



# The Blueprint for Nonprofit Organizations

## Stop searching. Start serving.

The fastest way to lose public trust—and your tax-exempt status—is poor record-keeping. Whether you use a digital cloud (such as Google Drive or Dropbox) or a physical filing cabinet, every nonprofit needs a standard filing system. Use this blueprint to build a “Master System” that outlasts any single volunteer or leader.

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## Part 1: The "Master Folder" System

Create these four main folders in your cloud storage. Share access only with authorized board members and staff.

### Folder 1: Corporate & Legal (The "Permanent" File)

These are your foundational documents and should never be deleted or discarded.

#### Subfolders needed:

- **Formation:** Articles of Incorporation, IRS EIN Assignment Letter, IRS 501(c)(3) Determination Letter.
- **Governance:** Current bylaws (and past versions), Conflict of Interest policies, and Whistleblower policies.
- **State Filings:** State tax-exemption certificates, charitable solicitation permits, and annual Secretary of State reports.

### Folder 2: Board & Meetings (The "Decision" File)

This folder documents that your board is actively managing the organization.

#### Subfolders needed:

- **Meeting Minutes:** Organized by year, then by month (e.g., 2026 > 04\_April\_Minutes.pdf).
- **Board Roster:** A current list of all board members, including contact information and term start/end dates.
- **Signed Agreements:** Signed Conflict of Interest forms for every board member, updated annually.

### **Folder 3: Financials & Tax (The "Money" File)**

This is the first place an auditor or a new Treasurer will look.

#### **Subfolders needed:**

- **IRS Form 990s:** Copies of filed tax returns, organized by year.
- **Bank & Accounting:** Monthly bank statements, canceled checks, and monthly reconciliation reports.
- **Grants & Major Donors:** Grant agreements, restrictions on fund usage, and final grant reports.

### **Folder 4: Operations & HR (The "People" File)**

Protect your team and limit organizational liability.

#### **Subfolders needed:**

- **Employees/Contractors:** W-2s, 1099s, employment contracts, and payroll records.
- **Insurance:** Current policies for General Liability, Directors & Officers (D&O), and other coverage.
- **Passwords & Access:** A secure, encrypted document listing who has access to software, bank accounts, websites, email, and social media; along with the CURRENT Login ID/Username & Passwords. Update the document every time there is a change.

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## **Part 2: The Document Retention Rulebook**

Not everything needs to be kept forever. Use this guidance to know when it's safe to delete or shred documents.

- **Keep Forever:** Articles of Incorporation, bylaws, IRS Determination Letter, board meeting minutes, and property deeds.
- **Keep for Seven (7) Years:** Bank statements, canceled checks, payroll tax records, contracts (seven years **after expiration**), and donor contribution records.
- **Keep for Three (3) Years:** General correspondence, internal emails, and expired insurance policies.

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## Part 3: The Annual Compliance Rhythm

Organization is not a one-time event; it is a habit. Put these reviews on your organization's official calendar.

### Monthly:

- Reconcile bank Accounts
- Have a non-check-writing board member review bank statements.

### Quarterly:

- Hold official board meetings.
- Review the Budget vs. Actual financial reports.
- Save approved meeting minutes to the Master Folder.

### Annually:

- File IRS Form 990.
- Renew state charitable solicitation permits.
- Have all board members sign updated Conflict of Interest forms.
- Conduct an annual file clean-up and shred documents older than seven years.

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## The Bottom Line: Organization is Insurance.

A well-organized file system is the best insurance policy your nonprofit can have. It protects you during IRS audits, strengthens grant applications, and ensures smooth leadership transitions. **Need help setting up your systems? We're here to help.**



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