

5 Principles Of Shared Filing Systems



No matter what kind of business you are in, there are five basic principles that apply to any shared filing system. When you apply them to the types of records you use, it's easy to create a filing solution that everyone can use without the risk of losing your important records or wasting valuable time.

Principle 1: File Identification

“HOW DO I FIND THE FILE I WANT?”

Develop a mutually understood indexing method or labeling system. Each file must have its own unique identifier, and there must be only one correct place for it in the system. The identifying elements must follow a clearly defined format for document indexing that never varies. It should make it easy to identify files both in and out of the filing equipment. All users must be trained so they know how the filing system works. Everyone who uses it must understand how to locate and return a record.

Principle 2: Organization Of Contents

“HOW DO I QUICKLY FIND WHAT I WANT INSIDE THE FILE?”

Determine how documents should be organized within the file for the fastest access to critical information. Follow a consistent method of organization for each file. Contents should be separated or categorized within the file in a manner that fits your workflow and makes it fast and easy to locate any specific document.

Principle 3: Misfiled Record Prevention

“HOW DO I MAKE SURE FILES ARE NOT IN THE WRONG PLACE?”

Minimize the accidental misfiling of records. On average, it costs more than \$150 to recreate a lost document. Searching for misplaced files wastes valuable employee time. Prevent misfiles by making it easy to find the correct location for each file in the system. Use a filing method that has color-coding to clearly identify any record that has been misfiled or put into the wrong place.



Principle 4: Out-Of-System Tracking

“IF A FOLDER IS NOT IN THE FILING SYSTEM, WHERE IS IT?”

Give people a way to find a file that is in use or has been removed from the filing system. A file tracking system lets users know if a file:

1. is being used by someone else
2. has been purged from the system
3. has been moved to permanent archive storage

Principle 5: System Maintenance

“IS THE FILING SYSTEM SUSTAINABLE?”

Develop and follow a process for migrating out unneeded records. File systems that are not maintained often outgrow their space. A retention plan and schedule makes sure your system does not grow unnecessarily while keeping records for the right period of time. Your filing solution must meet all regulatory requirements that apply. Appropriate security of the information must be maintained. The integrity of documents stored in long-term archives must be preserved. The filing equipment used must also be able to accommodate projected growth.

By following these five basic principles, your shared filing system will reduce the time spent looking for information and will help your workgroup be more productive.

