

# Instructions for Encrypting MS Office Documents

## Step 1

Establish a strong **encryption password** to use for encrypting files that contain personally identifiable information (especially social security numbers and birth dates) or other highly sensitive and confidential documents.

- Don't share your passwords and avoid writing them down.
- Characteristics of good passwords:
  - At least 8 characters in length
  - Contain a mixture of upper and lower case letters, numbers, and symbols
  - Difficult to guess (e.g. don't include real words or personal information like user name, names of family members, places, pets, birthdays, addresses, hobbies, etc.)
  - Easy to remember (so you don't have to write them down)

## Step 2

Collect all Microsoft documents (i.e. Word, Excel, Powerpoint) that contain PIIs into a single folder within your “My Documents” or “Desktop.” The name of the folder should be inconspicuous, do not call it “confidential” or “sensitive documents”.

## Step 3

**Open each individual document that contains sensitive information and save it using your encryption password.** Each version of Microsoft Office has a different method of saving documents with passwords.

- a. MS Office 2003 or Macintosh 2004: File >> Save As >> Options (button) >> Security >> Password to Open >> Enter Password
- b. MS Office 2007 or Macintosh Office 2008: Office Button >> Prepare >> Encrypt Document >> Password >> Enter Password

The most secure option is to save using the “password to Open.” Using the “Password to Modify” will allow anyone who opens it to simply save the file in a different format (rich text, plain text, PDF) or copy and paste the content without requiring the password.