



## Keeping Personal Electronic Mail

Like paper letters, your e-mail messages document important events, transactions and relationships. You might want to save some e-mails—or perhaps many of them.

Saving an e-mail involves keeping it separate from your e-mail program. This is because e-mail programs are not meant to keep information for a long time: they can change or stop providing support at any time.

### Archiving Tips

#### Identify all your e-mail sources

- Identify your personal e-mail accounts.
- Within each account, find all folders or other separate groupings of messages; include any “archived” messages.

#### Decide which messages have long-term value

- Pick the messages you feel are especially important.
- You can pick a few messages or many.
- Save attachments that are part of the selected messages.

#### Export the selected messages

- If saving a few messages, you can use the “save as” command in your e-mail browser or software program to export them as individual files.
- If saving many e-mails, investigate automatically exporting them using the email program.
- If possible, save messages in an open format.
- Save metadata for the messages, including the message “header” (the subject, from, to and time and date).

#### Organize the saved messages

- Give individual messages and attachments descriptive file names.
- Create a directory/folder structure on your computer to put the saved messages and attachments.
- Write a brief summary of the directory structure and its files.

#### Make copies and manage them in different places

- Make at least two copies of your selected messages and attachments—more copies are better.
- One copy can stay on your computer or laptop; put other copies on separate media such as DVDs, CDs, portable hard drives, thumb drives or Internet storage.
- Store copies in different locations that are as physically far apart as practical. If disaster strikes one location, copies of your e-mails and attachments in the other place should be safe.
- Put a copy of the summary description with your important papers in a secure location.
- Check your saved e-mail and attachments at least once a year to make sure you can read them.
- Create new media copies every five years or when necessary to avoid data loss.

