

## Database Tip sheet

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- Why do I care about databases?
  - Get a bird's eye view of a lot of information.
  - Determine some hard statistics.
  - They're sortable. You'll be able to say "this is the worst" and "this is the best" with confidence.
  - Make more \$\$\$.
- How do I learn?
  - NICAR at U. of Missouri teaches CAR boot camps several times a year and also does traveling training sessions for Excel and Access.
  - Attend a CAR boot camp.
  - Make friends with someone who knows how to use databases at your organization.
  - Teach yourself.
- Database software
  - Excel. For analyzing single tables of data, nothing beats Excel.
  - Access. Step it up a notch. Work with multiple tables and larger data sets.
  - SQL Server / MySQL.
    - The SQL in both these application titles stands for "structured query language".
    - Ask your database complex questions (called "queries") to perform data analysis.
    - Put your data on the web for readers and reporters.
- Building databases
  - Always remember to break apart different pieces of information
  - Add unique identifiers to each line of data
  - Use codes instead of words
  - This is bad:

Name / Title	Address
Robert J Barry, Reporter	1 Herald Plaza, Miami, FL 33132

- This is good:

Last	First	Middle	Title	Street	City	State	ZIP
Barry	Robert	J	Reporter	1 Herald Plz	Miami	FL	33132

- This is best:

ID #	Last	First	Middle	Title	Number	Street	Street Type	City	State	ZIP
1	Barry	Robert	J	R	1	Herald	Plz	Miami	FL	33132

- FOIAing databases
  - If you're not making your own database, you'll most likely be working with one provided by a government agency.
  - Often, PIOs don't know what you're talking about when you ask for a database. They can't fathom the idea of looking at a million pieces of information in a single lifetime, much less on deadline.
  - Shortcut: Make friends with the local government IT staff. They can be very helpful, and generally, they don't care about politics.