Individual names and/or initials are not typically needed in document titles. Employees come and go and it may be difficult to match a set of initials with a former co-worker, especially in large organizations. In certain cases, it may be necessary to include the position or job title of the record creator. This is preferable to using a specific name as position titles typically change less often than employees.

- If a number is an essential part of the document name, use a "leading zero" – e.g. use "011" and not "11," "02" and not "2," etc. The zero helps to ensure numbers sort properly and in numerical order.

- Some offices use internal tracking or file numbers to catalogue a specific work function. If system has been in place for a number of years and has worked well, keep it in place. The best naming conventions are ones that staff are comfortable with and have experience using.