United States Association of Former Members of Congress
Tip Sheet for Personal Digital Archiving

When Members of Congress leave office, they alone are responsible for the preservation of their personal papers. Some of the most historically significant documents remain with each member and today those documents are often in electronic form. Preserving these documents is an opportunity for each member to serve future Members of Congress, students, historians and scholars.

The greatest risk to digital files is inaccessibility. This is usually caused by *obsolescence*: either the files get stuck on obsolete storage media or the files are difficult to open because they were created with outdated software. The solution is to keep the files accessible by means of organizing and backing up.

Organize
Gather all your files from wherever reside: hard drives, CDs, flash drives, network drives, email attachments, floppy disks, Facebook. Collect the files into a folder on your computer and organize them into subfolders. Organize folders by date, topic, file type or whatever you prefer. Assign descriptive names to the folders and files that hint at their contents. Renaming does not affect files. Your system of organization does not matter as long as it makes sense to you and helps you and others find the files.

Back Up
Backup your collection folder onto two different removable storage media, such as a hard drive or DVD. Do not backup your collection to your computer. There is no *best* storage medium, so consider storing your collection onto different types of media in order to hedge your bets. Keep one copy handy -- in your office or wherever you prefer -- and the other in a geographically separate area. If disaster strikes one spot, the other copy will be safe.

Refresh the storage media periodically so that your digital collection will never be stuck on an obsolete storage medium such as old floppy disks or Zip disks. About every five to seven years, move your digital collection to a new, current storage medium.

Cloud storage is a good solution for a geographically remote backup copy and it eliminates the need to periodically refresh storage media for your collection; the storage owner does that. However there is no guarantee that the cloud storage company will always be in business or that they can always keep your collection accessible, so use cloud storage as a secondary backup, not as your primary backup.

If you keep your digital files organized and accessible, professional archivists will have a greater chance of success in giving your collection a proper home when the time comes.

Scan Documents and Photos
The [Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines](#) recommend that you scan documents as 300 dpi PDF files; PDF-A is the preferred, archival version if you have the option to save the digital file as PDF-A. Scan black and white documents in 8-bit grayscale and color documents in 24-bit color.

Scan photos (4"x6" and 5"x7") as 300 dpi color or grayscale TIFF files. To enlarge photos (4"x6" and 5"x7" photos to 8"x10" or greater), scan them at 600 dpi.

Procedure for Scanning

1.   Prepare the scanner
Clean the scanner glass and make sure it is free of dirt, smudges or specks. Prepare the documents or photographs for scanning. Remove paper clips, staples, tape and other items. Remove dirt, smudges or other particles from the documents or photos, taking care not to damage them during handling.

2.   Select scanner settings
These are common terms used by scanning software. Review them to help select a scan setting:
- *Palette*: the range of gray tones or colors in an image
- *Resolution*: fine detail, a measure of image sharpness
- *Dots per inch* (DPI): a measure of how many dots of color or shading are contained within one inch. The more dots in an inch, the greater the detail and the finer the image resolution.
- *Grayscale*: a palette of up to 256 gray tones, best for documents and black and white photographs
- *Bitonal*: two-tone black and white scans, suitable for handwritten text and some printed text
- *Color*: a palette of 256 to millions of color tones, used for photographs, maps, etc.

3.   Scan and save
Scan a document as a 300 dpi PDF or PDF-A file. Scan black and white documents in 8-bit grayscale and color documents in 24-bit color. Scan photos (4"x6" and 5"x7") as 300 dpi color or grayscale TIFF files with no compression. To enlarge photos (4"x6" and 5"x7" photos to 8"x10" or greater), scan at 600 dpi.

Unless you verify that the display of an image is reasonably accurate, the results might vary wide. It is best to view a reference image before beginning, to assure that the scan display is reasonably correct. Consult http://www.colour-science.com for a reference image.

Resources
For Members who want to do more than basic preservation, support is available from a variety of sources. When you are in Washington, consult with the House or Senate archivists. When you are in your home districts, consult with state university libraries.

- *Library of Congress: Personal Archiving*
  http://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/
- *Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative*
  http://www.digitizationguidelines.gov/
- *Paradigm: Guidelines for Creators of Personal Archives*
  http://www.paradigm.ac.uk/workbook/appendices/guidelines-tips.html
- *Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Archival Materials for Electronic Access: Creation of Production Master Files - Raster Images*
  http://www.archives.gov/preservation/technical/guidelines.html
- *Society of American Archivists: Electronic Records Resources List 2013*
  http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/List%20of%20Resources_2013_0.pdf
- *Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress*
  http://www.archives.gov/legislative/cla/advisory-committee/
- Preservation projects by Members of Congress can also serve as models. Explore their sites at the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress
  http://www.congresscenters.org