



Recordkeeping Guidelines For University Committees

WHAT ARE COMMITTEE RECORDS?

Committee records document the goals, objectives, decisions, and actions of a committee. They may take the form of paper-based or electronic documents, publications, videotapes, e-mail, photographs, and Web pages.

Committee records generally include:

- records relating to the establishment and mission of the committee
- membership lists
- member nomination, acceptance, and appointment letters
- minutes, including agendas, docket, and attachments
- reports
- clippings
- administrative records
- related correspondence

WHY RETAIN COMMITTEE RECORDS?

The records of committees contain information about decisions, discussions, recommendations and other information that often set a precedent, or provide the authority for some action. For this reason, they are among the University's most important records.

Every committee, whether at department level or University level is charged with the responsibility to deliberate on, or act or recommend action on one or more matters of concern to the University. The records of a committee provide the accountability for decisions made and actions taken.

Current committee members refer to meeting minutes to remind themselves of finished and unfinished business, and matters requiring follow-up. Minutes and other records serve to inform future members of the history, role, and accomplishments of the committee.

Committee records also hold significant value as historical records because they document decision-making, governance, and the changes in committee structure and charges over time. Minutes are often the only records of the actions and/or decisions made by committees.

WHY RETAIN COMMITTEE RECORDS?

What committee activities should be documented?

Major reform actions as well as the ongoing execution, review, and modifications of programs should be documented. Reform is oftentimes a cyclical phenomenon; each committee should have access to the work of its predecessors. While each committee may reach different conclusions, important insights can be gained from the records of earlier debates that reveal the issues considered and the conclusions formed at the time. Correspondence of the chair and deans may document why major projects or studies were

undertaken and what they hoped to achieve. The records of sub-committees assigned to carry out such projects or studies provide greater detail of the process and the debate.

Documentation of the continuing development of Harvard programs has significant administrative value. For example, administrators and faculty on a curriculum committee may need to determine when particular courses were approved and why. These decisions are documented in the records of the curriculum committee itself, as well as in the records of other committees with overlapping areas of responsibility.

Minutes of departmental meetings and correspondence files of committee chairs and individual members record the process by which ideas and decisions are formulated and approved.

What records are essential to document committee activities?

Meeting minutes generally provide the most complete record of the actions of a committee. The supporting papers that accompany each set of minutes provide background information that makes minutes more meaningful. These documents include agendas, reports, and recommendations, as well as other documents specifically referred to in the minutes.

How should minutes be recorded?

Minutes should be written in sufficient detail so that somebody not present at the meeting will still be able to fully understand the transaction of business which took place.

- Give a precise and unambiguous account of the proceedings, recording all the necessary information, including date of the meeting and names of attendees.
- Stick to the facts. Provide details of the actions taken and the rationale for them.
- Be objective. Do not offer subjective comments or personal opinions.
- Do not quote individuals directly. Individual contributions should only be attributed when an individual expressly requests it and the committee agrees that the contribution should be recorded in the minutes.
- Do not record the discussion verbatim. A concise and objective statement of the discussion and the decision reached is adequate. On occasion, an individual's exact words may need to be recorded with any quoted statement recorded as an exact transcription.

Some committees may also maintain action lists of items that require action, the committee member responsible for the action and the anticipated date of completion. These lists may be attached to the minutes as confirmation of action items outstanding to ensure those responsible have a follow up list to refer to.

Typically the information recorded for each item discussed at a meeting will include:

- Background information about the item
- Key issues raised
- Conclusions or recommendations made
- A resolution (if required) that details the decision(s) made, what was agreed, responsibilities, any outstanding or further action required and any deadlines or key dates for the action to be completed

The committee chair should attest the minutes as true and accurate before they are circulated to all members of the committee. All committee members should be given the opportunity to request amendments to the minutes if any errors are noted.

All amendments must be requested at the following meeting of the committee and those amendments must be recorded in the minutes of the next meeting. Minutes are never approved until after the meeting following the meeting they describe, and all members of the committee agree that they are correct and accurate.

When minutes are approved, the word "approved" and the secretary's/administrator's initials and date of the approval are written next to the signature of the secretary/administrator.

Approved minutes, agendas and documents reviewed by the committee should be filed together and retained in accordance with the requirements of the University's records management policy. Records must be kept safely for the appropriate retention period, after which they should be transferred to an archives or destroyed.

Note: Committee records may be transferred to an archives only after their administrative use by the committee has ceased.

MANAGING COMMITTEE RECORDS

How should meeting records be arranged?

As a general rule, records should be filed by type (charge, membership, meeting records, etc.) and then chronologically. Meeting records are generally arranged chronologically, by meeting date. Preferably, all documents pertaining to a specific meeting should be filed together. In other words, the following documents are filed under a given meeting:

- the agenda for that date
- a copy of the minutes from that meeting
- any correspondence that was to be discussed
- any submissions to be reviewed (generally listed on the agenda), with accompanying paperwork
- Any other documents discussed at the meeting, whether or not they are mentioned on the agenda, should also be included

A second copy of the agenda for each meeting can be filed separately, in chronological order. This "agenda file" provides a concise overview of committee business and can act as an index to enhance retrieval of need meeting records.

Electronic records

As with paper records, separate folders (sub-directories) should be kept for each type of record. Minutes of meetings, containing the final version of each paper which the meeting received should have their own folders and any background papers, follow-up correspondence, or drafts should be kept in one or more subfolders of the meeting folder. E-mail relating to committee business should be copied to the appropriate folder.

All documents should be clearly identified by the date of the meeting and their version numbers if appropriate. There should be no duplicates. Minutes kept in electronic format should be "locked down" after approval and protected from alteration. Audit trails should be instituted to ensure that any alteration of the records can be tracked.

The committee's record keeper should ensure that at least one colleague (preferably two) has access to all the committee's electronic records, in case a question arises and the regular record keeper is not available. Shared network access drives can be useful for managing committee materials.

The summary below presents the preferred method for organizing committee records.

Contents, Arrangement, and Retention of Committee Records

TYPE OF RECORDS	CONTENTS	ARRANGEMENT	RETENTION	HARVARD UNIVERSITY GRS NUMBER
Membership records	membership lists and nomination, acceptances, and separation letters for members	File correspondence alphabetically by name. Segregate files for separated members.	Retain permanently	1025, 1030
Committee charges	records relating to the establishment of the committee, its current and historical missions, and related correspondence	File chronologically.	Retain permanently	1027, 1030
Meeting records	agenda, docket, minutes and attachments, submissions and related records, including reports and other documents issued by the committee	File records chronologically by meeting date.	Retain permanently	1027, 1030
Subcommittee records	member lists, charges, agenda, docket, minutes and attachments, submissions and related records	File by record type, then as above for each type.	Contact archives	1027, 1030
Reports and publications	reports, memoranda, position papers, research materials and data, and other records relating to recommendations made by the committee, if not filed with meeting records	Arrangement of records within these categories will be influenced by the committee's methods of operation.	Retain permanently	1027, 1030
Supplementary files	applications or submissions made to the committee, drafts, revisions, and related correspondence	Arrangement of records within these categories will be influenced by the committee's methods of operation.	Contact archives	1027, 1030
Arrangement records	room reservations, meeting announcements, catering orders and invoices, and related records	File records relating to arrangements chronologically by meeting date; file invoices separately by meeting date.	Retain invoices for 4 years; all other records may be destroyed after 10 years	0410, 1027, 1030

How should meeting records be stored?

Paper meeting records can be kept in binders or in hanging files ("Pendaflex" files). Binders can be kept on a shelf, readily available. Each group of records can be separated by a divider with the date of the meeting and placed in the binder in chronological order for easy retrieval and filing. Some administrators may find that binders consume too much space in the record keeper's office.

Hanging files are also a viable option for storing meeting records. The items from each individual meeting can be stored in their own individual folder clearly distinguishing them from the records of other meetings. Hanging files are easily kept in chronological order with labels on the files denoting the date of the meeting.

May records be maintained in electronic form? Most committee records have long-term value to the University and will be retained permanently by the appropriate archives. The ability of the archives to maintain electronic records over time depends on a number of variables. If your records are being maintained only electronically, contact the archives before transferring them to determine whether the archives can accept them in the particular format you are using. If the archives is not able to accept that format, you may be asked to reformat or print the records.

What records should the chair or administrator pass on to his or her successor?

The outgoing chair and/or administrator should use his/her judgment to determine which records are still active. Records that may be useful to a new committee chair include the current charge of the committee along with the current membership list and the most recent minutes. Records that are no longer of use may be transferred to the appropriate archives.

WHEN THE COMMITTEE NO LONGER NEEDS THE RECORDS

What should be done with records the committee no longer needs?

Committee records are University records and subject to University records policy as spelled out in the General Records Schedule. Once a committee no longer needs regular reference access to its records to conduct its business, the records may be disposed of according to the requirements of the General Records Schedule. Under these requirements, some records may be destroyed, while others must be sent to the appropriate archives for storage and preservation.

What records should be transferred to an archives? According to the Harvard University General Records Schedule (GRS), the following records of faculty committees should be transferred to archives:

- *Membership records:* membership lists and nomination, acceptance, and separation letters for members
- *Committee charges:* records relating to the establishment of the committee, its current and historical missions
- *Meeting records:* agenda, dockets, minutes and attachments, submissions and related records, including records of subcommittees, memoranda, and other documents issued by the committee
- *Reports and publications:* reports, memoranda, position papers, research materials and data, and other records relating to recommendations made by the committee

Supplementary files of applications or submissions made to the committee, correspondence, clippings, and other records may also be reviewed for transfer to the archives.

What records can be routinely destroyed? Audio tape recordings of committee meetings may be re-used after the final version of the minutes has been approved. Most records relating to arrangements may be destroyed after 1 year; the exception is invoices, which should be retained for 4 years. Many other types of administrative records have short retention periods; for more information consult the GRS.

How can committee members obtain access to minutes or records that have been sent to the Archives?

The chair may authorize committee members or staff to review past minutes or records in the Archives. Bear in mind that records in an archives do not circulate and must be viewed on site.

Can others gain access to committee records held at the archives?

Use of University records by others is governed by University policy. Access to internal administrative records is restricted for fifty years from the date of creation (in the case of records relating to an individual, the restriction is extended until 80 years, or the person's death, whichever is later). The Director of the University Library may, with the approval of the head of the creating committee, authorize access to restricted records if it is determined that access to such records will not violate the privacy of individuals, damage fragile records, or adversely affect the completeness of recent records that may be deposited in the archives in the future. (Vote of the Harvard Corporation, March 13, 1989)

How should unneeded committee records be destroyed?

Committee records that are no longer needed by the committee for the conduct of its business, and that are not wanted by the archives should be destroyed by confidential shredding for paper records, or secure expungement or destruction of magnetic media. All destruction of committee records should be in accordance with University records policy and documented. (Records Destruction)