**What Can I Do With PDFs or Hardcopy Lists of Alumni?**

When trying to enter old camper and staff records into their database, many camps find that the data isn’t in the format they need for easy import. Whether the data is in old paper records or sent in pdf format, it isn’t ready to be imported into a database. So what can you do?

First note that if for some reason you are unable to convert the files into importable excel files, we truly believe it is worth the time and effort to do so manually. Other camps have either hired a temp to do the work, asked a volunteer to help with this work, or reached out to counselors who might need service hours to help with this process. The ROI of this effort is high and definitely worth it.

That said, if you can get the data converted into an excel spreadsheet that can be easily imported into your database, that’s ideal.

There are a number of options out there that claim to help with converting pdfs or other documents into useable excel files. We have not been able to test all of these tools or processes, but provide this list of options for you to consider. Give them a try and let us know what you find – we’d love to share your learning with others.

**Converting Paper Records to Excel Spreadsheets**

Paper records are often the most difficult to prepare for import. Sometimes the data is hand-written. Other times the paper has deteriorated over time. However, there are potential options for converting paper records into useable excel files:

1. **Scan it**! Some scanners have OCR (optical character recognition) capability, which means you can scan a document and it will convert it into readable text. Once a document is in text format, you should be able to open in Excel and manipulate it there.
2. **Google Keep**. Google Keep is a free tool from Google meant for note-taking across your computer and mobile device. In addition, you can take a photo of a hardcopy and then pull the text from that image. This blog post describes the process in more detail, as well as other OCR options for pulling text from images: <https://www.guidingtech.com/53597/best-ocr-apps-android/>

**Converting PDFs to Excel Spreadsheets**

What if you receive PDFs of data instead of paper records? You have some options as well. If you search “Convert PDFs to Excel” you will find a ton of options advertised. However, you might want to try using Adobe features first:

1. **Adobe Standard or Professional**. If your camp has a license for the Standard or Professional Adobe product, you should be able to easily convert the data into a spreadsheet. Don’t have one of these versions? You could ask a Board member if they have access at work! This article describes how to convert a PDF to a .csv file (which can be opened in Excel) with this tool: <https://www.techwalla.com/articles/how-to-convert-pdf-to-csv>
2. Adobe also has a tool specifically for this purpose that you can purchase. At the time of this writing, this tool can be used for free for 7 days. If you don’t have access to Adobe Standard or Professional, you could try the free trial and convert all of your PDFs during one week. <https://acrobat.adobe.com/us/en/acrobat/how-to/pdf-to-excel-xlsx-converter.html>

Please let us know if any of these options (or a different tool or process) help make this process easier.