

Factsheet

29: Managing information

With the growth of the internet, emails and social media, many organisations and individuals are suffering from information overload. Good information management supports the work of your organisation by making information useful rather than confusing and overwhelming.

You should think about what information your organisation needs and how best to get it. Information includes newsletters, newspapers, reports, email bulletins, leaflets, websites, social media etc.

You may find it easier to approach information management by thinking first about internal information and then about external information. You might well find that there are overlaps in the types of information shared and sometimes the same approaches can be used for internal staff/volunteers as are used for your external contacts and service users. However, sometimes messages and information are in quite different formats for different audiences, and you are likely to need to factor this into your framework.

The key stages to go through to begin effective information management are set out below.

1. Finding out what information you need

Find out what staff (both paid and voluntary) and management committee members need to know, when they need to know it, and in what format (e.g. by email, full text articles, verbal briefings, postings on website, etc). This is an *information needs analysis* and forms part of an *information audit*.

You can find out about information needs in a number of ways. You could devise a questionnaire or you could sit down with people and talk through what they need. You need to find out:

- What information they create or hold themselves
- Whether they have a way of sharing the information with committee members, paid staff and volunteers
- What type of information they need. Bear in mind that what information people say they *want* is not necessarily what they actually *want* or even *need*. Try to get people to be specific about what they actually need and what they want and why they want it
- Where they usually go first to find information and why

- Whether they have difficulty finding information and if so, whether this is all information or information about specific issues
- What is causing the difficulty in finding information (e.g. too much or out of date information)

2. Finding out what information you have

Do an *information audit* to find out what information is actually held in your organisation (e.g. journals received, mailing lists subscribed to, etc.) and who has access to it. Compare your findings to the results of your needs analysis.

By doing this, you should be able to identify gaps in the information you have, as well as information that you have but don't need.

3. Organising your information

Once you know what you hold and what comes into your organisation, you need to think about how to make the information easier to find and use. The methods used will depend on the size and type of your organisation. For example, you could bring all written information held into one central place where it can be ordered in a logical manner, and create a logical computer based system for electronic information. Systems used to organise information in this way are called *classification systems* and can cover information in filing cabinets for paper documents, libraries for books and journals, and directories with folder systems on computer. For help with this see the Further Help section below.

If you are a new organisation with no paid workers and no office, setting up a central place to store this information might be impractical. Another option is to list the information each individual has access to, and to make this list available to everyone in your organisation so that they know who is likely to know, or to be able to find out about, a given issue.

Once you've organised your information for the first time, you need to keep it organised. That means:

- Making sure people know what they should do with new information
- Keeping the information up to date. Not only should new information be added to the body of information, but also old, out of date information

must be weeded out. You might do this on a regular basis or when space demands.

- Archiving. There may be information you want to keep but you do not need ready access to on a daily basis. This can be true of financial records, which the law can require you to keep for a certain period of time. You should store this information in a safe way, and ensure records are kept of where it is and how long it must be kept.

4. Dealing with incoming information

Now that you know what everyone needs to know, you need to make sure that appropriate information gets to them. You can do this in a number of ways:

- If only one person needs to see a particular publication, it could be sent directly to them
- You could quickly look through incoming items for useful information, noting what you find, compiling these notes into a list and sending it out to committee members, staff and volunteers. This way, everybody has a summary of the latest useful information, and knows where to find the full text of everything.
- All information could come into the organisation through one person who then redirects the information to those who need it

The organisation should have a policy for which emails must be kept and which can be deleted, and a system for storing emails after they are dealt with.

5. Understanding copyright and data protection

There are laws that apply to managing information, the most important of which are the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and copyright law.

The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) is a regulation in EU law on data protection and privacy for all individuals within the European Union and the European Economic Area.

The Data Protection Act 2018 controls how your personal information is used by organisations and is the UK's implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The two pieces of legislation essentially work together to cover how we should treat personal data and this will continue post Brexit.

The Data Protection Act and GDPR applies to ‘personal data’, which means any information relating to an identifiable person who can be directly or indirectly identified in particular by reference to an identifier. You can find more detail in the [key definitions section of the ICO \(Information Commissioners Office\) Guide to the GDPR](#)

For more information read [Factsheet 21: General Data Protection Regulations \(GDPR\) and the Data Protection Act](#)

Confidentiality: Confidentiality includes data protection rules, but is wider – for example it will cover information about deceased individuals, and sensitive information about your organisation. Your organisation should have data protection and confidentiality policies, or one policy covering both. Template policies can be found here: [Data protection policy and procedures policy template](#) and [Confidentiality policy](#)

Copyright: All creative works (written and artistic works, photographs, music, emails, website design and content and much more) is automatically copyright as soon as it is created, without having to be registered in any way. Copyright is the right to decide how the creative work can be used. Copyright usually belongs to the creator of the work, except where the work is created by an employee in the course of their employment, in which case copyright usually belongs to the employer; or where the creator of the work assigns (transfers) the copyright to someone else.

People often think that if they pay someone to do create the work, they own the copyright – but this is not the case. A photographer who is commissioned to take photos, a designer commissioned to design a logo or a consultant commissioned to write a report all own the copyright to those works, unless they have explicitly assigned copyright to whoever commissioned the work.

The basic rule is that if you are not the copyright holder, you need the permission of the copyright holder in order to copy or use their work. This permission is called a licence and might be very limited (for example the right to use one photograph in an annual report) or much wider (the right to use a



whole set of photographs for any publicity purposes for the organisation, which could include use in annual reports, leaflets, website, on mugs or t-shirts to raise money for the organisation, or any other specified purposes).

Copyright may be much wider than you think. For example if your organisation plays music on a radio, television, phonograph, iPod or internet at work or for any of its activities, it will need licences to play recorded music; if anyone plays live music which they have not written themselves, the organisation is likely to need a licence for it to be played.

Information about copyright is available from the UK Intellectual Property Office, and information about music licensing from Performing Right Society (PRS) and Phonographic Performance Ltd (PPL) (see further help, below).

6. Working out the cost of managing information

There are costs associated with managing information. These can include:

- Staff/volunteer time
- Subscriptions to publications
- Space (to store both paper and electronic information properly)
- IT equipment (depending on methods chosen)
- Internet access

However, there are financial benefits to managing information well. For example, you may no longer be paying for a subscription that your audit revealed was no longer needed, and no longer is every member of staff and every volunteer spending time sifting through lots of information to find the bit they need.

7. Monitoring and evaluating how you manage information

Once you have set up your information system you will need to monitor and evaluate it to ensure that the system keeps pace with the changing needs and priorities of your organisation. One way of doing this is to regularly consult those people who use the information and ask them about the information they access, how useful it is and whether there is information that they want but do not receive. It is like an information needs analysis.

You may also need to keep statistical information about the types of information you keep and ways you distribute it. For example, you can keep a record of how many email bulletins you send out and to how many people.

8. Further help

Manchester Community Central – www.manchestercommunitycentral.org
contact 0333 321 3021, or email: info@mcrcommunitycentral.org

Information Commissioner's Office – www.ico.gov.uk ICO's dedicated advice line for small businesses or charities 0303 123 1113 and select option 4

UK Intellectual Property Office – www.ipo.gov.uk contact 0300 300 2000

PRS (Performing Right Society) – www.prsformusic.com contact 020 7580 5544

PPL (Phonographic Performance Ltd) – www.ppluk.com contact 020 7534 1000

Updated: September 2021