Records Retention

for Research and Evaluation Practice

Alberta Health Services

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This document was originally developed by Evaluation Services and has been revised to meet the needs of Research Priorities and Implementation (RPI).

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Introduction

About Alberta Health Services–Research, Innovation and Analytics (RIA)

The Alberta Health Services (AHS) RIA Portfolio has a broad mandate to provide consistent and meaningful learning through effective and efficient research and rigorous evaluation. These activities are at the heart of the organization's culture and deliver the fuel that drives consistent high performance and learning.

About Research Priorities and Implementation (RPI)

As part of RIA, Research Priorities and Implementation (RPI) consists of the following expert teams designed to enable and enhance quality patient-oriented research and evaluation.

Engagement, Education and Capacity is a provincial service that develops and delivers research learning opportunities in partnership with academic and provincial research and innovation institutions. Through the Assistant Scientific Directors (ASDs) in the research arm of the Strategic Clinical Networks (SCNs), this operation collaborates with the scientific community to identify and support scientific rigour, best practice, and advancement of research priorities within AHS.

Evaluation Services is a provincial service that supports a rigorous evaluation approach and skill set to support evidence-informed decision making for clients throughout AHS that will help inform and improve practice and patient care.

Knowledge for Change is an evidence-based knowledge translation science. Practice supports include training, academic-quality grant and project support, KT plans, knowledge brokering, synthesis, decision support, and dissemination expertise, including advice on implementation.

Research Facilitation is a provincial service that provides rigorous hands-on expert consultation and support for approved projects pre-submission and post award which have been endorsed by the dyadic leaders for the SCNs and the operational leaders for clinical departments.

Workforce Research and Evaluation is a provincial service that conducts joint research and evaluation projects to inform the effective use of the clinical workforce and the design of integrated collaborative service delivery models.

This resource outlines how to manage inactive records, what records are kept and destroyed, and how to store and destroy records

Purpose of this Guide

RPI has an obligation to manage its information by consistently applying the Alberta Health Services (AHS) *Records Retention Schedule (1133-01)* and Records Management Policy & Procedures to ensure important business information is documented and retained as long as needed to meet legal, fiscal, operational, and historical requirements (AHS, n.d.). As well, project closure is an important part of professional practice that can be easily overlooked, so standardizing this process across all RPI operations is an important part of business. This document summarizes applicable AHS *Records Retention Schedule (1133-01)* and Records Management Policy & Procedures, and guides application within the RPI portfolio. Specifically, this document outlines how to manage inactive records, what records are kept and destroyed, and how to store and destroy records. Appendix A shows the records management process. For AHS's most current and comprehensive record policies, refer to Records Management on Insite:

http://insite.albertahealthservices.ca/recordsmanagement.asp

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Records Preparation

When preparing records for storage, follow these three steps:

1. Determine record type

2. Determine who will take responsibility to act as Office of Record

3. Determine what type of media to use for official record storage

1. Determine record type

Records management classifies records as two basic types: transitory and official.

TRANSITORY RECORDS

Transitory records have short-term value to the organization and are not to be maintained beyond their usefulness. No legal or regulatory requirements exist to maintain transitory records since they do not document any decision, transaction, proof of business or compliance with regulatory requirements, diagnosis, or treatment of care (AHS, 2013). Table 1 lists common types of transitory records.

Table 1: Transitory Record Descriptions and Examples

Type of Transitory Record	Examples	Exceptions
Records of immediate or short-term value	Phone messages; informal notes; cover sheets	
Duplicate or copy records	Copies of meeting minutes; correspondence; publications; hard copy surveys that have been entered into a database	Copies are not considered transitory when the record contains substantive information, proof of receipt, or required action Substantive notes or corrections should be placed on the master record
Draft documents and/or working materials	Preliminary drafts; rough notes; dictating tapes; recordings that have been transcribed	Drafts that have value in substantiating or providing background material for a master record are not transitory
External publications and advertising material	Books; magazines; newspapers; brochures; catalogues; price lists	Internal publications are business records and should be maintained in accordance with the Records Retention Schedule
Blank forms or templates and information media	Obsolete letterhead; forms; all materials containing AHS or former entity logos	Originator of the form or template is responsible for maintaining a master copy for record keeping purposes

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Official records have legal, operational, and historical value. The organization must maintain official records for specified periods that are often regulated (AHS, 2013). As defined by the organization, official records document:

- Results of significant daily activities that support the mission and objectives of AHS

- Advice and recommendations made to management, and the decisions and actions taken

- Problems encountered in business operations and the steps taken to resolve the problems

- Interactions with the public, customers, clients, consultants, vendors, partners

- Verbal communication such as meetings, telephone calls, and face-to-face discussions where significant actions or decisions have occurred

- Legal agreements of any kind

- Work done for AHS by consultants and other external resources

- Actions and decisions where payments have been made or received, funds committed, services delivered, or obligations incurred

- Policy, business planning, performance measurement, and budget activities

RPI recognizes official records as all documents that are deemed fundamental to the business of research and evaluation, including[1]:

- Signed contracts, work agreements, and all amendments to either

- Work estimates, final budgets, and invoices

- Research and evaluation-related frameworks (and drafts)

- Event related to ethical oversight

- Research and evaluation steering committee minutes

- Source data fundamental to validating outcomes

- All finalized reports

- Synopsis sheet outlining project specifics, and file name and path of all electronic official records (Appendix B)

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[1] This list is not exclusive. Other documents deemed fundamental to the business of evaluation may also be determined. The decision to include as official record is left to the discretion of the Project Manager and Director.

See Appendix C for a decision-support guide for retaining research- and evaluation-related documents.

> **IF...** The record is a **transitory record**, no documentation or authorization is required prior to destruction.
>
> The record is an **official record**, go the step 2.

2. Determine who will take responsibility to act as Office of Record

Determining the Office of Record establishes responsibility for maintaining the official record. RPI acts as the Office of Record in research and evaluation projects commissioned by clients internal to AHS, unless otherwise determined through consultation and agreement with the client. The work agreement must clearly specify the designated Office of Record.

The Office of Record must also be determined for research and evaluations commissioned by clients who are external to AHS[2]. Generally, RPI does not act as Office of Record for research and evaluation projects commissioned by external clients, unless otherwise requested. A fee for service may apply. The contract or work agreement must clearly specify the designated Office of Record.

> **IF...** RPI **is not the Office of Record**, treat all copies as transitory records.
>
> RPI **is the Office of Record**, go the step 3.

3. Determine what type of media to use for official record storage

The official record is defined as the primary record, commonly referred to as a *master copy*. The primary record may be declared as either paper or electronic.

RPI official records are maintained in electronic file format.

> **IF...** The record is **not the official record**, treat all copies as transitory records.
>
> The record **is determined to be the official record**, refer to Records Classification for classifying, retaining, and destroying official records.

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[2] Examples of external clients include Health Quality Council of Alberta; Alberta Medical Association; Primary Care Networks; Alberta Health's direct involvement (not as the granting source for AHS-lead projects); researcher outside of AHS.

This resource outlines record preparation, classification, retention (electronic and paper), and destruction.

Records Classification

The AHS *Records Retention Schedule (1133-01)* document governs the following aspects of official records:

- How these records should be organized

- How long these records must be retained

- When these records must be destroyed or archived

Records are grouped into record retention classifications. Refer to AHS's *Records Retention Schedule (1133-01)* for all classifications and schedules. Table 2 lists the most applicable classifications for RPI.

Table 2: RPI Records Classification

This information is extracted from AHS's Records Management and Archives protocol.

Records Classification	Description	Closure Rule[3]	Total Retention	Final Disposition[4]
0360-Quality Control	Quality control is related to actions taken to ensure that a product or performed service adheres to a defined set of quality criteria. Quality Control records may include audits, sterilization & calibration records, quality surveys, inspections, and test results.	Calendar Year	5 years	Destroy[5]
0850-HR Management Payroll	The review, approval, and processing of employee payroll. Includes remittance of taxes and other source deductions. Includes payroll time accounting/timecards, attendance records, leave of absence reports, records that document employee hours, wages, vacation, holidays, absences, and overtime.	Calendar Year	7 years	Destroy
0865-Human Resource Management (Recruitment)	Information related to the analysis of candidates against a specified position profile to evaluate the suitability of individuals for employment. Includes resumes and interview notes.	Calendar Year	1 year	Destroy
1420-Performance Measurement and Evaluation	The activities related to assessing the quality and effectiveness of programs or services to clients. This may be achieved through a services scorecard method or can be tracked through the maintenance of quantitative and qualitative measures of program success. Results are used to identify possible areas for improvement, examine client satisfaction with services they receive, immediate and longer term outcomes, and influence decision making or policy formulation.	Fiscal Year or completion of report/ project	5 years	Selective Retention[6]

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[3] **Closure Rule:** An event that triggers when the retention period starts.

[4] **Final Disposition:** Final administrative action taken with regard to records, including destruction or permanent preservation.

[5] **Destroy:** Records destruction following the guidelines in the AHS Destruction Procedure.

[6] **Selective Retention:** Retention of selected records in AHS Archives or for a longer period in long-term storage as determined by the archivist.

Records Classification	Description	Closure Rule[3]	Total Retention	Final Disposition[4]
1550-Public Health Surveillance	The ongoing collection, analysis, and interpretation of health data essential to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public health practice, closely integrated with the timely dissemination of the data to those who need to know. The final link in the surveillance chain is the application of the data to prevention and control. A surveillance system includes a functional capacity for data collection, analysis, and dissemination linked to public health programs. Sources of surveillance data can include disease outbreak reports and mortality and morbidity reports based on death records or laboratory diagnosis.	Superseded or obsolete	5 years	Destroy
1620-Data Collection for Research	Information related to applications for research not involving clinical trials. Includes methodologies, research data and reports, research protocols including all data relating to patient diagnostic and treatment procedures and outcomes, notes in day books, recordings, printouts, questionnaires, surveys and other raw data, decoder files, and other material products including slides, pictures, and x-rays.	Research completed	7 years	Selective Retention

IF... The official record is **eligible for destruction**, follow the guidelines under **Records Destruction**.

The official record is **not eligible for destruction** and **must be retained**, follow the guidelines under **Records Retention (Electronic)** steps 4–7.

Records Retention (Electronic)

4. Prepare the electronic project folder for official records retention

Purge the active project folder by deleting transitory records and preparing official records for inactive storage. Create an electronic copy of documents that might exist only in hard copy.

5. Label and file the project folder

Figure 1: Label Format for Electronic Archive Folder

ARCHIVE	Project Name	MMMYYYY – MMMYYYY	LAST NAME
Upper case	One space / Abbreviated version (upper & lower case)	One space / Start date / Hyphen / End date / One space	Researcher, Evaluation Lead or Primary Author (upper case only)

EXAMPLE: ..\..\Project Folders\Archived Projects\ARCHIVE Project X May2011-Jun2015 SMITH

6. Create a synopsis of the project's official records

The research or evaluation project and official records in storage is captured in a one- or two-page summary (see Appendix B), which contains basic demographics information and the file path to all electronic official records. This synopsis is maintained in both hard copy and electronic versions.

The following example provides a standard way to format this resource[7]:

Patient Focus Groups and Interviews & G:\Project Folders\Archived Projects\ aCATS\6.Data Files\Patient Focus Groups and Interviews\Fort Saskatchewan Focus Groups\Fort Saskatchewan Patient Interview March 21.docx

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[7] Instructions to insert a file path into MS Word: On the INSERT menu, click HYPERLINK.

7. Track retention of the project's official records

Administrative staff ensures all archived projects are entered into the corresponding columns of the sheet titled *Retention File List* in the Records List workbook. Figure 2 provides an example of the file format for the database tracking archived official records.

Figure 2: Official Records Retention Database

Cabinet #	Classification	File Title	Project Lead	Date From:	Date To:	Destruction Date

Records Retention (Paper)

To promote the continued professional development of RPI staff, RPI retains paper copies of archived research and evaluation projects. These documents are not considered the official record. While transient in nature by official definition, readily accessible hard copy documents have value in informing future research and evaluation plans and building research and evaluation capacity with existing and new staff. A system for paper retention of records also provides a repository for existing paper documents already produced during the life of the project. Paper records follow the same retention schedule as official records.

Ongoing Projects. RPI is involved with a range of different projects, some of which are episodic, while others are ongoing. For example, contractual agreements with Primary Care Networks may be renewed for several years and the work continues without clear end dates. For ongoing projects, work is archived annually on the anniversary date in hanging files.

Fundamental paper records pertaining to research and evaluation that have legal, operational, and historical value include:

• Synopsis sheet outlining project specifics, and file name and path of all electronic official records (see Appendix B)

• Signed contracts, work agreements, and all amendments to either

• Work estimates, final budgets, and invoices

• All research or evaluation-related frameworks (final versions only)

• Business related to ethical oversight

• All finalized reports

• Evidence of pertinent decision making or conflict resolution

See Appendix B for additional details about archiving hard copies.

8. Place all paper records in 8" x 14" hanging files

Use as many hanging files for each project as required. If more than one hanging file is needed, an additional label is required that clearly indicates the number of files involved.

9. Label hanging file folder

Follow the standard process for labelling hanging files as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: File Label Tabs

Content	Label Tab Size	Position of Tab
Project name	4 inch	Put the tab closest to the drawer front
Destroy Date & Records Classification # (See Table 2)	4 inch	Place an additional tab in the middle of the hanging file (beside the project name) e.g., DESTROY: May 2017 Records Class: 1420

10. Organize hanging files together with the same records classification

Group and store files together according to their records classification. Arrange files alphabetically by destroy date year.

11. Track retention of project's hard copy records

Follow guidelines stated in Step 7 to track retention of hard copy records. The *Retention File List* (Figure 2) also captures the location of each filing cabinet and the corresponding storage instructions for each cabinet.

Records Destruction

Destroying official records cannot occur without prior authorization from the Project Manager (only if that person is still on staff at RPI) or the respective Director.

The Project Manager or Director has the option to end or extend the retention period of the archive. Reasons for retaining official records beyond the normal retention schedule may include the project topic is still relevant to the organization or the project continues to make an important contribution to the practitioner's professional practice.

When a decision has been made to destroy official records, the department must obtain authorization at the organizational level prior to the destruction of its records. To obtain authorization, complete the Records Destruction Authorization Form. For instructions on records destruction, see the Inactive Records Storage AHS & Practice Manual. Both documents are available on InSite.

The destruction of retained paper transitory records in hanging files does not require official documentation or authorization prior to destruction. As with electronic official records, the Project Manager or Director makes the decision to end the retention period, but submitting a form outside of your operation is not required. Physical storage capacity is an important consideration when extending retention schedules.

As with official records, destruction of records follows the current organizational instructions appropriate for the media type.

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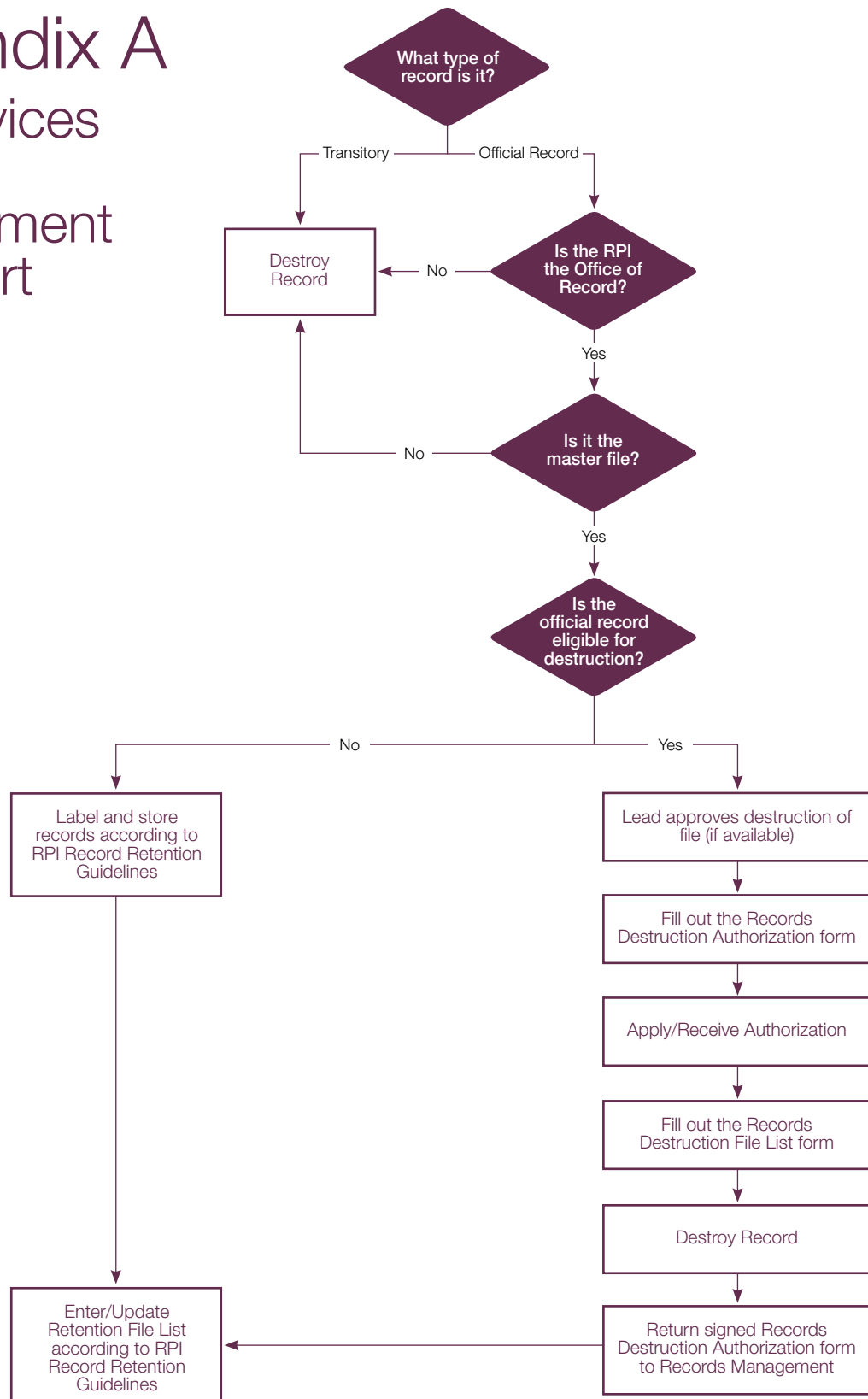
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Appendix A
RPI Services Records Management Flowchart

What type of record is it?

Transitory — Official Record

Is the RPI the Office of Record?

No → Destroy Record

Yes

Is it the master file?

No → Destroy Record

Yes

Is the official record eligible for destruction?

No → Label and store records according to RPI Record Retention Guidelines

Yes → Lead approves destruction of file (if available)

Fill out the Records Destruction Authorization form

Apply/Receive Authorization

Fill out the Records Destruction File List form

Destroy Record

Return signed Records Destruction Authorization form to Records Management

→ Enter/Update Retention File List according to RPI Record Retention Guidelines

Appendix B
Synopsis of Project Official Records Retention

SYNOPSIS OF PROJECT OFFICIAL RECORDS RETENTION

NAME OF UNIT:

RPI (CITY):

PROJECT NAME:

RECORDS CLASSIFICATION #:

PROJECT START DATE:

MONTH / YEAR

PROJECT END DATE:

MONTH / YEAR

RECORDS DESTRUCTION DATE:

MONTH / YEAR

PROJECT LEAD:

OFFICIAL RECORDS FILES IN ELECTRONIC STORAGE

List hyperlinks file paths or folder names (for SPSS documents) for all final reports and supporting databases. Print a copy of the synopsis sheet and store it in the hanging file. Also, save a copy in corresponding electronic archive file.

HYPERLINK FILE PATH OR FOLDER NAME

Appendix C
Decision-Support Guide for Retaining RPI Research and Evaluation-related Records

Record		Electronic File	Hanging File	Other considerations
Signed contracts Work agreements All amendments to either		✓	✓	Hard copies are kept in an administrative binder during the project lifespan. These copies are transferred to the hanging file when the project is archived.
Work estimates Final budgets Invoices		✓	✓	Initial estimates and budget amendments are included in the work agreement. Electronic and hard copy evidence of invoicing is also generated and filed by administration.
Evidence of pertinent decision making or conflict resolution		✓	✓	Pertains to circumstances that are unusual and not necessarily routine. When hard copies of emails, letters, or other artifacts are stored, staple or bind together with label (e.g., sticky note or writing on first page).
Framework or plan		✓	Final version only	Drafts that have value in substantiating or providing background material for a master record are not transitory (AHS, 2012). If important decision making has been retained within the final version of the framework (e.g., field notes) or committee meeting notes, retaining drafts is not necessary. Therefore, retaining hard copy of drafts is up to the discretion of the Evaluation Lead.
Business related to ethical oversight		✓	SOR letter Six Ethics Considerations	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES: ARECCI Screening Tool, Six Ethics Considerations document, SOR review response, REB ethical opinion, other related correspondence (e.g., email offering expert opinion). ARECCI Screening Tool is best retained electronically. Email the screening tool to yourself and save email in Ethics file.
Steering committee minutes		✓		
Source data	Paper-based tools	✓		POSSIBLE EXAMPLES: Spreadsheets, survey, audit, participant consents, and other data collection tools Retaining a scanned version of sourced data is acceptable once the transcription is complete as long as the scan is of the highest quality (HREB, 2014). Scanning and destroying paper data collection tools is preferred, but left to the discretion of the Project Manager. Retained paper files are bundled in envelopes.
	Quantitative databases	✓	File path included in synopsis	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES: Raw database, cleaned database, analysis Raw/original data sets are always maintained. Final working copies of cleaned data sets that were used for analysis and fundamental to validating outcomes or for future comparative studies are also retained.
	Digital recordings	✓		Digital recordings may be retained during the life span of the project but **should not be kept** after the end of the project. The rationale for not retaining a digital file is that it is impossible to anonymize the record.
Finalized reports		✓	✓	
Synopsis sheet outlining project specifics, file name and path of all electronic official records (Appendix B)		✓	✓	It is important that all source data is identified and clearly documented (HREB, 2014).

Appendix D
Step-by-Step Process for Archiving

At the end of a project…

Project Manager prepares archives following the Records Retention Guidelines found in the Archive Policy folder, G:\Corporate Policies\Records Retention Policies\Archive Policy. Both hard copy and electronic archives will be prepared following the decision-support guide listed in Appendix C.

To start…..

STEP 1 Project Manager moves electronic records to ARCHIVES folder located on the shared drive under Project folders.

STEP 2 Project Manager changes name to *"ARCHIVE project name"*

STEP 3 Project Lead cleans up electronic files using the Records Retention Guidelines

STEP 4 Project Lead prepares the synopsis sheet (found in Archive Policy folder)

> ✓ This is a quick summary of project name, Project Manager, and hyperlinks or file paths for final reports and supporting databases. Adding links to other pertinent documents are optional.
>
> ✓ In a Word program, use CTRL+K to find file and create hyperlink
>
> ✓ *Note: This function does not work in SPSS, please save folder paths in this case*

To prepare hard copy archives…

STEP 5 Project Lead prints synopsis sheet

STEP 6 Project Lead prints all documents following the decision-support guide listed in Appendix C of this document

> ✓ *Note: As per the guidelines, when a significant volume of printed source data exist (e.g., paper surveys, consent forms, etc.), you may choose to keep an electronic copy. If you choose to keep a paper copy of source data, bundle it in white envelopes and follow up with Cheryl to complete a label for the hard copy package.*

STEP 7 Project Lead brings synopsis sheet and all hard copy documents to the designated Administrative Assistant

STEP 8 Administrative Support personal finishes the archiving by completing the following steps:

> ✓ Create hanging file folder and tabs
>
> ✓ Add project to Retention File List
>
> ✓ File in cabinet