



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set V Number 3

Rev. February 2000

Set V Strategies for Secretaries

Filing and Maintaining Records

by Betty R. Kaufman

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

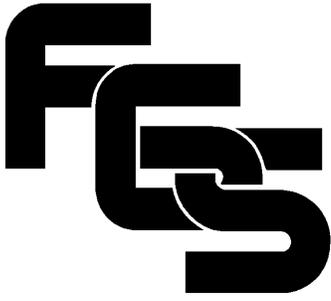
This paper discusses secretarial correspondence, offering guidelines for handling the receipt of society mail and writing correspondence on behalf of the society.

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Set V Strategies for Secretaries Filing and Maintaining Records by Betty R. Kaufman

INTRODUCTION

Filing is more important than merely putting away. The purpose of files is to help the volunteers of the organization do their work in an efficient and informed manner. This purpose should dictate not only the initial planning of a filing system but its frequent use as well. Busy volunteers realize that well-kept files and file maintenance are essential to controlling the ever increasing paper blizzard.

It is the secretary's responsibility to keep the files. However, many presidents prefer to have possession of the files for quicker access. In this case, or if more than one person in the society has access to the files, the secretary may not be responsible for maintaining the whole records program. Instead, the files should be organized so that everyone can find and refile whatever is required. A table of contents for the files most frequently used provides easy access and is an excellent aid for new officers or volunteers.

ARRANGEMENT OF FILES

No single arrangement of filed material is suitable for all society situations. The goal is to have as few places to look as possible, preferably only one. The best arrangement might be a blend of

systems, depending on the type of material to be filed and its use. The important element is that each person using the system be able to locate the needed information quickly and easily.

The four basic file systems or arrangements are alphabetical, by subject, by number, or by location (geography).

ALPHABETICAL

The alphabetical arrangement uses a name or a topic as the important item. This is the most widely used. It is basic to all filing because when other systems are used, the smaller units are indexed alphabetically. Alphabetic arrangements provide direct reference, a quick check on folders that are out of order, and the grouping of related names and topics.

SUBJECT

When the topic of a paper or a letter is more important than the name or location of the correspondent, arrangement should be by subject. For example, appropriate papers would be filed under titles such as contracts, meetings, or reports. Subject filing is useful when all the records about a particular activity will be needed at once, as in planning an annual event or a seminar. More than

Filing and Maintaining Records

one subject file may be necessary for different areas of activity. A subject file may be needed in addition to an alphabetic correspondence file.

NUMERIC

A numeric file is better adapted to automatic data processing than other systems. Since numbers are not as readily confused as similarly spelled names may be, misfiling is reduced. Another advantage of a numeric file is the possibility of unlimited expansion. There are, however, some disadvantages in this system. Errors occur when numbers are inadvertently transposed and such mistakes cannot be discovered as easily as errors in an alphabetic filing.

GEOGRAPHIC

For a few societies, a file arranged geographically is the most useful type. Guides are set up for locations, such as states, counties, or cities, with correspondents' folders arranged alphabetically behind the appropriate guides.

These centralized files have the advantage of uniform filing practices but may sometimes result in poor control of essential and confidential records.

CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to evaluate the type of records to be filed for such things as frequency of use and confidentiality.

Is privacy necessary? If so, such material should be put in a secure place when in use and returned to a locked file drawer afterwards. The assignment of file cabinet key(s) must be considered and noted carefully.

Another consideration is the need for short or long term storage. Items requiring frequent reference may be kept close at hand. Materials consulted less often can be transferred to off-site storage or boxed for stacking. A complete list or table of

contents must be maintained of records held in long term storage.

SYSTEM AND CONTENT

For files that will be fairly active, there should be enough subdivisions to allow for rapid access to any material. File activity is measured in terms of the number of references each month.

Information should be filed in the way it will most often be sought. If the material will be called for by subject, arrange files alphabetically according to subject rather than name.

A systematic approach to filing guarantees that what goes into the files can be found rapidly when it is needed. Almost as important as arrangement is contents: what must be filed and what can be discarded?

Unnecessary carbon copies should be discarded. Paper clips, pins, and other fasteners should be removed. Copying the reply onto the back of the original letter eliminates fasteners as well as saving paper and space. Related papers should be stapled together diagonally across the upper left corner to reduce the possibility of tearing. Use only one staple and avoid "staples over staples."

Items should be arranged in folders with the top of each page at the left and the most recent piece in front or on top. Large papers are folded to standard size. Small papers may be copied or taped onto standard size sheets. Torn papers should be repaired.

FILE FOLDERS



A folder will hold at least twenty to twenty-five sheets of paper without crowding. When material within a folder becomes more than one inch thick, a new folder should be set up and the filled folder labeled as complete, such as "2000-2001." The beginning date for items in the new folder is written on the front of the folder and the new

Filing and Maintaining Records

folder is then placed in the file in front of the completed folder.

Folders with expandable pockets are useful for bulky materials such as catalogs. These folders should be the same size as the others in the drawer.

Individual folders (by name of correspondent) should be set up when there are five or more pieces of correspondence from any one individual. The folders are then filed behind the appropriate guides.



FILE CABINETS

The top drawers of a cabinet are for current filing and the bottom drawers for the most recently transferred folders. An index of each file drawer is very helpful and should be placed at the front of the appropriate drawer. Three to four inches of working space should be left in a file drawer to avoid jamming the files and wasting time in obtaining material.

OUTDATED FILES

The retiring president and other officers and committee chairs should transfer files in good working order. A file maintenance checklist for the new file custodian or officer is very helpful. For example, working papers of the immediate past president and perhaps those of the previous administration are retained as reference for the incoming president. When the current president leaves office, the oldest set of administrative working papers should be discarded. This removes encumbrances of previous leadership style or philosophy and permits the infusion of new vitality into the organization. It also provides much needed space to accept the more recent files.

Inactive files should be removed to dead storage as soon as they cease to be used. No file should be destroyed without making a record of it, or without proper authority.

Today, more and more organizations are binding the most important older files, using a consistent format and arrangement. For example, board meeting minutes, regular meeting minutes, and treasurer's reports are included in monthly sequence. The minutes of annual and board meetings, and the treasurer's reports are including in the proper chronological order. Bound volumes may be in one, two, or more years, whichever offers the greatest convenience for the organization. Consider binding by presidential terms.

The expense of binding is minimal when a clear cover of archival quality is used along with velobinding. The transparent cover allows the title page to also serve as the cover page and identifies the contents, inclusive dates, the society name, and logo. Bound volumes may be placed in dead storage, either on shelves or in cartons. The microfilming of inactive files is an alternative when there are existing storage limitations. Bound material and microfilm are both acceptable in a court of law.

Many societies prepare history books of each presidential term. These are maintained in an archival manner and serve as an attractive and informative complement to the bound volumes of minutes and treasurer's reports.



A regular discard schedule should be followed. Committee reports and nonessential records are saved no more than three years. All financial and tax records, minutes, contracts, corporate papers and ready reference files are saved indefinitely. Other types of files will need special consideration on an annual basis before discarding or transferring to dead storage.

Filing and Maintaining Records

TIME SAVER SUGGESTIONS

If the correspondence file consists of twenty-seven folders, one per letter of the alphabet, and several have only two sheets of paper in them (such as the Q, X and Z files), why not double -- or even triple -- up? Put the Q's with the Ps and have an X-Y-Z file. It is better to have twenty files with ten sheets in each than a hundred holding two pages each.

Consider combining ingoing and outgoing correspondence files. Take this a step further by using the back of an inquiry to copy the reply (by printer or copy machine). This reduces by half the number of papers and the filing and retrieval time.

Arrange papers within a folder chronologically rather than alphabetically. For example, don't file Mr. Agassi's letter between the inquiries from Mrs. Adams and Ms. Alderson. Instead, make Agassi the top paper in the folder. This puts the most recent correspondence -- and the most likely to be needed again soon -- where it is easiest to be

retrieved.

SUMMARY

Keep files lean and clean. Use a simple file procedure or a blend of systems and conduct a thorough file maintenance program. A good file system can be an immeasurable time saver. Organizations which keep their records carefully, meticulously and systematically will considerably improve their business efficiency. "File it and find it" should be your motto.

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