Electronic Document Naming Conventions

FOIP and Information Management, Enterprise Information Management

Version: 1.0

Approved by: Maureen Towle, Executive Director, Enterprise Information Management	Owner: Maureen Towle, Executive Director, Enterprise Information Management	
Approval Date: June 1, 2019	**Last Reviewed:** January 19, 2021	**Review Date:** January 19, 2022
Contact: Sa.InformationManagement@gov.ab.ca	**Policy Instrument type:** Guideline	

Guideline Statement

Naming conventions are rules applied to electronic documents, folders, and filenames ("electronic documents"). Naming electronic documents consistently, logically, and in a predictable way distinguishes them from one another at a glance, and facilitates reliable storage and retrieval.

Authority

- *Government Organization Act*
- Records Management Regulation

Scope

This guideline applies to all departments defined under section 14 of Schedule 11 of the *Government Organization Act* and agencies, boards, and commissions as defined in schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation.

Agencies, boards, and commissions that are not contained within Schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation are encouraged to align with this guideline.

Guideline Description

This guideline provides a number of requirements and best practices when naming electronic documents in systems and applications.

Guideline Specification

Metadata

In accordance with the Metadata – Core Content Standard, there are five mandatory metadata elements that must be applied to all content in the custody and/or under the control of the Government of Alberta: Creator, Date Created, Date Modified, Title, and Security Classification.

Mandatory metadata should not be included when naming electronic documents unless necessary (e.g., exporting copies out of a system or application, naming documents in a shared drive, etc.).

Formats

- **Dates:** If inclusion of a date in the filename is necessary (e.g., meeting minutes and agendas), it must be formatted as YYYY-MM-DD.
- **Names:** If inclusion of a person's name in the filename is necessary, it should be formatted as surname followed by initials (e.g., SmithB_Consultation.pdf).
- **Numbers:** Use two-digit numbering (e.g., 01, 02, etc.).

Best Practices

- Keep electronic document names short but meaningful; ideally a title that is no more than 25 characters in length (e.g., "Government of Alberta Capital Plan for Fiscal Year 2021" could be named "Capital-Plan-2021.pdf").
- Ensure the electronic document name accurately describes the content and the context of the electronic document (e.g., "Capital-Plan-2021.doc" instead of "CP.doc" or "Document01.doc").

- Avoid repetition and/or redundant words when naming electronic documents (e.g., repeating words in folder and file names, such as "Information Organization Scheme\Governance\Strategic and **Business Plan**ning\Ministry**BusinessPlan\Business Plan** 2014-2017.xls").
- Use consistent names within a business area to easily group electronic documents by topic, function, activity, process, or type.
- If inclusion of a version in the name of an electronic document is necessary (e.g., the electronic document is being managed in a system that does not support integrated versioning), it must be applied consistently.
    - It is recommended that versioning be limited to "DRAFT", "REVIEW", and "FINAL", as numbered versions require specific criteria (e.g., what constitutes a major or minor version) and diligent upkeep.
- Be aware that including personally identifiable information (such as a person's name) in the name of an electronic document may create privacy issues—consider only including personally identifiable information where absolutely necessary, and ensure that personally identifiable information is managed in accordance with Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) requirements.
    - For more information regarding FOIP requirements, business areas should reach out to the appropriate [FOIP contact](#) in their department.
- Avoid the use of special characters (e.g., ~, ", #, %, &, *, :, <, ?, {, etc.).
- Use hyphens to break up titles for readability and improved search results (e.g., Capital-Plan-2021.pdf instead of capitalplan2021.pdf).
- Avoid using acronyms, abbreviations, or initialisms unless they are commonly understood (e.g., FOIP for Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy).
- Avoid words such as "the", "if", "but", "so", "for", etc., as these are typically excluded from search results.

Benefits
- Creates uniformity in naming electronic documents.
- Supports reliable retrieval of the correct information.
- Decreases the amount of time spent locating and retrieving information.
- Potentially reduces duplicate items, especially duplicate items with different names.
- Supports the use of enhanced information management tools, such as controlled vocabulary, folksonomy, index optimization, performance metrics and reporting, and metadata analysis.

Compliance
Consequences of non-compliance with this guideline could result in the loss of information, damage to Government of Alberta's reputation, exposure of Albertans to harm and/or incurrence of unnecessary costs. Depending on the severity of non-compliance:
- either informal or formal requests and/or follow-ups may be made by Enterprise Information Management, Corporate Internal Audit Services, Corporate Information Security Office, Office of the Information Privacy Commissioner, and/or Public Service Commission, and
- legislated disciplinary action (i.e., *Public Service Act*) may be taken.

References and Supporting Resources

- [Data Exchange Standard – Date, Time, Date and Time](#)
- [Data and Information Security Classification Standard](#)
- [Metadata – Core Content Standard](#)