

## New Jersey Division of Revenue and Enterprise Services

### File and Folder Naming Conventions

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#### Introduction

Public agencies throughout New Jersey rely on computer technology to create, store, manage, access, distribute and dispose of public records of all kinds, including correspondence, fiscal, personnel and budget records, evidentiary documents like minutes, system documentation, drawings, images and audio/video recordings. These records are stored in desk top computers, mobile devices such as tablets and notebooks, centralized electronic file shares, collaboration platforms, video/teleconferencing sites and more. Further, these computer-based records may be stored in a variety of locations encompassing, office and home settings, alternate remote work sites and sites hosted in the Cloud.

Given the variety/volume of and speed at which public records are created in this complex, heterogeneous environment, it is important to adopt practices that foster consistency and clarity with respect to how computer-based public records are named. Doing this helps to ensure that these records can be identified and used for their intended purposes effectively and efficiently over the course of time, by both the initial and subsequent creators/users, and then properly disposed of once their usefulness and retention periods have expired. In turn, this capability fosters improved transparency and accountability in governmental operations and enhanced defensibility of records disposition actions.

The following guidelines set forth basic conventions for naming computer-based files and folders. The term *file* is analogous with individual *records* managed by public agencies, while the term *folder* connotes collections of related files. **Individuals and agencies may apply these conventions to files and folders residing on personal computing devices, centralized file shares, collaboration sites, video conferencing platforms, social media accounts and general Cloud-based storage facilities. Relative to collaboration sites, the conventions can be applied to chat streams, meeting titles, discussion groups and teams and files of all types shared on the sites.**

Like many efforts that involve computing technology, implementation of naming conventions is likely to require the involvement of diverse stakeholders such as:

- Information and records management professionals
- Legal advisors
- Information technology staff (for example, Chief Technology and Chief Information Officers)
- Information security staff
- Agency managers

## **Notes on Sources, Exceptions and Implementation Options**

There appears to be broad consensus on naming conventions among the records management, academic and library science communities. The materials that form the basis for this presentation are drawn from institutions within these three communities (see References below).

Regarding exceptions, not all situations are amenable to the application of the conventions below. For example, some custom-designed and centrally controlled assets like legacy mainframe and client-server applications and database systems may dictate how files are named. From another perspective, newer forms of technology may provide for greater flexibility in locating and retrieving files, thereby reducing the number of controls required for naming them. At base then, public agencies and employees can adopt variations of any file/folder naming convention, provided they apply it **consistently** over time.

Finally, in connection with implementation, the ideal would be to adopt a comprehensive approach and work to bring all names – for existing and newly received/generated files and folders, into compliance. Achieving the ideal may prove onerous, however, as it simply may not be feasible to rename existing, non-conforming files and folders. If this is the case, several implementation options are available.

It may be best to implement the convention on a day-forward basis and name only newly generated/received computer-based records in accordance with the convention. Alternately, agencies can adopt a hybrid approach by using the convention to rename selected high value records from existing stores and then apply the convention to all newly generated/received records going forward. Lastly, agencies could consider applying the convention to selected high value records only on a day-forward basis.

### **Key Contacts**

The contact for assistance with naming convention is the New Jersey Division of Revenue and Enterprise Services' Records Management Services Unit (RMS): 609-777-1020 or 609-292-8711. Guidance on preservation of permanent and historical records can be obtained from the State Archives: 609-633-8304 or 609-292-6260.

## File Name Guidelines

- **Use simple, clear and descriptive terms that all members of your organization can understand and that will identify the files uniquely no matter where they are stored.** Terms should include descriptors like constituent names and project/event names combined, where indicated, with other parameters such as dates and numeric identifiers. Other useful terms could include the type of communication (newsletter, status report, annual report, constituent response, minutes, agenda, etc.), version number and organizational unit.

### Examples:

Contituent\_Response\_Smith\_Jane\_20210804.doc.

Project01\_Charter\_Final.ppt

News\_Release\_Program\_Alpha\_20210301.docx

Revenue\_Report\_20210415.xlsx

Password\_Use\_Policy\_Final\_20210201.pdf

Contract\_01234\_Office\_Supplies.doc

Processing\_Bureau\_Status\_Report\_0802021

Safety\_Committee\_Meeting\_Minutes\_03062021.docx

Safety\_Committee\_Meeting\_Minutes\_03062021.docx

- **If possible, do not use default names** (names automatically assigned by the system). This is important because, over the course of time, files may be moved to other storage platforms and default names may not provide enough information on the content and context of the files being moved.
- **Be consistent in the way you name files.** Apply your naming conventions consistently over time.
- **Ensure that each file name is unique.**
- **Be concise.** Try not to exceed 50 characters per file name. Do not use words that *do not help* to identify the file such as articles (the, a and an) and conjunctions (and, or, but, nor, etc.). Where appropriate, use abbreviations that are clear and understandable **to all staff** who may need to retrieve and view the file. If possible, develop a control list of abbreviated terms and use it consistently.

- **Avoid using special characters in file names** – for example, \ / : \* ? “ < > | [ ] & \$, because computer operating systems may use these characters to physically organize and store files. In many cases, the system software will prohibit the use of these character. Also, *only use periods to separate the file name from the extension*. The extension indicates the file type or format (.doc, .docx, .pdf, .xls, .ppt, etc.) thus – Filename.**Extension**.
- **To separate principal terms within a name, consider using *underscores* or *capital letters* (the latter is called *Title Case*) instead of periods and spaces**. This practice will help ensure accurate identification and retrieval of files, especially if they are moved to new/different storage platforms that interpret spaces and periods differently than the system originally used to create and store the files. The examples in the first guideline above use underscores as separators. The following examples show the same names using capital letters as separators. The use of capital letters may be preferred because the practice helps shorten file names and may facilitate/speed file retrieval.

Examples:

ContituentResponseSmithJane20210804.doc.  
 Project01CharterFinal.ppt  
 NewsReleaseProgramAlpha20210301.docx  
 RevenueReport20210415.xlsx  
 PasswordUsePolicyFinal20210201.pdf  
 Contract01234OfficeSupplies.doc  
 ProcessingBureauStatusReport0802021.docx  
 SafetyCommitteeMeetingMinutes03062021.docx

- **Use dates in a consistent manner**. The preferred date format follows the International Standards Organization (ISO) standard date notation (ISO 8601) of year, month, day - YYYY\_MM\_DD or YYYYMMDD. If the date is a key retrieval element, place it either at the front or end of the file name consistently:

Examples (without separating segments of the date):

News\_Release\_ProgramA\_20210301.docx  
 News\_Release\_ProgramB\_20210420.docx  
 News\_Release\_ProgramY\_20211020.docx

Examples (with underscores separating the segments of the date):

2021\_05\_01\_Revenue\_Report.xlsx

2021\_05\_02\_Revenue\_Report.xlsx

2021\_05\_03\_Revenue\_Report.xlsx

- **Where applicable, use a consistent versioning format.** If you store drafts or versions of documents, presentations, reports or other content, use a consistent format to name the versions. Consider using the letter **v** to indicate draft version and numbering succeeding versions sequentially. Label the final product as **Final**.

Examples:

Password\_Use\_Policy\_v01\_20210301.pdf

Password\_Use\_Policy\_v02\_20210302.pdf

Password\_Use\_Policy\_v03\_20210303.pdf

Password\_Use\_Policy\_Final\_20210302.pdf

- **If you use sequential numbering, pad the numbers in the series with leading zeros.**

Examples:

Contract\_Office\_Supplies\_01234.doc

Contract\_PPE\_01235.doc

Contract\_Copier\_Maintenace\_01236.doc

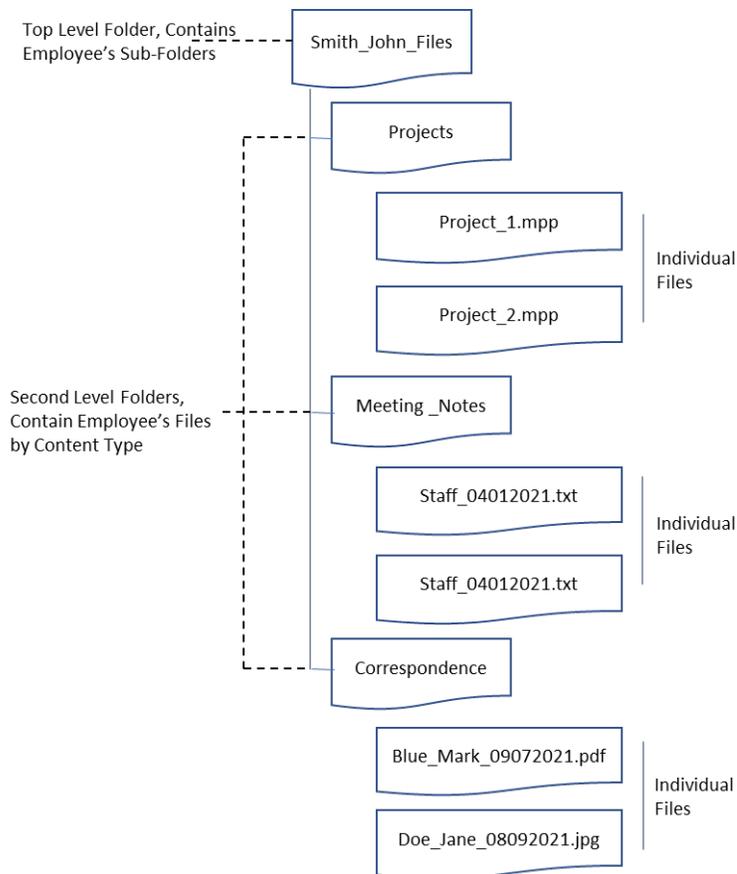
- **Document your naming conventions** in a document or plain text file and give the file a descriptive name -- for example, in Title Case, FileNamingConventionsSmithWilliam.txt. Store the file in a conspicuous space such as your desktop or notebook *Documents* folder, or on a shared network drive or Cloud storage area allotted to you.
- **If appropriate, consider harmonizing your computer file names with related manual (paper) file names.**

## Folder Name Guidelines

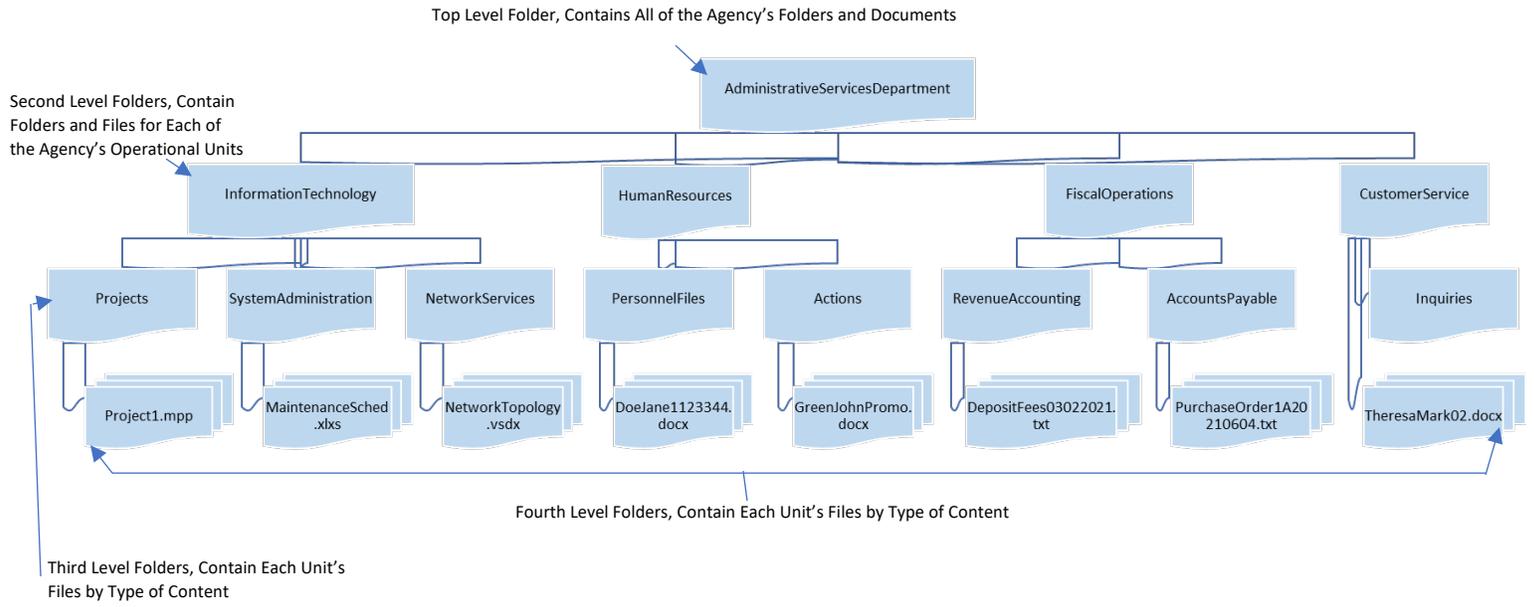
Folders are collections of related files. Folders may also contain multiple subfolders. Arranging related files in electronic folders aids in organizing, accessing, managing and disposing of your electronic content.

- **Use a hierarchical structure to organize folders.** The structure can be based on an organizational hierarchy or hierarchies based on functions, events, activities or other criteria. Hierarchical structures work well for individuals and can be applied effectively on an organization-wide basis. For instance, folder structures can be applied to centrally controlled file shares, collaboration sites, video conferencing platforms and Cloud-based storage areas.
- **Use the file naming conventions** outlined in the preceding section when naming folders.

*Example of a simplified folder structure for an individual employee (underscores used to separate terms in the folder and file names):*



Example of a simplified folder structure for an organization using Title Case (capital letters used to separate terms in the folder and file names):



## References

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