



Step-by-Step Guide to Going Paperless

Introduction

There are many benefits that come along with relying less on paper and more on an electronic case management system. These benefits include: increased efficiency, more security, searchable data, ease in creating reports and remotely accessing case files. This step-by-step advisory provides guidance on how to move your program toward relying less on paper and more on an electronic case management system. This involves scanning in and storing all your client files in the cloud. Once client files are stored in the cloud, immigration legal services representatives can securely access and work on cases while also providing staff supervision.

Going Paperless Step-by-Step Guide

1. Review your motivations for paperless and set a realistic goal:
 - a. What makes you want to go paperless, and what benefits do you expect from going paperless?
 - b. 100% paperless, partially paperless, or nearly paperless?
 - Where are your files located (onsite/offsite)?
 - c. How far can you go back?
 - How many files do you have?
 - Who maintains these files, and how are they maintained?
2. Examine available resources and staff involvement:
 - a. What resources and equipment do we have that can support this going paperless project?
 - Laptops
 - Copiers/Scanners
 - Smartphone apps that can scan
 - Internet connection/speed
 - b. Who in the office or outside the office can be involved?
 - Office Manager
 - Administrative Assistant
 - Attorney
 - DOJ Accredited Representative

- Outside vendors who will scan for you
- Other

3. Develop a Plan of Action

- Decide what you want scan/archive digitally (e.g. entire client file; selected parts of client file; other)
- Where will we locate scanned files (e.g. on our server; on the cloud (online); on our online case management service; other)
- When will we scan files (e.g. as file is created; when it becomes inactive; other)
- How will scanned files be named/labeled - (e.g. SMITH.John.Case.No.123.09.19.2017)
- What format will we save scanned files (e.g. pdf file; image file; other)
- How long will we be required to retain client file (e.g. 5 years; check your local rules for maintaining/archiving files)
- Do we want scan current inactive files or implement this plan moving forward with new files
- What is our BACKUP (e.g. server backups; cloud back up; other)
- What is our SECURITY (e.g. password protect; firewall; other encryption)

4. Testing the Plan

- How long does it take to scan a client file
- Will our hardware (equipment) be able to manage (impact on internet connection)
- Is this causing any disruptions in our shared office
- How can we improve, make easier and more efficient

5. Getting Others to Buy In

- Less paper in office
- Files can be accessed remotely (outside of office; telecommuters; remote/temporary offices)
- Files and file information can be accessed faster (searchable pdf files)
- Save on office space and off site storage expenses
- More secure (from physical damage; still need online protection)

6. Implementation

- Phase in plan (gradual or more accelerated)
- Set timeline for progression and review

7. Assess and Adjust

- Get feedback (what is working; what is not working) and make corrections to the plan

- Assess if you need better/more hardware (e.g. scan only device; faster internet connection)
- Assess if you need better/more digital storage for your case files
- Adjust the scope of file content you are scanning (e.g. should we scan inactive files; other)
- Determine if BACKUP and SECURITY measures are sufficient
- Provide ongoing technical support & customization
- Adjust written policies and procedures
- Prepare grant applications that include technology support

Other ideas:

- Using fillable Adobe PDF client intake forms (make available on website; email; other)
- Using tablets for client intake (with fillable forms)
- Using online based management system for client information

It is advisable for programs to consult with a reliable Information Technology (IT) expert on the steps above. Consulting with another nonprofit immigration legal program that has already accomplished a transition to paperless records is also advisable. Program directors may wish to study the cost savings, if any, of going paperless and report the result with agency leadership. Lastly, as technology changes, programs should stay aware of how their paperless systems can be improved and more secure.