Email Records Management FAQ

Every KSU employee is individually responsible for handling and maintaining records (including University email and other electronic records) in accordance with University policy and requirements. Emails are records which may contain evidence of official University actions, decisions, approvals, or transactions. Email is subject to statutes of the State of Kansas, KSA 45-401 through 45-414, which applies to the preservation and destruction of records. (See Email Policy 3455)

1: How Long Do I Keep Email Messages I Have Received and Sent?

Email You Can Delete

Most received and sent emails have a very transitory value. They have no administrative, legal, fiscal, or archival retention requirements and can therefore be deleted as soon as they have fulfilled their reference purpose. Examples of such email messages include:

- Preliminary drafts
- Routine replies/requests for information
- Emails sent as reference or for informational distribution
- Emails used to set-up or accept meetings
- Announcements
- Acknowledgements

Email You Must Keep

All other email messages, both sent and received, must be retained for a designated amount of time (retention period). Retention periods are listed on a Records Retention Schedule. The retention period is based on the content of each individual email.

Emails that contain the following types of information have specific retention periods:

- Policy and procedure directives
- Substantive decisions regarding matters of University business
- Legal, discipline, or audit issues
- Approvals for purchases, HR decisions, and other actions to be taken
- Financial records including invoices and receipts
- Final reports or recommendations
- Student advising files
- Documentation of departmental/office actions, decisions, operations and responsibilities

2: How Do I Delete My Email Messages?

Deleting an email is the first step toward eliminating information that does not require further retention.

Delete emails in your Inbox, Sent Mail, and other folders that are not required to be retained or have passed their retention periods.

If you save a message that is the last in a thread of emails, you may be inadvertently saving content that you do not want or need as part of the previous messages in the string. Try to save only the information that is pertinent to a subject and not parts of a string that are unrelated.

Each email system has its unique way of storing email. You need to know how your system works to ensure all email messages that should be deleted actually are deleted.

3: When Creating a Message, What Can I Do to Help Ensure It Will Be Properly Managed?

Do You Need It?

Before creating an email message, consider whether it needs to be created:

- Can other modes of communication be used more efficiently or effectively?
- Is it necessary to create and send "information only" emails?
- Could this information be shared on a collaborative workspace such as SharePoint, Microsoft Teams, or Slack?
- Is it necessary to CC all of the listed recipients?
- Do you need to reply? Avoid replying to messages you receive unless a reply is actually required.

Be Objective

Be objective in the content of your email. Remember that email is subject to public information requests and may be accessed during litigation or audits. Create each email as if it were being published on the front page of the local newspaper.

One Subject Per Message

Try to limit the content in each email message to one subject. If there are several unrelated subjects to discuss, send individual emails for each subject. The messages will be easier to track, find, use, and eventually delete.

Subject Line

It is important to be objective and accurate in choosing the subject heading. Subject lines should be clear, concise, and closely articulate the purpose or action requested in your email.

Stick to the Subject When Forwarding

When forwarding email, review the original subject line and ensure it applies to your response. Too often, people continue to use a string of email messages with the same subject line, even though the topic of the messages has changed. This makes it difficult to properly categorize email messages for deletion.

When replying or forwarding messages, you can choose to not include the original message. At the top of your email inbox click File > Options > Mail > Replies and Forwards to see options. (Outlook 2016)

4: What Do I Do with All My Email?

Once you open an email message, decide what you are going to do with it before you close it.

Delete It

Can the information be found elsewhere, such as on an internal/external website, collaborative web tool, or network drive? Is it a newsletter, acknowledgement, notification, or alert? Does the email request or provide routine information? All of these types of emails can be deleted as soon as you no longer need it for reference. For most KSU employees, 70-80% of emails meet these criteria and do not need to be kept beyond reference purpose.

Do It

If you can respond or take specific action in two minutes or less – do it. File it in a folder, respond, make a call, etc.

Delegate It

Email messages requesting information or an action are not always directed to the appropriate person. After reading a message, determine whether you need to respond to it or whether you should delegate it to someone who is better placed to respond to it.

Defer It

If a response or specific action will take more than two minutes of dedicated time – defer it. If you use Outlook, you have the ability to flag emails for follow-up, label them, and add them to your Tasks list. These tools can help you find them later so that you can determine whether action is still required.

File It

Create folders that are logically aligned with the way in which business is conducted for your office such as projects, transactions, standing meetings, budgets, and employees.

5: How Do I Manage the Email I Have to Keep?

Manage Emails by Folders

Email folder titles should be clear, concise, and relate directly to the emails that will reside in the folder. Once the project or function is completed, you may add the retention period to the folder title for easy future cleanup.

Create a folder for each project or standing meeting:

- Make a folder for each project and/or standing meeting and put all email related to this project into this single folder. Use your email client's search function to check both your inbox and sent mail folder for these emails. When the project is complete, note the date of the termination of the records retention period and retain the entire folder until that time.

Create a folder for specific functions or transactions:

- Create a folder for specific functions, transactions, or processes. For example, if you approve purchases for your office, you can create an Approvals folder for each fiscal year.

Use subfolders:

- Creating subfolders is a very useful way to easily find information. For example, a Budget Files folder can have subfolders named for each budget with which you work.

Create a folder for archival emails:

- Archive folders can be created for groups of emails related to the same topic or function that have been designated archival on the General Records Retention Schedule. Archival emails should be transferred to the University Archivist at the end of their retention period.

Separate Transitory Email

In order to keep your inbox clean, delete transitory messages as soon as you no longer need them for reference. Any transitory emails you may need to keep for a limited amount of time can be moved to a folder that is purged regularly.

Use Search and Sort Functions

Search and sort functions are useful for locating and grouping specific messages that have characteristics in common. You can search for emails to or from an individual, by date, subject, and keywords in the body.

To search in Outlook, click on the folder you would like to search, enter the search term in the search box and press Enter. Outlook’s search options also allow you to search all folders and include the Deleted Items folder in your search. You can access more options by clicking the Search tab at the top of your screen.

Don't Use Email - Collaborate Via the Web

Consider utilizing an online collaboration tool such as Microsoft Teams, Groups, or OneDrive for projects/meetings rather than using email. These tools compile all the information, written and received, by its users in one location. All notes, drafts, conversation, and meeting minutes may be stored on the tool. Remember that information stored on web collaboration tools are subject to public records requests, audits, and litigation and must be retained and later deleted as per an approved retention schedule.

6: What are My Responsibilities as a Manager?

If You Are a Manager:

- Schedule a quarterly or yearly records cleanup time for your office.
- Include records management responsibilities in your office's new employee checklist.
- Establish an office procedure for setting up email accounts that allows access to email by other(s) in the office in case of absence.
- Establish general email protocols which ensure that everyone in the office is managing their email in the same way.

When an Employee Separates from Employment:

In accordance with KSU policy, managers and/or administrators are responsible for managing records associated with separated employees - this includes email.

- The employee and their manager or administrator should develop a plan for determining which emails must be kept and which may be deleted.

- Email that must be kept should be transferred to another employee or stored in a centralized location, such a network drive or SharePoint site.

To allow time for the department to appropriately transfer ownership or dispose of the records, systems administrators must ensure that email and other electronic records associated with a separated employee are not automatically deleted until at least one year after separation.