

Disposition of Federal Records: A Records Management Handbook

2000 Web Edition (of 1997 printed publication)

Table of Contents

- [Message from the Archivist](#)
- [FOREWORD](#)
- I. [A MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW](#)
 - Introduction
 - Nature of the Records Disposition Program
 - The Program Directive and Its Contents
 - Program Promotion
 - Program Evaluation
 - Conclusion
- II. [RECORDS IDENTIFICATION AND SCHEDULING: AN OVERVIEW](#)
 - Introduction
 - Records, Nonrecord Materials, and Personal Papers
 - Records Disposition Functions
 - Basic Steps in Scheduling Records
 - Conclusion
- III. [THE RECORDS INVENTORY](#)
 - Introduction
 - Review of Agency Functions and Recordkeeping Requirements and Practices
 - Inventorying: What, Why, and How
 - Inventorying: Scope, Focus, and Responsibility
 - The Series Inventory
 - The Information System Inventory
 - Verification

- Conclusion

IV. RECORD VALUES AND SCHEDULE INSTRUCTION

- Introduction
- Evaluating Records: The Agency's Viewpoint
- Evaluating Records: NARA's Viewpoint
- Preparing Disposition Instructions
- Understanding General Records Schedules
- Applying General Records Schedules to Agency Records
- Conclusion

V. SCHEDULE PREPARATION AND CLEARANCE

- Introduction
- Completing an SF 115
- Description and Added Information
- Electronic, Audiovisual, and Other Special Records
- Other Considerations in Completing an SF 115
- Arranging a Records Schedule
- Assembling a Draft Records Schedule
- Obtaining Internal Clearances and GAO's Approval
- Submitting an SF 115 for NARA's Approval
- Conclusion

VI. SCHEDULE IMPLEMENTATION

- Introduction
- Issuing the Schedule
- Training Employees
- Applying the Schedule to Permanent Records
- Applying the Schedule to Temporary Records
- Reviewing and Updating the Schedule
- Related Disposition Matters
- Conclusion

VII. PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Introduction
- Reports on the Program
- Self-Evaluation Guidelines
- NARA's Evaluation of Agency Programs
- Conclusion

APPENDIX A. RECORDS DISPOSITION STATUTES

- [44 U.S.C. Chapter 21](#)
- [44 U.S.C. Chapter 29](#)
- [44 U.S.C. Chapter 31](#)
- [44 U.S.C. Chapter 33](#)
- [18 U.S.C. Chapter 101](#)

APPENDIX B. RECORDS DISPOSITION REGULATIONS (36 CFR 1228)

- [Subpart A](#): Records Disposition Programs
- [Subpart B](#): Scheduling Records
- [Subpart C](#): General Records Schedules
- [Subpart D](#): Implementing Schedules
- [Subpart E](#): Loan of Permanent and Unscheduled Records
- [Subpart F](#): Emergency Authorization to Destroy Records
- [Subpart G](#): Damage to, Alienation, and Unauthorized Destruction of Records
- [Subpart H](#): Transfer of Records from the Custody of One Executive Agency to Another
- [Subpart I](#): Transfer of Records to Records Storage Facilities
- [Subpart J](#): Transfer, Use, and Disposition of Records in a NARA Records Center
- [Subpart K](#): Facility Standards for Records Storage Facilities
- [Subpart L](#): Transfer of Records to the National Archives of the United States
- [Appendix A to Part 1228](#) - Minimum Security Standards for Level III Federal Facilities

- o [Appendix B to Part 1228](#) - Alternative Certified Fire-safety Detection and Suppression System(s) Authority: 44 U.S.C. chs. 21, 29, and 33.

[APPENDIX C.](#) APPRAISAL GUIDELINES FOR PERMANENT RECORDS

[APPENDIX D.](#) RECORDS MANAGEMENT PUBLICATIONS

[APPENDIX E.](#) LIST OF REGIONAL RECORDS SERVICES FACILITIES

From the Archivist

This web-formatted version of the 1997 reprint of the *Disposition of Federal Records* handbook has been changed only to update organizational information and reflect changes in regulations.

As indicated in the National Archives and Records Administration's Strategic Plan, *Ready Access to Essential Evidence*, we are reviewing our records management policies. This handbook and other records management issuances will be more extensively revised in the future for conformance to changes in policy and in recordkeeping practices affected by technological developments.

Please let me know if you have suggestions for improving this handbook or any of our other records management publications.

JOHN W. CARLIN

Archivist of the United States

FOREWORD

An effective records disposition program is the key to successful records management in Federal agencies. It helps ensure that agencies have the recorded information necessary to conduct Government business, avoid waste, and preserve America's documentary heritage.

This handbook explains how to establish, manage, and operate a records disposition program within a Federal agency. It emphasizes the necessity of each agency's developing, implementing, and updating a records schedule for all agency records,

regardless of media or location. Developing a records schedule includes reviewing agency functions and recordkeeping requirements, inventorying and evaluating records, preparing disposition instructions, organizing and clearing the schedule internally, and obtaining approval from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and, if necessary, from the General Accounting Office (GAO).

Proper implementation involves issuing the approved records schedule as an agency directive, training employees to use it, and carefully applying the schedule's provisions to both permanent and temporary records. The schedule's final objective is to ensure the authorized, appropriate, and timely disposition of the agency's records. Besides being developed and implemented, the schedule needs to be reviewed at least annually and updated whenever necessary.

The handbook explains how to evaluate a records disposition program in order to make improvements. It also describes NARA's role in helping agencies comply with laws and regulations regarding records disposition and other aspects of records management. The appendixes contain relevant laws and regulations, appraisal guidelines for permanent records, a listing and description of NARA's records management publications, and a list of regional records facilities. The frequent repetitions, summaries, and cross-references are intended to facilitate use of this edition for instructional purposes as well as for self-study.

This handbook does not cover the disposition of Presidential records or records of the U.S. Congress.

Richard A. Wire wrote this revised edition of *Disposition of Federal Records*. He wishes to thank Frank B. Evans, William H. Leary, and Katherine V. Coram for their advice and assistance. This publication was designed and illustrated by John H. Hedges.

Bibliographic note: The 2000 web edition is based on the 1997 printed publication *Disposition of Federal Records, a Records Management Handbook, Second Edition, National Archives and Records Administration, Office of Records Services -- Washington, D.C. (1997)*. The web edition may vary from the printed version. The text has been changed to update organizational information and reflect changes in regulations.

I. A Management Overview

- [Introduction](#)
 - [Nature of the Records Disposition Program](#)
 - [The Program Directive and Its Contents](#)
 - [Program Promotion](#)
 - [Program Evaluation](#)
 - [Conclusion](#)
-

I. A Management Overview

- *An effective records disposition program is essential to successful records management, which is an integral part of information resources management.*
 - *A disposition program requires a strong directive.*
 - *Managing the records disposition program includes training employees, publicizing the program, and cultivating professional relationships.*
 - *Agency records officers should participate in the development of electronic and other recordkeeping systems to ensure proper planning for disposition.*
 - *Agency records officers need to evaluate their records disposition programs periodically.*
-

Introduction

This chapter describes how to establish and manage a records disposition program, while the following chapters explain how to implement it. An effective records disposition program is the key to successful records management, which, in turn, ensures that Government activities are documented properly, efficiently, and economically. Managing Federal records requires an understanding of their essential role in administering Government affairs and of the relationship of records management to other information resources management programs. It also entails a knowledge of recordkeeping requirements. Managing the disposition program is based on a directive establishing the program and involves an understanding of the program's nature, of promotion methods, and of evaluation techniques.

Records and Information Resources Management

Managing recorded information is an important responsibility of every Federal agency. As the basic administrative tool by which the Government does its work, records are a basic component of each agency's information resources. Like other resources, they must be managed properly for the agency to function effectively and comply with Federal laws and regulations.

According to Federal law ([44 U.S.C. 2901](#)), records management means:

the managerial activities involved with respect to records creation, records maintenance and use, and records disposition in order to achieve adequate and proper documentation of the policies and transactions of the Federal Government and effective and economical management of agency operations.

Along with data processing and telecommunications, records management is an integral part of information resources management (IRM). (See [fig. 1-1.](#)) IRM is concerned with the creation, maintenance and use, and disposition of information as well as with related resources, or assets, such as personnel, equipment, funds, and technology. In accordance with 44 U.S.C. 3504, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) works with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the General Services Administration (GSA) to promote the coordination of Federal information policy, including records management. (For more details on OMB's role in IRM, see [OMB Circular No. A-130](#), Management of Federal Information Resources.)

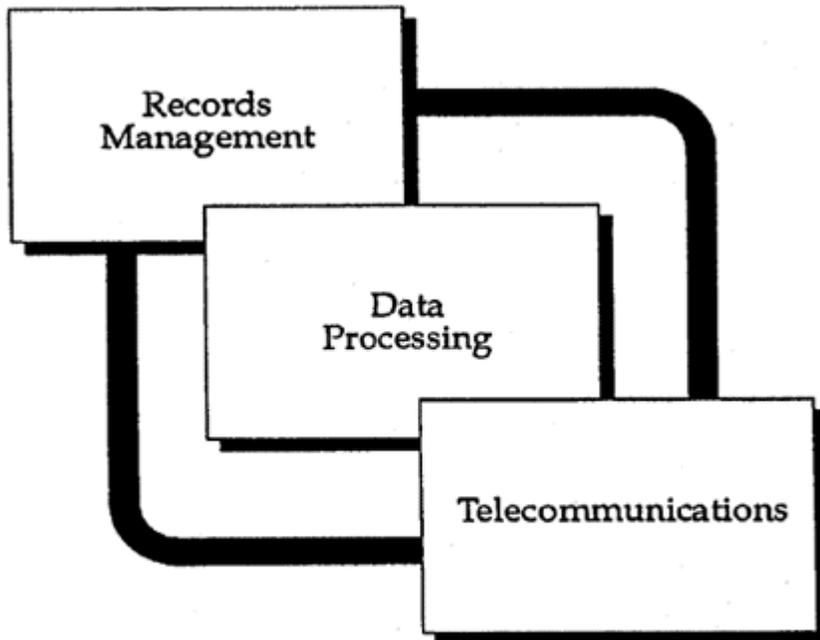


Figure 1-1. IRM Components

In setting forth records management responsibilities, Federal law requires each agency head to

make and preserve records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency and designed to furnish the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities [[44 U.S.C. 3101](#)].

The agency head must also "establish and maintain an active, continuing program for the economical and efficient management of the records of the agency" ([44 U.S.C. 3102](#)). This means establishing continuous and systematic control over the creation, maintenance and use, and disposition of agency records in accordance with statutory and regulatory requirements. It also involves cooperating with NARA and GSA to improve records management.

Recordkeeping Requirements

Central to the proper management of recorded information is the concept of recordkeeping requirements. These requirements are statements in laws, regulations, or agency directives providing general and specific guidance on particular records to be

created and maintained by an agency. Since each agency is legally obligated to create and maintain adequate and proper documentation of its organization, functions, and activities, it needs to issue recordkeeping requirements for all activities at all levels and for all media and to distinguish records from nonrecord materials and personal papers.

Agency recordkeeping requirements apply to both the creation and maintenance of records. In accordance with NARA regulations ([36 CFR 1222](#)), these requirements should prescribe the systematic creation and maintenance of all agency records.

Records Disposition and the Life Cycle of Records

Disposition is an integral part of records management and is the third and final stage of the life cycle of records. According to the life cycle concept, records go through three basic stages: (1) creation (or receipt), (2) maintenance and use, and (3) disposition. (See [fig. 1-2](#).) Although this handbook focuses on disposition, all three stages of the records life cycle are interrelated. Thus an agency must coordinate its programs to manage records creation, maintenance and use, and disposition so that each program supports the others.

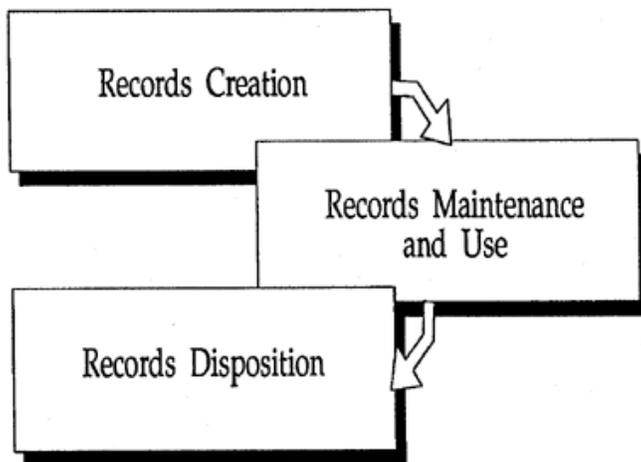


Figure 1-2. The Records Life Cycle

In Federal usage, records are referred to, depending on the stage they have reached in their life cycle, as "current," "semicurrent," or "noncurrent." These terms refer not to the date or age of the records, but rather to their use in the current daily work of the office.

As used in this handbook, disposition means those actions taken regarding Federal records after they are no longer needed in office space to conduct current agency business. These actions include:

- Transfer of records to agency storage facilities or NARA records centers.
- Transfer of records from one Federal agency to another.
- Transfer of permanent records to the National Archives of the United States.
- Disposal of temporary records no longer needed to conduct agency business, usually by destruction or occasionally by donation.

Disposition is a comprehensive term that includes destruction as well as other actions, such as the transfer of permanent records to the National Archives. After appraising agency records, NARA authorizes either their disposal or their transfer to the National Archives for preservation and research. Agencies must also receive NARA's approval before lending records outside the Federal Government, before retiring them to NARA-operated record centers, and before transferring them to other Federal agencies, unless exceptions have been granted. Finally, they must receive NARA's approval before establishing or relocating their records centers and before converting permanent or unscheduled originals to microfilm.

In contrast to disposition, "disposal" in Federal usage refers to only those final actions taken regarding temporary records after their retention periods expire. It normally means destruction of the record content, such as by recycling or burning the record medium. The term is also used occasionally to mean the transfer of temporary records from Federal control by donating them to an eligible person or organization after receiving NARA's approval.

Nature of the Records Disposition Program

Definition

A records disposition program may be defined as those policies and practices designed to achieve effective and efficient disposition by scheduling all records; ensuring their proper storage, whether in agency or record center storage space; ensuring the authorized and prompt disposal of temporary records; and ensuring the timely transfer of permanent records to the National Archives.

Elements of the Program

The primary steps in managing a records disposition program are described below and summarized in [figure 1-3](#). These steps make up the elements of the program:

- Issue a program directive assigning authorities and responsibilities for records disposition activities in the agency, and keep that directive up to date.
- Develop, implement, and update a comprehensive records schedule.
- Train all those taking part in the agency's records disposition activities.
- Publicize the program to make all agency employees aware of their records disposition responsibilities.
- Evaluate the results of the program to ensure adequacy, effectiveness, and efficiency.

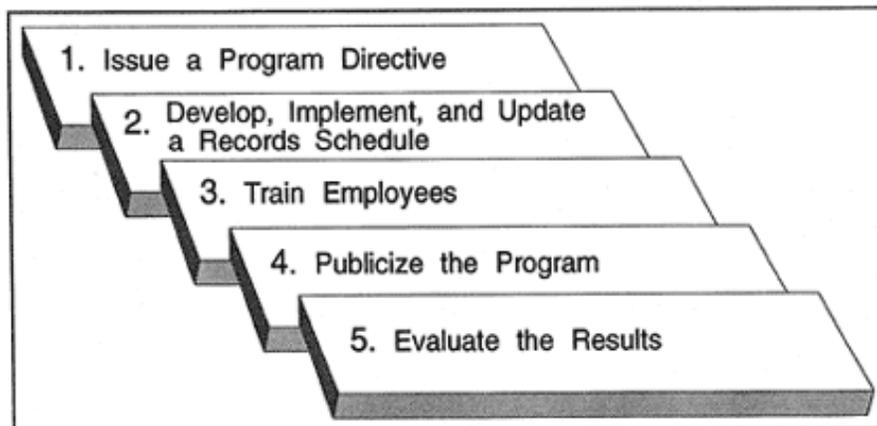


Figure 1-3. Steps in Managing a Records Disposition Program

This chapter describes the steps involving the program directive, training, publicity, and evaluation. Later chapters elaborate on developing, implementing, and updating a comprehensive records schedule and on evaluating a records disposition program.

Basic Objectives

A records disposition program provides for the effective and efficient management of records no longer needed in office space to conduct current business. It has three main objectives: The prompt disposal of temporary records whose authorized retention periods have expired, the timely and systematic transfer to economical storage of records no longer needed in office space but not yet eligible for final disposition, and the

identification and transfer of permanent records to the National Archives for preservation and for reference and research use.

Most records cannot and should not be kept permanently or even for long periods. All records, regardless of media, fall into one of two categories for disposition purposes:

1. **Temporary records.** These should be destroyed, or in rare instances donated, after a fixed period of time or after occurrence of a specified event. The time may range from a few months to many years. Most Federal records are temporary.
2. **Permanent records.** These are sufficiently valuable for historical or other purposes to warrant continued preservation by the Federal Government. Relatively few Federal records are permanent, although the exact percentage differs from agency to agency.

In carrying out a records disposition program, each agency is responsible for recommending to NARA retention periods for potentially temporary records and suitable transfer dates for potentially permanent records. The agency also needs to determine where the records should be kept as they await disposal or transfer to the National Archives -- in the office, in an agency storage facility, or in a commercial or NARA record center.

The Program Directive and Its Contents

Managerial Support

To establish an effective records disposition program, the agency head must issue a strongly worded directive making the program an integral part of the agency's records and information management program. Issuing this directive emphasizes the agency's commitment to the authorized, timely, and orderly disposition of records. It allows the agency to issue the proper delegations of authority, establish staffing patterns, and approve procedures. The sections that follow provide details about the directive and its contents.

Organizational Placement

The organizational placement of the records disposition program will influence its effectiveness. In deciding where to place the program, the agency must recognize it as an

important management function and understand the need to relate it to other records and information management programs.

Program Responsibility and Objectives

The directive should designate the agency records officer as the official responsible for the program. It should permit delegation of authority to involve all parts of the agency in the program. The most important part of the directive states these program aims and duties:

- To enable agency managers to make informed decisions.
- To establish effective controls over all records and nonrecord materials in the agency's custody.
- To prepare, obtain approval of, and apply an up-to-date comprehensive schedule for all agency records and nonrecord materials.
- To participate in the development of electronic and other recordkeeping systems to ensure proper disposition.
- To assist and advise agency officials regarding records disposition matters.
- To act as a liaison with NARA for program direction.
- To recruit and train the staff necessary to carry out the program.
- To evaluate the program's results to ensure adequacy, effectiveness, and efficiency.

Staffing and Liaison

The directive should provide for an adequate network of personnel at major headquarters offices and at field offices to carry on records disposition work under the agency records officer's direction. The number of people in this liaison group depends on the size of the agency and its organizational complexity. [Figure 1-4](#) illustrates the structure of such a system.

Smaller agencies may find that records officers must directly conduct disposition activities. In a larger agency, the complexity and volume of records often require assigning some people full-time to the disposition function.

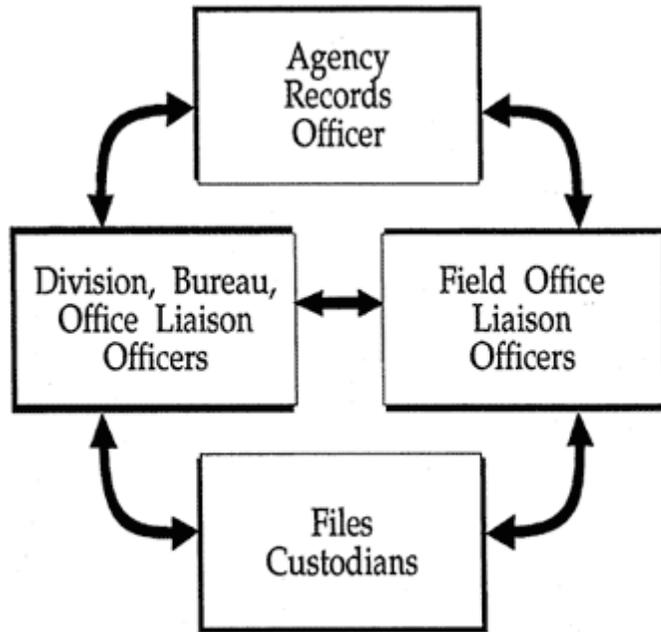


Figure 1-4. Liaison Organization

NARA's Role

The directive should indicate NARA's role in the disposition program. It should identify NARA as the oversight agency responsible for appraising all Federal records, approving their disposition, providing program assistance and records center storage, evaluating records management programs, and serving as the final custodian of permanent records. It should also point out that NARA operates two different types of records facilities:

- **NARA records centers.** These provide temporary storage and also reference service for records that are needed infrequently by the creating agency but are not yet eligible for disposal or transfer to the National Archives. Records stored in a NARA records center remain in the legal custody of the creating agency.
- **The National Archives.** It stores the Federal Government's permanent records, which are also known as the National Archives of the United States. When transferring permanent records to the National Archives, agencies also transfer legal custody of the records. The National Archives takes conservation measures needed to preserve the records and also provides reference service, including service to the creating agency.

Finally, if the directive covers the entire records management program, it should also indicate the responsibilities of GSA, OMB, and other oversight agencies.

Program Promotion

In working to develop and apply a comprehensive records schedule, the agency needs to promote and evaluate the overall records disposition program. Program promotion involves training employees, publicizing the program, helping develop and monitor electronic and other recordkeeping systems, and cultivating professional relationships inside and outside the agency.

Training

Proper training is an essential part of a records disposition program. Training should involve those agency personnel directly concerned with developing and applying schedules. These individuals include the agency records officer and staff, records liaison officers in central and field offices, and files custodians.

NARA's introductory records disposition curriculum provides a basis for internal agency training. In addition, records officers and their staffs can keep current by participating in more advanced training offered by NARA. These training opportunities are provided by NARA's Office of Records Services - Washington, DC and the Office of Regional Records Services. These and other training opportunities are described on the [NARA Records Management Programs training](#) web page.

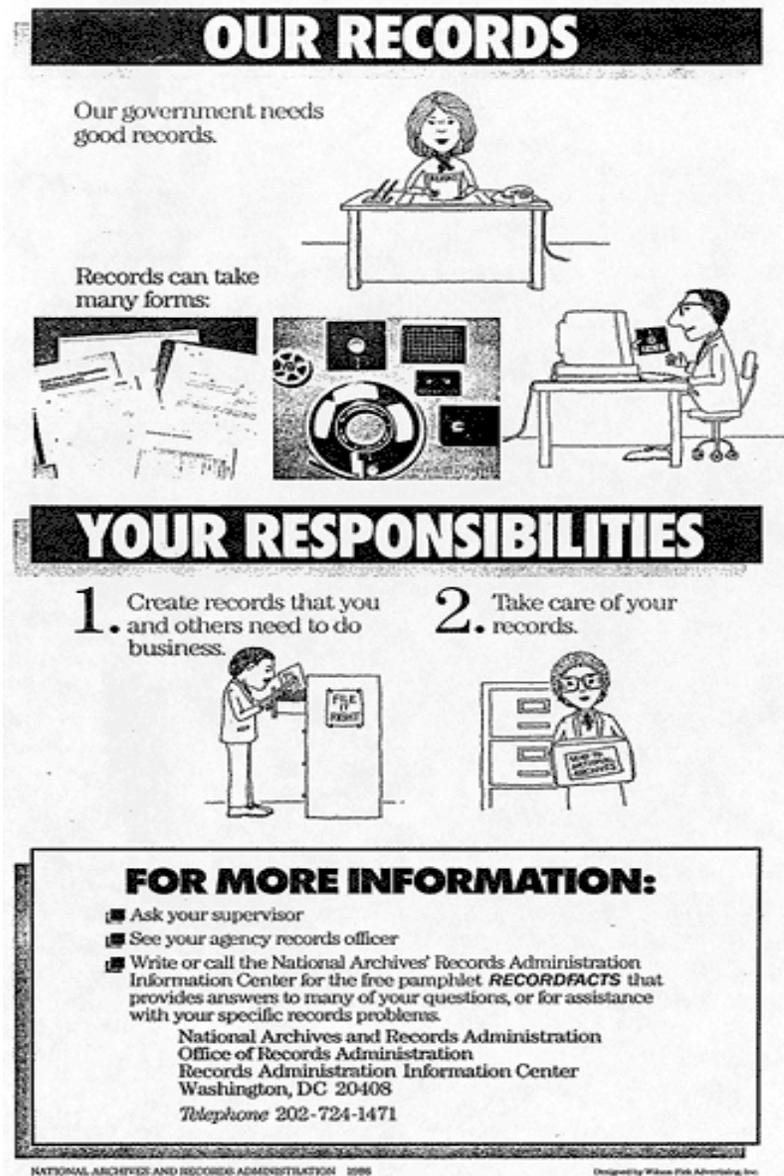
Agencies should periodically brief supervisors and other employees on their records responsibilities, particularly those relating to records disposition. Audiovisual recordings of training and briefing sessions may also be useful, especially for remote locations or regional offices.

Publicizing the Program

Besides formal training courses and briefing sessions, other ways to publicize the records disposition program include:

Agency Newsletters. These are a valuable way of informing employees about the program.

Posters. Appropriate posters are available for display on office walls or in hallways. For electronic copies of other records management posters, see the NARA [records management publications](#) web page.



Developing and Monitoring Recordkeeping Systems

Agency records officers should participate in the design and development of recordkeeping systems to ensure the proper disposition of recorded information. Such involvement is especially important in the design of electronic records systems.

According to OMB Circular No. A-130, agencies are to create or collect information "only after planning for its . . . use, storage, and disposition."

The uncontrolled purchase of recordkeeping equipment can waste money and undermine the entire records disposition program. Records officers should review requests for major purchases of such equipment to ensure that the records are scheduled and the disposition instructions are being carried out promptly.

Cultivating Professional Relationships

Records officers need to develop and maintain good professional relationships both inside and outside the agency in order to advance records disposition and other aspects of records management. They should develop and maintain such relationships with:

- **Records liaison officers.** An active network of such officers, both at headquarters and in the field, is essential to the success of the agency's records disposition program. As those responsible for coordinating records matters in particular offices, records liaison officers provide the agency's records officer with much of the information and support needed to develop and implement the program.
- **Agency program managers.** Involving them is essential to the disposition program's success. They must be consulted to determine the value of the records to the agency and to identify other users and uses of the information. Their involvement will help ensure that records officers participate in the development of new information systems. Assisting these managers in disposition and other records management matters can open doors to cooperation. Furthermore, the records disposition program offers program managers an important service. It provides the disposition authorities required to preserve the information they need to do their jobs well and to dispose of information when it is no longer needed.
- **Designers and managers of electronic records systems.** Because of the growth of such systems, records officers should give special attention to helping design and develop these systems to ensure adequate documentation and especially proper disposition of recorded information.
- **Agency historians.** Records officers should assist agency historians and consult with them in the process of ensuring adequate documentation and identifying records with potentially permanent value.

- **Records managers outside the agency.** Forming a network of contacts outside the agency can be useful. Attending meetings sponsored by NARA and professional societies, for example, can lead to a sharing of information and ideas about records management problems and possible solutions. For information about professional societies as well as NARA-sponsored meetings, agencies should contact NARA's Life Cycle Management Division. Information about [NARA events](#) is also available on the records management web page.
 - **NARA staff members.** NARA staff members are a key resource as agencies develop or improve their records disposition programs. Besides approving mandatory disposition authorities, NARA provides services such as information, training, and record center storage. It also takes legal custody of permanent records once their agency use has ended, as described in later chapters of this handbook.
-

Program Evaluation

Good management necessarily involves evaluating a program's results to make improvements such as shorter retention periods for temporary records, more timely disposal or transfer of eligible records, and better relations with other agency managers and NARA.

Besides reviewing its records schedule annually, each agency is required to evaluate periodically its records management programs, including records disposition, for compliance with relevant laws and regulations and for effectiveness. Likewise, in its oversight role, NARA periodically conducts single agency and interagency evaluations for the same purposes. ([36 CFR 1220](#))

Chapter VII of this handbook contains further information on [evaluating](#) an agency's records disposition program.

Conclusion

An effective records disposition program is the key to successfully managing recorded information. Such a program helps ensure that agencies have the recorded information necessary to conduct Government business, avoid waste, and preserve America's documentary heritage for transfer to the National Archives. Managing this program is a challenging and rewarding responsibility, one that deserves the highest priority.

After giving an overview of identifying and scheduling records, the chapters that follow explain how to carry out a records disposition program, especially by developing and implementing a comprehensive records schedule and by evaluating the program.

II. Records Identification and Scheduling: An Overview

- [Introduction](#)
 - [Records, Nonrecord Materials, and Personal Papers](#)
 - [Records Disposition Functions](#)
 - [Basic Steps in Scheduling Records](#)
 - [Conclusion](#)
-

II. Records Identification and Scheduling: An Overview

- Records must be identified and distinguished from nonrecord materials and personal papers.
 - Records are created or received and accumulated as an agency conducts Government business.
 - Records may be on paper, electronic, audiovisual, microform, or other media.
 - Scheduling is the process of developing a document that provides mandatory instructions for what to do with records (and nonrecord materials) no longer needed for current Government business.
 - The scheduling process requires an understanding of records disposition functions.
 - Basic scheduling steps include reviewing agency functions and recordkeeping requirements, inventorying and evaluating the records, and preparing disposition instructions.
 - The steps also include organizing the draft schedule, clearing it internally and externally, and then implementing the approved schedule and updating it whenever necessary.
-

Introduction

An effective records disposition program depends, at least in part, on the systematic creation and maintenance of agency records. Records management during the creation and maintenance stages involves identifying records and establishing and meeting recordkeeping requirements. (See [Chapter I](#).) It should be based on the recognition that records are important because they:

- Protect the legal, financial, and other rights of the Government and its citizens.
- Ensure continuity and consistency in administration.
- Assist agency officials and their successors in making informed policy and program judgments.
- Provide information required by the Congress and others to oversee the agency's activities.
- Document the agency's organization, structure, and achievements.

This chapter gives an overview of the process of identifying records and scheduling them for appropriate disposition. Identifying records means distinguishing them from nonrecord materials and personal papers. It initially involves inventorying the records. (See [Chapter III](#).)

Scheduling records is the process of developing a document that provides mandatory instructions for what to do with records (and nonrecord materials) no longer needed for current Government business. This document is a records schedule. It is sometimes called a records disposition schedule, a records control schedule, a records retention schedule, or simply a schedule. In NARA's usage the term includes the SF 115, Request for Records Disposition Authority; the General Records Schedules (GRS); and the agency records schedule. The agency schedule should be a comprehensive schedule that also contains agency disposition instructions for nonrecord materials.

NARA's regulations ([36 CFR 1228](#)) require each agency to develop a comprehensive records schedule within 2 years of the agency's establishment and to schedule the records of a new program within 1 year of its implementation. Each agency also needs to review its comprehensive records schedule annually and to revise and update it as necessary. Finally, whenever NARA issues a change to the GRS, the agency has 6 months to update its schedule accordingly unless it has received an exception from NARA.

Records, Nonrecord Materials, and Personal Papers

Federal records need to be distinguished from nonrecord materials and personal papers for disposition purposes. Nonrecord materials require only agency approval for disposition, and the individual owner determines the disposition of personal papers. In contrast, the disposition of Federal records is authorized only when an agency has received NARA's approval.

Records

What are Federal records? As defined in 44 U.S.C. 3301, the term includes:

all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them.

This legal definition contains several important terms and phrases that require further explanation:

- "Documentary materials" is a collective term that refers to all media on which information is recorded, regardless of the nature of the medium or the method or circumstances of recording. The term usually refers to records and nonrecord materials, but it may also include personal papers as defined later in this chapter.
- "Regardless of physical form or characteristics" means that the medium may be paper, film, disk, or another physical type or form. It also means that the method of recording may be manual, mechanical, photographic, electronic, or any combination of these or other technologies.
- "Made" means the act of creating and recording information by agency employees, regardless of the method or medium involved. Such recorded information is generally circulated to others or placed in files accessible to others.
- "Received" means the acceptance or collection of documentary materials by agency employees:
 - Regardless of who originated the materials, whether employees within the agency or in other agencies or whether private citizens, public officials, contractors, Government grantees, or others.
 - Regardless of how the materials were transmitted, whether directly by the originator or indirectly by messenger, mail, electronic means, or some other method.

In this context the term "received" does not refer to misdirected materials. It may

or may not refer to loaned or seized materials. The question of Government ownership of loaned or seized materials depends on the conditions of agency custody and use and should therefore be referred to legal counsel for advice.

- "Preserved" means the filing, storing, or any other method of systematically maintaining documentary materials by the agency, even if those materials have not yet been filed or have been removed temporarily from existing filing systems.
- "Appropriate for preservation" means suitable for filing, storage, or other systematic maintenance by the agency, regardless of any inadequacies in the agency's formal recordkeeping policies and practices.

Documentary materials are records when they meet both of the following conditions: (1) They are made or received by an agency of the U.S. Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of agency business; and (2) they are preserved or are appropriate for preservation as evidence of the agency's organization, functions, and activities or because of the value of the information in them.

In summary, the legal definition has three key points:

1. Records are made or received by a Federal agency either to comply with a law or to conduct public business. As a result, they belong to the Government rather than to individuals, and their legal disposition depends on the prior approval of the Archivist of the United States.
2. Records are, or should be, preserved because they constitute evidence or contain information of value. They document an agency's organization, functions, and activities or the persons, places, things, or matters dealt with by an agency.
3. Records vary widely in their physical form or characteristics. They may be on paper, electronic, audiovisual, microform, or other media.

Special attention must be given to electronic records throughout their life cycle. These are records stored in a form that only a computer can process. Their storage media include floppy diskettes, data cartridges, magnetic tapes and disks, and optical disks. These media may change frequently because of rapidly expanding technologies. Electronic records are increasingly supplementing and sometimes replacing paper records. Furthermore, they are found not only in program offices but also in automatic data processing (ADP) centers.

It is essential to design electronic records systems so that adequate maintenance and disposition procedures are in place from the start. An effective records disposition program depends on scheduling all records, regardless of location and regardless of physical form or characteristics, including electronic records.

Attention should also be given to working files, or working papers, because of the difficulty of determining record status. Normally case working files are records because they generally need to be organized and maintained for some specified period of time. Other likely record categories include working files used in preparing reports or studies and preliminary drafts of policy documents circulated for comment. In contrast, preliminary drafts of correspondence not circulated for comment are more likely to be nonrecord materials.

Nonrecord Materials

An agency's disposition program also needs to include managing nonrecord materials, because their volume may exceed that of records. These are US Government-owned documentary materials excluded from the legal definition of records (44 U.S.C. 3301), either by failing to meet the general conditions of record status already described or by falling under one of three specific categories:

1. Extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience of reference.
2. Stocks of publications and of processed documents. Each agency needs, however, to create and maintain record sets of processed documents and of publications, including annual and special reports, special studies, brochures, pamphlets, books, handbooks, manuals, posters, and maps.
3. Library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference or exhibition purposes.

On the basis of these conditions and the categories specifically cited in the law, nonrecord materials include:

- Information copies of correspondence, directives, forms, and other documents on which no administrative action is recorded or taken.

- Routing slips and transmittal sheets adding no information to that contained in the transmitted material.
- Tickler, follow up, or suspense copies of correspondence, provided they are extra copies of the originals.
- Duplicate copies of documents maintained in the same file.
- Extra copies of printed or processed materials for which complete record sets exist, such as current and superseded manuals maintained outside the office responsible for maintaining the record set.
- Catalogs, trade journals, and other publications that are received from other Government agencies, commercial firms, or private institutions and that require no action and are not part of a case on which action is taken.
- Physical exhibits, artifacts, and other material objects lacking evidential value.

Determining whether a particular document is a record does not depend on whether it is an original or a copy. As [figure 2-1](#) shows, several copies of a single form may each have record status because each serves a separate administrative purpose, and they are maintained in different filing systems. A single set of publications should be designated the record copy, as distinguished from copies elsewhere or stocks of the same publication.

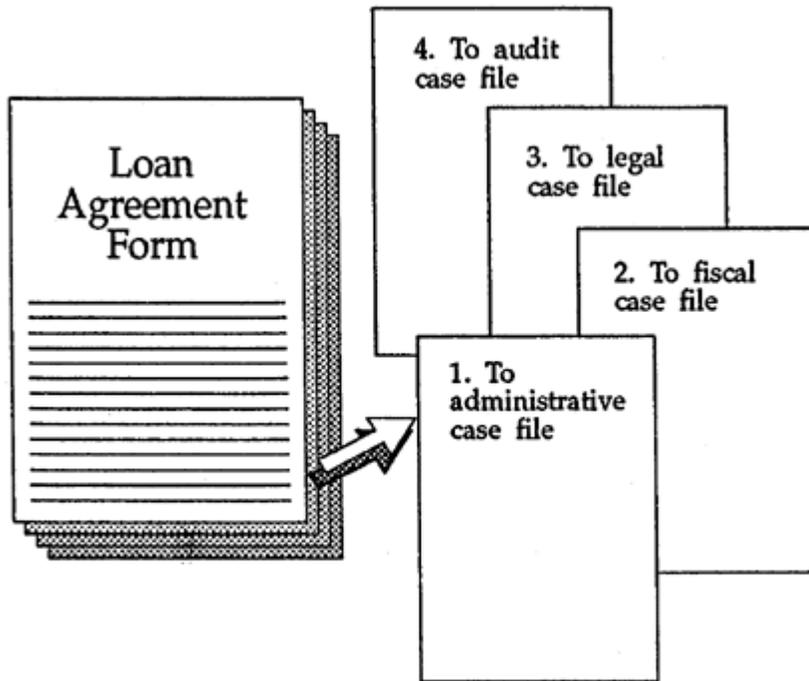


Figure 2-1. Multiple Record Copies of a Single Form

The following guidelines should be used in managing nonrecord materials:

- Within the agency, only the records officer should determine record or nonrecord status, after obtaining any necessary advice from the agency's legal counsel. Giving such responsibility to officials at agency staff or operating levels may lead to misuse of the nonrecord label, weaken the entire disposition program, and result in the loss of valuable records.
- The records officer should seek NARA's guidance regarding the record or nonrecord status of a questionable file or type of document.
- When it is difficult to decide whether certain files are records or nonrecord materials, the records officer should treat them as records.
- Nonrecord materials should not be interfiled with records.
- Nonrecord materials should be destroyed when no longer needed for reference. NARA's approval is not required to destroy such materials.

- Nonrecord materials should be removed from US Government custody only with the agency's approval. The agency should ensure adequate protection of any security-classified or administratively controlled information contained in such materials.

Personal Papers

Some Government employees, especially executives, senior staff, scientists, and other specialists, accumulate and keep various personal papers at the office. The maintenance of personal papers in agency space and equipment requires agency approval and also compliance with Federal and agency requirements. If kept there, such personal papers must be clearly designated as such and maintained separately from records.

Personal papers are documentary materials belonging to an individual that are not used to conduct agency business. They relate solely to an individual's personal and private affairs or are used exclusively for that individual's convenience. They may refer to or comment on the subject matter of agency business, provided they are not used to conduct that business. In contrast to both records and nonrecord materials, personal papers are not Government-owned. Certain documentary materials are clearly personal and may readily be identified and claimed as such. Categories of personal papers include:

- Materials accumulated by an individual before joining Government service that are not later used to conduct Government business. Examples include previous work files, political materials, and reference files.
- Materials brought into or accumulated in the office that are not used to conduct agency business and that relate solely to an individual's family matters, outside business pursuits, professional activities, or private political associations. Examples include family and personal correspondence, volunteer and community service records, literature from professional organizations, and manuscripts and drafts of articles and books.
- Work-related materials, such as diaries, journals, notes, personal calendars, and appointment schedules, that are not prepared, received, or used in the process of transacting agency business. Although these materials contain work-related information, they are personal papers if they are claimed as such and serve only the individual's own purpose (e.g., as reminders and personal observations about

work-related and other topics). This category is the most difficult to distinguish from agency records because of its work-related content.

Employees should keep in mind that some materials appearing to be personal papers could prove to be agency records. Determining their record status depends on all the circumstances of their creation, maintenance and use, and disposition.

In determining whether or not certain documentary materials are records, the Federal courts have developed guidance, subject to change, in deciding Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) cases. Based on current case law involving executive agencies, the meaning of "agency records" for FOIA purposes is broader than that of "records" under 44 U.S.C. 3301 with respect to such agencies. Therefore, documentary materials falling outside the FOIA usage would also fall outside the statutory definition of "records" for those agencies. The following topics include relevant questions and guidance regarding the record status of work-related documentary materials:

- **Creation.** Was the document created or received by an agency employee on agency time, with agency materials, and at agency expense? If not, then the document is unlikely to be an agency record. If so, it may or may not be an agency record, depending on other considerations.
- **Content.** Does the document contain only substantive information about agency business, or does it contain only information about the employee's personal matters? Does it contain both official and personal information? If the document does not contain official information, then it is unlikely to be an agency record. If it does, then its potential record status depends on additional considerations.
- **Purpose.** Was the document created to facilitate agency business? If so, then it may be an agency record, depending on its distribution and use by other agency employees. Or was it created solely for the employee's personal convenience? If so, it is unlikely to be an agency record.
- **Distribution.** Was the document distributed to other employees for an official purpose? If so, it may be an agency record.
- **Use.** Did this employee or others actually use the document to conduct agency business? Materials brought into the agency for reference use do not become agency records merely because they relate to official matters or influence the

employee's work. However, if the employee relies on such materials to conduct agency business or if other employees use them for agency purposes, then the materials are more likely to be agency records.

- **Maintenance.** Was the document placed in agency files, or was it kept in the employee's possession? If placed in agency files, it is likely to be an agency record. If not, then its possible record status depends on other considerations.
- **Disposition.** Does a NARA-approved records schedule govern the document's disposition? If so, the document is a Federal record and is also likely to be an agency record for FOIA purposes. Or is the employee free to destroy or remove the document solely on the basis of individual discretion? If so, the document is unlikely to be an agency record.
- **Control.** Has the agency attempted to exercise "institutional control" over the document through applicable maintenance or disposition directives? Did it do so by requiring the document to be created in the first place? If so, the document is most likely an agency record.
- **Segregation.** Can substantive agency information in the document be segregated from any personal information? If so, the official portion should be extracted and placed in agency files.

In short, mere location in the agency does not mean that the materials are records, nor is use alone conclusive in determining record status. Materials generally assume record status, however, when the agency asserts control by requiring their creation or retention. Furthermore, documents created within an agency cannot be regarded as personal merely because the employee is free to dispose of them. Depending on other considerations, they may be records or nonrecord materials and therefore subject to agency control.

Government employees also tend to accumulate extra copies of documents, particularly those they have drafted, reviewed, or otherwise acted on. They may retain and remove these copies, with agency approval, if such actions do not impose an administrative or financial burden or violate the confidentiality required by national security, privacy, and other interests protected by law.

If departing officials want copies of agency records that are classified or otherwise restricted, they should seek the advice of the agency's information security manager and

legal counsel. The agency, not the individual, is responsible for arranging the transfer of such nonrecord materials to an approved depository.

[Title 18 U.S.C. 798](#) provides fines and imprisonment for the unauthorized disclosure of classified information, and [Executive Order 12958](#) (and the Amendment to E.O. 12958) restricts access to such information. Only the originating agency may waive access restrictions and then only when essential for authorized and lawful Government purposes. It may do so for historical researchers and former Presidential appointees. Even in those instances the agency must certify in writing that such access is consistent with national security. It must also ensure that the information is properly safeguarded and limit access to documents essential to the historical research project or documents that the former Presidential appointee originated, reviewed, signed, or received while in office.

Each agency needs to establish procedures to prevent departing employees from destroying records or removing records from the agency's custody. Such procedures include notifying employees of their legal responsibilities and reviewing any documentary materials that employees wish to take with them. Special attention should be given to reviewing any documentary materials maintained by the agency head or other high officials during their tenure. If preventive measures fail, the agency must inform NARA of any instances of unauthorized disposition, including unauthorized removal. (See [Chapter VI](#) for details.)

Even though documentary materials may have designations such as "personal," "confidential," or "private," they are records if they are created or received by the agency to conduct Government business and if they are preserved or appropriate for preservation because they document the agency's organization, functions, and activities or contain information on the persons, places, things, or matters dealt with by the agency.

Government employees should be careful not to mix personal papers with Federal records. Although personal papers may be destroyed or removed at the owner's discretion, it is illegal to destroy or remove records without proper authorization ([18 U.S.C. 2071](#)).

Carefully considering the preceding guidance should aid the agency's legal counsel, records officer, or other designated official in determining whether particular documents are records, nonrecord materials, or personal papers. Further guidance appears in the

NARA publication [*Documenting Your Public Service*](#) as well as in NARA's regulations ([36 CFR 1222](#)). Assistance is available from NARA appraisal archivists.

Records Disposition Functions

In scheduling records, an agency should understand what records disposition functions must be carried out. These functions include inventorying, developing a comprehensive records schedule, cutting off records, transferring eligible records to Federal records centers and agency holding areas, disposing of temporary records when their retention periods expire, and transferring permanent records to the National Archives.

Inventorying

Inventorying involves distinguishing records from nonrecord materials and personal papers and gathering information about the records themselves. Although treated separately in this handbook, inventorying is also one of the steps to follow in scheduling records.

Development of a Comprehensive Records Schedule

A comprehensive schedule is the heart of a records disposition program. Based on careful analysis of the agency's documentary materials, it provides mandatory instructions for the retention and disposition of each record series or system and of nonrecord materials. It authorizes the systematic removal from offices of unneeded records even as new ones are being created. The schedule's quality is essential to the success of the entire program.

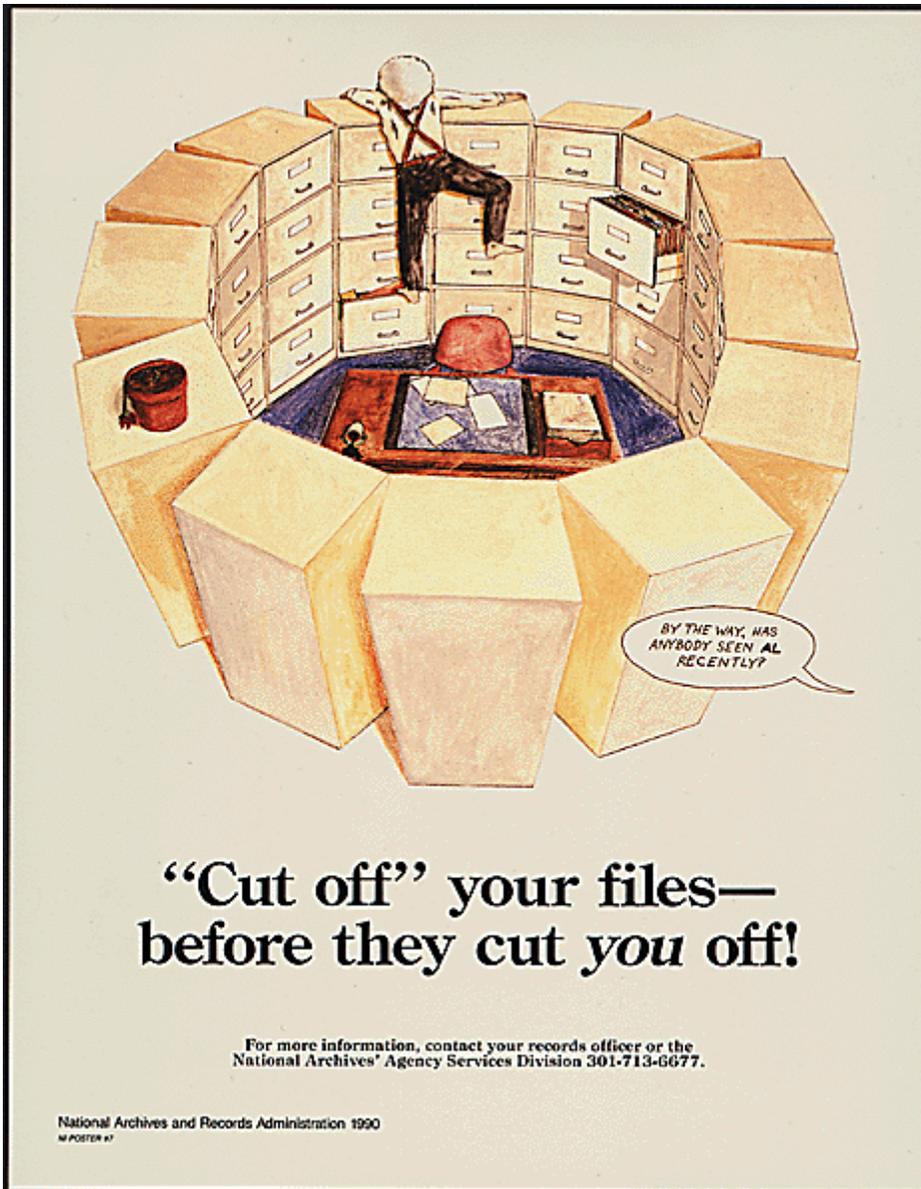
To develop this comprehensive schedule, the agency combines its own disposition authorities for nonrecord materials with NARA-approved records disposition authorities. The specific steps to follow in developing a schedule are described later in this chapter. It is important to understand that although all agency records must be scheduled ultimately, they need not be scheduled all at once.

Record Cutoffs

Records in a series or system should be cut off, or broken, at regular intervals, usually annually, to permit their disposal or transfer in complete blocks and, for correspondence

files, to permit the establishment of new files. Normally correspondence files are cut off at the end of each year (fiscal or calendar), documents are no longer added to that year's files, and new file folders are set up for the next year's files. Unless high volume makes more frequent cutoffs necessary, case files normally are cut off at the end of the year (fiscal or calendar) in which final action is taken.

Cutoffs are needed before disposition instructions can be applied because retention periods usually begin with the cutoff, not with the creation or receipt, of the records. An agency should also cut off unscheduled records to make their disposition possible once they have been scheduled and authority has been received from NARA. Nonrecord materials do not normally require cutoffs but should be purged periodically, at least annually. (See [fig. 2-2](#) for a poster on cutting off records.)



“Cut off” your files— before they cut you off!

For more information, contact your records officer or the
National Archives' Agency Services Division 301-713-6677.

National Archives and Records Administration 1990
NPP0287 87

Transfers to NARA Records Centers and Agency Storage Facilities

Records centers, operated by NARA, store and service agency records no longer needed in office space but requiring continued retention until a later disposal date or scheduled transfer to the National Archives. Agencies may maintain their own records holding areas for temporary records no longer needed in office space but whose volume or retention periods are insufficient to warrant transfer to a record center. Instead of storing permanent records in such holding areas, agencies should establish separate holding areas to protect them during any necessary period between their cutoff and their transfer to a record center or the National Archives. Agencies may also operate their own records centers, provided they comply with NARA's regulations ([36 CFR 1228](#)). More guidance

on transferring records to NARA records centers is contained in these regulations and in the publications and training offered by the federal records centers.

Disposal of Temporary Records

Temporary records are those determined by NARA to be disposable, or nonpermanent. NARA approves such records for destruction or occasionally for donation to an eligible person or organization. Many temporary records are eligible for destruction when no longer needed in an office to conduct current business. Others are eligible only later, after storage in an agency holding area or a records center. Temporary records should normally be disposed of promptly in accordance with a NARA-approved records schedule.

Although NARA-approved retention periods for temporary records are normally mandatory, exceptions can and should be made. In rare instances, one particular file may have permanent value obviously lacking in the other records found in a series or system scheduled as temporary. For example, if a particular case attracts congressional and national media attention, it may well deserve special consideration even if it is part of a series scheduled for disposal. If such a case comes to the agency's attention, the records officer should consult with the NARA appraisal archivist before formally requesting NARA approval of a new disposition for the particular file that appears to warrant permanent retention.

Transfer of Permanent Records to the National Archives

Transferring permanent records to the National Archives' legal and physical custody will relieve the agency of having to provide special care for such valuable records. This transfer should take place when the agency no longer needs the records for the conduct of current business, whether or not the records are stored in agency or other records storage facilities. The schedule should specify when the records are to be transferred.

Each agency needs to ensure the timely transfer of its permanent records to the National Archives. The National Archives stores permanent records of primarily national interest at its facilities in the Washington, DC, area and those of primarily regional and local interest at its regional archives located in major metropolitan areas throughout the country. Legal control of the records passes to NARA when the NARA official signs the required legal document acknowledging receipt of the records. After the appropriate agency official has signed this document indicating the records are ready for immediate

transfer to the National Archives, the agency should be careful not to dispose of the records or withdraw them from a NARA records center.

At its facilities in the Washington, DC, area, the National Archives maintains accessioned permanent records created by agencies in that metropolitan area. It maintains all other accessioned permanent records at its regional archives located in 12 other metropolitan areas throughout the country.

Basic Steps in Scheduling Records

Before going into detail, it is useful to gain an overview of all the steps needed to schedule records. These steps are based on the assumption that the agency has already issued a directive establishing its records disposition program. As summarized in [figure 2-3](#), the basic scheduling steps are as follows:

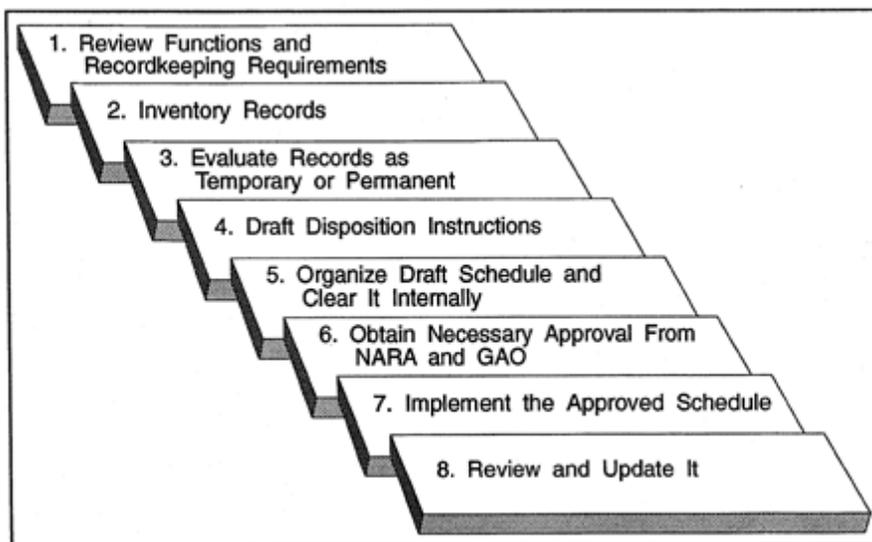


Figure 2-3. Basic Scheduling Steps

1. Review Functions and Recordkeeping Requirements

Review the functions and recordkeeping requirements and practices of the agency and of the particular offices whose records are being scheduled. Examine pertinent documents, such as laws, regulations, organization charts, and functional statements. Also consult with program managers, ADP managers, and records personnel. (See [Chapter III](#).)

2. **Inventory**

Inventory series and systems of agency files, including both records and nonrecord materials. Usually at this stage the agency makes a preliminary decision as to whether the schedule will be arranged by organization, function, or a combination of these. (See [Chapter III](#).)

3. **Evaluate**

Evaluate for disposition the records contained in each series or system by determining their uses and analyzing their values. The result of this evaluation process is to recommend the records as permanent or temporary and to propose specific retention periods for them. (See [Chapter IV](#).)

4. **Draft Instructions**

Draft recommended file cutoffs, retention periods, and other disposition instructions for all records, along with necessary instructions for all nonrecord materials. (See [Chapter IV](#).) During this process, take these actions:

- Use the [General Records Schedules \(GRS\)](#) for all applicable records.
- Complete a [Standard Form 115](#), Request for Records Disposition Authority, for all records not scheduled by the GRS.
- Write appropriate disposition instructions for nonrecord materials.

5. **Organize and Clear Internally**

By this stage, the agency should have determined the schedule's arrangement. Based on that arrangement, assemble the draft schedule, and clear it within the agency. (See [Chapter V](#).)

6. **Obtain Approval**

Obtain any necessary approval from NARA and the General Accounting Office (GAO). No external approval is required for the disposition of nonrecord materials. External approval has already been granted for records covered by the GRS. (See [Chapter V](#).)

7. **Implement**

Implement the completed and approved schedule by issuing it as a mandatory agency directive, training employees in its use, and applying it to agency records. (See [Chapter VI](#).)

8. Review and Update

Review the schedule at least annually, and by following the above steps, update it to cover new series and systems or to revise the dispositions of current series and systems. This step results from careful monitoring of the schedule's implementation as well as from constant awareness of new and revised recordkeeping requirements and practices. (See [Chapter VI](#).)

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of identifying records and scheduling them for appropriate disposition. It has emphasized the need to distinguish records from nonrecord materials and personal papers for disposition purposes. It has also described the major records disposition functions and the basic steps in scheduling records. Later chapters of this handbook explain in some detail how to carry out these scheduling steps. At the outset, however, it should be emphasized that although an agency needs to schedule all its records ultimately, it does not need to schedule them all at the same time. Instead it may schedule them one office or one function at a time until all its records are covered. Furthermore, throughout the scheduling process, the records officer or staff member should keep in contact with the NARA appraisal archivist assigned liaison responsibility for the agency.

III. The Records Inventory

- [Introduction](#)
 - [Review of Agency Functions and Recordkeeping Requirements and Practices](#)
 - [Inventorying: What, Why, and How](#)
 - [Inventorying: Scope, Focus, and Responsibility](#)
 - [The Series Inventory](#)
 - Series Inventory Form
 - Series Inventory Form - Back
 - Audiovisual Records Series Inventory Form
 - Audiovisual Records Series Inventory Form - Back
 - [The Information System Inventory](#)
 - Information System Description Form
 - Information System Description Form - Back
 - [Verification](#)
 - [Conclusion](#)
-

III. The Records Inventory

- *The first step in scheduling records is to review the agency's functions and its recordkeeping requirements and practices.*
- *The next step is to inventory the agency's records.*
- *The inventory provides information needed to schedule records and helps identify various records management problems.*
- *The inventory should focus primarily on program records in current office space and may be completed incrementally by function or organizational unit.*
- *The inventory profiles each record series and system.*
- *Electronic records should be inventoried by information system, rather than by series.*
- *It is important to verify the inventory's results.*

Introduction

The process of developing a comprehensive records schedule for an agency begins with a review of the agency's functions and its recordkeeping requirements and practices. Next comes the inventory, which provides the information necessary to draft the schedule and make it comprehensive, clear, and current. Normally the agency makes a preliminary decision at this point to arrange the schedule by organization, function, or a combination of these.

Review of Agency Functions and Recordkeeping Requirements and Practices

A careful review of the agency's functions and its recordkeeping requirements and practices helps lay the groundwork for inventorying and other steps needed to schedule records.

Agency Functions

Before the inventory begins, it is necessary to review the agency's functions as reflected in its program responsibilities, structure, and levels of authority. Doing this involves examining pertinent documents, such as laws, regulations, organization charts, and functional statements, and consulting with program managers, ADP managers, and records personnel. This process is essential in identifying and locating important records within the agency. The following questions should be answered:

- Which are the key line and staff offices?
- What programs does the agency have?
- What units are responsible for developing policies?
- What is the nature of staff support activities? Legal? Fiscal and budgetary? Inspection? General management? Administrative services?

Agency Recordkeeping Requirements and Practices

Before inventorying, it is also important to review the agency's recordkeeping requirements and practices. The following questions need to be answered:

- What are the agency's recordkeeping requirements? (See [Chapter I](#) of this handbook for a discussion of such requirements.)
- Have recordkeeping requirements been established for all electronic records systems and for all audiovisual and cartographic records?
- Is there a prescribed agency-wide records maintenance system? If so, how widely is it used? If not, what systems are used?
- Is there a prescribed classification system for general correspondence? If so, is it numeric, subject-numeric, or some other system?
- Is there a central file? A uniform indexing system? Does each operate as planned? At what levels? What records are not included? Where are records likely to be that relate to important agency programs?
- What agency policy and procedures, if any, govern vital records, adequacy of documentation, personal papers of officials, and Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act concerns?

Inventorying: What, Why, and How

After reviewing its functions and recordkeeping requirements and practices, the agency is ready to gather information about the records by conducting an inventory. The remainder of this chapter explains the meaning, elements, scope, and verification of the inventory.

Definition and Purpose

In records management, an inventory is a descriptive listing of each record series or system, together with an indication of location and other pertinent data. It is not a list of each document or each folder but rather of each series or system. Its main purpose is to provide the information needed to develop the schedule. It also helps identify various records management problems. These include inadequate documentation of official actions, improper applications of recordkeeping technology, deficient filing systems and maintenance practices, poor management of nonrecord materials, insufficient identification of vital records, and inadequate records security practices. When completed, the inventory should include all offices, all records, and all nonrecord materials. An inventory that is incomplete or haphazard can only result in an inadequate schedule and loss of control over records.

Link With the Schedule

The schedule is the heart of an effective records disposition program, and it is based on information gathered during the inventory process. The more systematic and complete the inventory, the better the schedule is likely to be. Scheduling records involves the steps described in [Chapter II](#) of this handbook.

Inventorying is useful not only in developing the schedule but also in ensuring that it is applied properly and kept up-to-date. Regardless of the agency's size, the inventory can help make the schedule:

- **Comprehensive:** Designed to cover simultaneously or incrementally all records and nonrecord materials of the agency's organizational and functional components.
- **Clear:** Containing accurate descriptions and easily understood disposition instructions.
- **Current:** Reflecting periodic updating to include any new or revised series or systems, authorized revisions to disposition instructions, and any changes in the General Records Schedules.

Record Series and Information System Concepts

The record series concept is a convenient way of grouping file units or documents to permit their management as a group. The unit to be inventoried and scheduled is normally the record series, not individual documents or file folders. A series is a group of records arranged according to a filing system or kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific kind of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use, such as restrictions on access and use.

For example, a group of contract files in a procurement office would constitute one series and thus an inventory item. Other series in that office might include general correspondence, procurement reports from regional offices, and a file on individual employees.

The concept of the records series is applicable to nontextual as well as textual records. Thus, a "collection" of motion pictures, photographs, sound recordings, data tapes, etc.,

constitutes a series, if the collection is organized in accordance with a single filing system, or has been brought together and maintained as a unit for the reasons already mentioned.

Frequently, each of the above types of nontextual records may constitute more than one series, or a series may include mixed media. The records custodians should be consulted in determining the number of separate series involved. If necessary, the records themselves should be examined. In no event should all photographs, magnetic tapes, or other types of nontextual records be arbitrarily grouped together as a single series in the inventory or as a single entry in the draft schedules.

When a series of paper records has been microfilmed or converted to electronic form, the result in each case is not one but *two* series that should be separately inventoried and scheduled. However, the relationship between the two series should be carefully defined.

The record series is the unit used in identifying and scheduling most records. Electronic records, however, are best inventoried and scheduled in the context of an information system. An information system is the organized collection, processing, transmission, and dissemination of information according to defined procedures. It includes three categories of information: (1) inputs, (2) the information on the electronic media, and (3) outputs. Along with these categories of recorded information, the agency should inventory and schedule any related indexes and also the documentation needed to maintain and use the electronic records.

Steps in Inventorying Records

It is useful at this point to gain an overview of how to inventory records. The steps in this process are as follows:

- Define the inventory's goals. The paramount goal is gathering information for scheduling purposes, but other goals may include preparing for conversion to other media, or identifying particular records management problems such as those already mentioned.
- Define the scope of the inventory; it should include all records and all nonrecord materials.
- Obtain top management's support, preferably in the form of a directive, and keep management and staff informed at every stage of the inventory.

- Decide on the information to be collected (the elements of the inventory).
- Prepare an inventory form, or use an existing one.
- Decide who will conduct the inventory, and train them if necessary.
- Learn where the agency's files are located, both physically and organizationally.
- Conduct the inventory.
- Verify and analyze the results.

All nonrecord materials should be included in the inventory. These materials should be located, described, and evaluated in terms of use. Retention periods should be assigned to them, and this information should be included in the final version of the published schedule or in the agency's disposition manual.

Inventorying: Scope, Focus, and Responsibility

Besides defining the inventory's goals and obtaining and retaining top management's support, the agency needs to decide on the inventory's scope and focus and determine who will be responsible for conducting the inventory.

Scope and Focus

In establishing a records disposition program, each agency should complete an inventory of all records in its legal custody, regardless of their location or physical form. Besides paper records, the inventory must include electronic, audiovisual, microform, and other records, especially those stored offsite in laboratories and other locations. The inventory should also note collections of nonrecord materials to permit their proper management.

The inventory process should begin with current records in office space and concentrate on the program records maintained there; that is, on those records documenting the unique, substantive functions for which an agency or office is responsible. Less detailed attention can be given to administrative, or housekeeping, records held in many or all offices that are already described and scheduled in the [General Records Schedules](#) (GRS). When describing program records, special attention should be given to those records likely to be proposed for permanent retention.

An agency establishing a disposition program need not conduct the inventory simultaneously in all locations or complete all of it before beginning the scheduling

process. Instead it may inventory and schedule records incrementally, that is, office by office or function by function, until all are covered.

An agency with an established disposition program should conduct an inventory if it begins a new program or undergoes a reorganization affecting program responsibilities. It should also use the inventory to identify records management problems, including any inadequacies in the schedule or its application.

Inventorying and the Schedule's Arrangement

Planning the inventory's scope and focus normally includes consideration of the records schedule's arrangement. The schedule can be arranged by organization, function, or a combination of these. Since the schedule's arrangement will affect how to inventory the agency's records, it is advisable to make at least a preliminary decision on the matter at this time. The final decision should be made by the time the draft schedule is ready to be assembled. (See [Chapter V](#) for details.)

Responsibility for the Inventory

Normally records officers or experienced staff members conduct the inventory because they are best equipped to understand the project's purposes and the concepts involved. However, when speed is essential or when the volume of records is unusually large, other agency personnel may be asked to do the job. In that case, careful training will be necessary.

The Series Inventory

Except for electronic records, agency records are most suitably inventoried by series. (See guidance later in this chapter on inventorying electronic records by information system.) Whoever conducts the inventory should decide what inventory elements are necessary and then use a form, or forms, to collect the same information on each series. (See [figure 3-1](#) and [figure 3-2](#) for suggested series inventory forms.)

3-1a. Series Inventory Form

1. DATE PREPARED	2. OFFICE MAINTAINING THE FILES (Name and symbol)	
3. PERSON DOING INVENTORY (Name, office, phone number)		4. SERIES LOCATION
5. SERIES TITLE		6. INCLUSIVE DATES
7. SERIES DESCRIPTION		
8. MEDIUM (check all that apply) ~ Paper ~ Microform ~ Electronic (use information system form) ~ Audiovisual (use audiovisual form)		13. REFERENCE ACTIVITY (after cutoff) ~ Current (At least once a month per file unit) For how long after cutoff? _____ ~ Semicurrent (Less than once a month per file unit) ~ Noncurrent (Not used for current agency business)
9. ARRANGEMENT ~ Subject file classification system ~ Alphabetical by name ~ Alphabetical by subject ~ Geographical by (specify) ~ Numerical by (specify) ~ Chronological ~ Other (specify)	14. VITAL RECORDS STATUS: ~ Yes ~ No (If yes, indicate type here; use entry 15 to show any duplication.) ___ Emergency-operating ___ Rights-and-interests ___ Both	
	15. DUPLICATION: Are documents in this series available in another place or medium? ~ Yes ~ No (If yes, explain where and in what medium.)	
10. VOLUME (in cubic feet)		16. FINDING AIDS (if any)
11. ANNUAL ACCUMULATION (in cubic feet or inches)		17. RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS AND USE (if any)
12. CUTOFF (e.g., end of FY)	18. CONDITION OF PERMANENT RECORDS ~ Good ~ Fair ~ Poor Comment:	
19. DISPOSITION AUTHORITY: Does the series have an approved disposition authority? ~ Yes (List the schedule and item number, give the current disposition instructions, and justify any proposed change.) ~ No (Propose an appropriate retention period.)		

3-1b. Series Inventory Form Instructions

Complete an inventory form for each record series. A series is defined as file units or other documents arranged according to a filing system or kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific kind of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use, such as restrictions on access and use.

Entries 1-4, 13-15, and 19 are self-explanatory.

5. Give each series a title for brief reference. Examples include property control records and bills of lading.

6. List the earliest and latest dates of the records in each series. If the series is still being created at the time of the inventory, indicate the latest date by the designation "to date" or "to present." NARA requires agencies to give inclusive dates for records proposed for permanent retention and also for nonrecurring records proposed for immediate destruction.

7. Each series description should contain enough information to show the purpose, use, and subject content of the records. Follow these guidelines in describing the series:

(a) Avoid emphasizing form numbers, especially when describing case files.

(b) Consider combining into a single inventory item a number of very small series of temporary records if they serve the same function and are proposed for the same retention period.

(c) Avoid terms, such as "miscellaneous" or "various," that add nothing to the description.

(d) Give special attention to describing potentially permanent records, because NARA requires more detailed information on them.

8. Indicate whether the record medium is paper, microfilm, electronic, audiovisual, or some combination of these. If it includes electronic or audiovisual records, use special inventory forms, such as those in NARA publications.

9. Indicate the arrangement, or filing system, used. Examples include a subject classification system and arrangements that are alphabetical by subject, alphabetical by name of claimant, geographical by state, numerical by contract number, and chronological by date of report. NARA requires agencies to indicate the arrangement of records proposed for permanent retention but not those proposed for disposal.

10. Express the volume of records in cubic feet by using the conversion table provided. NARA requires agencies to give volume figures for records proposed for permanent retention and also for nonrecurring records proposed for immediate destruction. For microform and cartographic records, also give an item count.

Cubic Footage Conversion Table

- One letter-size file drawer holds *1.5 cubic feet* of records.
- One legal-size file drawer holds *2 cubic feet* of records.
- Seven reels of standard digital computer tape (2400 feet long, 1/2 inch wide) equal *1 cubic foot*.
- One standard records center carton holds *1 cubic foot*.
- Fifty 100-foot 35 mm microfilm reels equal *1 cubic foot*.
- One hundred 100-foot 16 mm microfilm reels equal *1 cubic foot*.
- One letter-size National Archives box holds *0.35 cubic feet* of records.
- One legal-size National Archives box holds *0.43 cubic feet* of records.

11. Estimate the annual rate of accumulation for each series if the records are current and continuing. NARA requires agencies to furnish the rate of accumulation of such records proposed for permanent retention but not those proposed for disposal. If the records no longer accumulate, indicate "none."

12. Indicate how often the series is cut off and when the last cutoff occurred. If it is not cut off, explain how inactive records are separated from active ones.

16. Describe any finding aids, such as indexes, document lists, lists of file headings or containers, and classification or filing manuals. If they cover more than one series, note that fact. If they are not in the same office or area as the related series, indicate their location.

17. Note any restrictions on access to, and use of, the particular series, such as restrictions relating to personal privacy or national security. NARA requires agencies to indicate any Privacy Act restrictions on records proposed for eventual destruction and any Freedom of Information Act restrictions on records proposed for immediate transfer to the National Archives.

18. Note the physical condition of records that are actually or potentially permanent, especially those stored offsite. Identify any threats, such as overhead water pipes, electrical equipment, excessive heat and/or humidity, vermin, and inadequate security.

3-2a. Audiovisual Records Series Inventory Form

1a. PREPARED BY	1b. ORGANIZATION	1c. PHONE NUMBER
2. SERIES LOCATION	3. CREATING OFFICE	
4. SERIES DESCRIPTION		
5. DATES	6. ARRANGEMENT	7. VOLUME
8. RESTRICTIONS	9. ANNUAL ACCUMULATION ~ Cubic Feet ~ Items	
10. NATURE AND FREQUENCY OF USE		
11. CUTOFF INSTRUCTIONS	12. RETIRE REGULARLY? ~ Yes ~ No	
13. PRESENT DISPOSITION		
14. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISPOSITION		
15. COMMENTS		

3-2b. Audiovisual Records Series Inventory Form Instructions

1. Enter your name, organizational unit, and telephone number.
2. Include building and room number. If original material (e.g., motion picture preprint, master tapes, or still negatives) is not in the same place, where is it?
3. Which unit created these records?
4. Include the following in the description:
 - a. Format (4x5, 16 mm, and 1/2-inch) and generation.
 - b. Subject matter covered in the series.
 - c. Purpose served by the series.
 - d. Finding aids such as data sheets, shot lists, continuities, review sheets, catalogs, indices, and caption lists. Location of such aids.
 - e. Related documentation. Do files exist elsewhere that include production contracts, scripts, or other documents concerning these records? Where?
5. What is the date span of the series?
6. What is the arrangement of the series (e.g., alphabetical by subject, chronological, or numerical)?
7. What is the volume of the series? (See [conversion](#) table.)
8. Are there restrictions on access to or release of items in the series? If so, what statute, exemption to the FOIA, or regulation authorizes this restriction? Are any items copyrighted?
9. How many cubic feet (or, if negligible, items) were added to this series last year?
10. How many requests for copies does your unit handle in a month? Who requests the copies and why?
11. What is the basis for cutting off a series so earlier parts can be retired without disturbing the remainder of the series? (End of calendar year, every 5 years, etc.)
12. Have parts of the series been retired to agency storage areas or to a Federal records storage center? How often? If parts of the series have been retired to a Federal records storage center, attach copies of the SF 135's.
13. Which item of your agency's records schedule applies to this series? If none applies, what happens to the records your unit no longer needs?
14. How long does your unit intend to keep those items added to the series last year in order to respond to internal agency requests?

Conversion Table

All of these equal **1 cubic foot**:

Still Pictures

- Negatives 2,300 35mm 6-exposure strips
8,640 2x2-inch mounted slides
2,184 4x5-inch file sheets
5,960 2 1/4x3 1/4-inch file sheets
- Prints 2,350 8x10-inch glossies
9,400 4xS-inch glossies

Motion Pictures

6 35mm reels (1,000 feet)

11 16mm reels (1,200 feet)

15 16mm reels (800 feet)

32 16mm reels (400 feet)

Video Recordings

10 3/4-inch cassettes

3 2-inch reels

9 1-inch reels

43 1/2-inch reels

Sound Recordings

76 16-inch disc recordings

144 12-inch disc recordings

48 7-inch audiotape reels

16 10-inch audiotape reels

Series Inventory Elements

To be useful, an inventory needs to include certain elements of information for each series. These essential elements are described in the following sections. Although some elements are useful only for agency purposes (e.g., date prepared and identification of person conducting inventory), most are needed to provide information to NARA for scheduling records through the submission of an SF 115, Request for Records Disposition Authority. As indicated, NARA requires more complete information on records proposed for permanent retention than for those proposed for disposal. If an agency proposes for disposal records that NARA later determines to be potentially permanent, it must then change the proposed disposition to permanent and give NARA the necessary additional information.

The series inventory elements, with related instructions, are as follows (see [figure 3-1](#)):

1. Date prepared

List the date the inventory was prepared.

2. Office maintaining the files

List the name and symbol of the office maintaining the records. If this office received this series from another office, also indicate the name and symbol of that office and designate it as the "creating office."

3. Person conducting the inventory

List that person's name, office, and telephone number.

4. Series location

Give the precise location of the series; for example, room 233, building B, annex 1. If the series is located in more than one office, it is only necessary to inventory once and then indicate multiple locations.

5. Series title

Give each series a title for brief reference. Such a title can come from one of several sources:

- The agency, which may be using a generally accepted title in its normal day-to-day procedures. Examples: employee locator file, project progress report.
- The person who conducts the inventory and who can supply a descriptive title. Examples: property control records, meeting transcripts file, loan analysis file.
- The title of a single form or type of document if it applies to the entire series. Examples: bills of lading, notifications of personnel action, narrative quarterly reports.

6. Inclusive dates

List the earliest and latest dates of the records in each series. This information supplements or is a part of the description and is needed to schedule records proposed for permanent retention. It is also needed to determine when to cut off, or break, records and transfer them to records centers or agency storage facilities. Finally, it can provide a clue to the rate of growth of the series. For case files or correspondence files, express the earliest date as the year only. For series being created at the time of the inventory, indicate the latest date by the designation "to date" or "to present."

NARA requires agencies to give inclusive dates for records proposed for permanent retention and also for nonrecurring records proposed for immediate destruction.

7. Series description

A clear description of the series is basic to the success of the inventory and the schedule. It is necessary for NARA's later appraisal of the records. It may also be needed to clarify the series title. Examples of such language are:

- "Case files of internal audits of agency programs, operations, and procedures, and of external audits of contractors and grantees. Consist of audit reports, correspondence, and supporting working papers."
- "Records relating to the office's internal administrative, or housekeeping, activities rather than the functions for which the office exists. Include records on office organization, staffing, procedures, and communications; the expenditure of funds, including budget files; day-to-day administration of office personnel, including training and travel; supplies and office services and equipment requests and receipts; and the use of office space and utilities. May also include the office's copies of internal activity and workload reports, such as work progress, statistical, and narrative reports forwarded to higher levels."
- "Photographs of routine award ceremonies, social events, and other nonprogram activities."
- "Requests from the public for forms and publications."
- "Record set of formal directives distributed as orders, circulars, or manuals, announcing major changes in the agency's policies and procedures, and relating to program functions."
- "Correspondence on Division matters prepared for the Director's signature, and related documents."
- "Case files of grants to individual institutes for the funding of research related to mining and mineral resources. Include pre-proposals, proposals or applications, patent information, project reports, studies, certificates, agreements, memorandums, letters, and other records relating to the receipt, review, award, evaluation, status, and monitoring of grants along with the allocation of funds and project budgets."
- "Record set of Newsclippings and Analysis Service publications, such as *Current News*, *Supplemental Clips*, *Equal Opportunity Current News*, *Radio-TV Defense Dialog*, *Selected Statements*, *Foreign Media Edition of Current News*, and *Friday Review of Defense Literature*."
- "Information showing Government employment, private employment, and financial interests of civilian employees and military personnel required to file such statements under AR 600-50. Included are statements of employment and financial interests, supplementary statements, reports of change, review comments, and related information."

Inventory items should not emphasize form numbers, especially when case files, or transaction files, are being described. Such files, which consist of numerous forms and related correspondence, constitute the bulk of all Federal records. Examples include contract files, claims files, loan files, clinical files, and personnel files.

[Figure 2-1](#) in Chapter II shows how each copy of a completed form can become part of a separate case file serving a unique purpose. In the inventory, each copy loses its individuality and is covered in the item describing the case file of which it is a part. The person taking the inventory should:

- Select a title describing the function served by the series.
- Sample the contents of a few folders in the series to determine the general kind of documentation in it and the range of subject content.
- Determine whether or not a typical file documents the case from beginning to end. For example, in a contract file, the folder may or may not cover the procurement process from successful bid to final payment. If not, supplementary documentation needs to be located and its relationship to the series indicated in the schedule.

It is permissible to combine into a single inventory item a number of very small series of temporary records if they serve the same function and are proposed for the same retention period. For example, separate series relating to an office's housekeeping, or internal administrative, activities may be merged into a single item called office administrative files. However, each series of potentially permanent records must be described and scheduled separately. (See [Appendix C](#) for permanent records appraisal guidelines.)

Each series description should contain enough information to show the purpose, use, and subject content of the records. Avoid terms, such as "miscellaneous" or "various," that add nothing to the description. Give special attention to describing potentially permanent records, because NARA requires more detailed information on them. Include in the description of audiovisual records the format (e.g., 4 by 5 inches, 16 mm, one-half inch), generation, and subjects.

Finally, it is important to describe the various components of audiovisual, microform, cartographic, and related records. For example, a central laboratory often maintains photographic negatives, while different agency units maintain specialized series or

collections of prints. Both the negatives and the prints are record components and need to be inventoried and scheduled, along with related finding aids.

8. Medium

Indicate whether the record medium is paper, microform, electronic, audiovisual, or a combination of these. For electronic records, see the information system inventory described later in this chapter. For audiovisual records, see [figure 3-2](#).

9. Arrangement

Indicate the arrangement, or filing system, used. Examples include subject classification systems and arrangements that are alphabetical by subject, alphabetical by name of claimant, geographical by state, numerical by contract number, and chronological by date of report. If the series has no apparent arrangement, then mark it "unarranged." If there are subordinate patterns of arrangement within the series, list them also. NARA requires agencies to indicate the arrangement of records proposed for permanent retention but not for those proposed for disposal.

10. Volume

Express the volume of records in cubic feet rather than in linear feet or any other medium of measurement. Since it represents height, width, and depth, a cubic foot figure provides a realistic idea of the amount of space actually occupied. Also include the volume of older records, which may be wrapped in bundles or packages, or of oversized materials, which are too large to be stored in conventional filing equipment. (To calculate the contents of file containers in cubic feet, use the conversion table appearing in [figure 3-1b](#).)

Although volume information is important, the figure for each series need not be measured with extreme accuracy. In calculating the volume of a series, do not include fractions, such as one-half inch, but simply round all figures to the nearest cubic foot. If the series totals less than half a cubic foot, list the volume as "negligible" or "less than one."

Precise accuracy is not needed in gauging the volume of any series that is obviously large. Simply sample the file drawers to see if they are relatively full, and then multiply the number of full file drawers by the pertinent conversion ratio. For those records not stored in filing equipment, estimate the number of file drawers the records would occupy, and then apply the appropriate conversion ratio.

When inventorying audiovisual, microform, cartographic, and related records, provide not only total cubic footage but also an item count (e.g., 1200 prints, 3500 negatives) that is as accurate as possible. Again sampling may be necessary for large series or collections. If so, multiply the average number of items in a cubic foot (or some other measure) by the total number of cubic feet (or other measure) in the collection.

NARA requires agencies to give volume figures for records proposed for permanent retention and also for nonrecurring records proposed for immediate destruction.

11. Annual accumulation

Based on information from the files custodian, estimate the annual rate of accumulation for each series if the records are current and continuing. NARA requires agencies to furnish the rate of accumulation of such records proposed for permanent retention but not those proposed for disposal. If the records no longer accumulate, indicate "none."

12. Cutoff

Indicate how often the records are cut off and when the last cutoff occurred. If they are not cut off, explain how inactive records are separated from active ones. To cut off records means to break, or end, them at regular intervals to permit their disposal or transfer in complete blocks and, for correspondence files, to permit the establishment of new files. (See [Chapter II](#) and [Chapter V](#) for further details.)

13. Reference activity

Rate the reference activity of a paper record series, after the regular cutoff, by placing it in one of three categories:

- Current, or active (used more than once a month per file drawer).
- Semicurrent, or semiactive (used less than once a month per file drawer).
- Noncurrent, or inactive (not used for current operations).

Information on reference activity, or frequency of use, is especially important for paper records because it affects the timing and type of disposition, particularly in reference to offsite storage. For example, if voluminous records are still current, or active, keep them in office space rather than transferring them to a records center. Transfer semicurrent, or semiactive, records to a records center, if other conditions are met, to await the final disposition prescribed by a NARA-approved records schedule.

Reference information may also influence changes in filing practices if only one part of a series is active. It may even reveal some unnecessary searches.

Since most series of paper records are relatively small in volume, accumulating less than 5 or 6 cubic feet per year, their reference figures will be less precise. For voluminous series of paper records, ask the files custodian to survey reference activity. The survey should contain information on the number of requests for a fixed period, not to exceed 3 months; the organizational source of the requests, including sources outside the agency; the purpose of the requests; and the age of the records requested. When such precise survey information is unnecessary, use code words to indicate reference activity: current, semicurrent, and noncurrent.

For audiovisual records, specify the number of requests for copies per month, the source(s) of the requests, and the reason for the requests.

14. Vital records status

If the records qualify as vital records, specify whether they are emergency-operating records, legal and financial rights records, or both. Also indicate whether they are the originals or duplicates. (See [36 CFR 1236](#) for requirements in managing vital records.)

15. Duplication

Indicate duplication in form or content. It can exist in the following ways:

- Carbon or other copies may be in the same organizational unit or elsewhere in the agency. The copies may contain significant differences or notations.
- Similar data or information may be available elsewhere in the agency, either physically duplicated or in summarized form.

If the duplication is only partial, state its extent. If the information is recorded on both electronic and paper media, both must be inventoried and scheduled as parts of an information system. To study duplication in content, examine the agency's paper and information flow. Detailed reports of subordinate or field offices are usually summarized at higher levels. Understanding the reporting system is basic to recognizing the nature and extent of duplication.

16. Finding aids

Note the existence of any finding aids for the series, especially if the records are to be proposed for permanent retention. Finding aids identify the contents of particular series

so that users can locate individual documents, file units, or other parts of the series. They may include indexes, document lists, lists of file headings or containers, and classification or filing manuals. If they cover more than one series, note that fact. If the finding aids are not in the same office or area as the related series, indicate their location.

17. Restrictions on access and use

Note any restrictions on access to, and use of, the particular series. Such restrictions may result from statutes, executive orders, or agency directives. The two most common types of restrictions are:

- *Personal Privacy.* These files are restricted because they contain information about individuals whose privacy would be violated if the information were made known to others. Examples are tax returns, medical records, and some personnel investigative files.
- *National Security.* These files bear classification markings, such as "top secret," "secret," or "confidential." They do so because their release, or the release of information in them, to unauthorized persons might harm national security.

Executive orders govern national security classification policies and procedures. The intelligence agencies classify many of their files under special statutory and executive authority. In dealing with access and restriction matters, also comply with the [Freedom of Information Act](#) (5 U.S.C. 552) and the [Privacy Act](#) (5 U.S.C. 552a), as amended.

Whenever necessary, consult with the agency officials responsible for such matters.

NARA requires agencies to indicate any Privacy Act restrictions on records proposed for eventual destruction and any Freedom of Information Act restrictions on records proposed for immediate transfer to the National Archives.

18. Condition of permanent records

During the inventory, take note of the physical condition of records that are actually or potentially permanent, especially those stored offsite. Identify threats to their preservation and security and take appropriate corrective action. Threats include overhead water pipes, electrical equipment, excessive heat and/or humidity, vermin, and inadequate security.

19. Disposition authority

If the series has an approved disposition authority, list the schedule and item number and then the retention period. If the series has no such authority, list the files as

"unscheduled," make sure they are preserved, and ask the program office to recommend a suitable retention period.

Series Inventory Forms

In conducting the inventory, the records manager should use a form or forms. Doing so makes it easier to analyze the information and avoids its loss or fragmentation. The agency may wish to prepare its own form or select an existing form. [figure 3-1](#) is a suggested form for collecting information about a record series. The form in [figure 3-2](#) may be used to inventory audiovisual records. The NARA publication [*Managing Audiovisual Records*](#) contains further guidance on inventorying such records.

- Figure 3-1a. [Series Inventory Form](#)
- Figure 3-1b. [Series Inventory Form - Back](#)

- Figure 3-2a. [Audiovisual Records Series Inventory Form](#)
- Figure 3-2b. [Audiovisual Records Series Inventory Form - Back](#)

The Information System Inventory

Electronic records are most effectively and conveniently inventoried and scheduled in the context of information systems. As indicated earlier, an information system is the organized collection, processing, transmission, and dissemination of information according to defined procedures. It includes three categories of information: (1) inputs, (2) the information on the electronic media, and (3) outputs. Along with these categories of recorded information, the agency should inventory and schedule any related indexes and also the documentation needed to maintain and use the electronic records.

Elements of the Information System Inventory

Each agency should maintain a complete and accurate inventory of all its electronic records systems to meet its own needs and to comply with NARA regulations ([36 CFR 1234](#)). This inventory should include the elements indicated below. The form in [figure 3-3](#) may be used to collect some of this information. The elements listed below with italicized titles are those NARA requires to make an initial appraisal of the information system.

Figure 3-3a. Information System Description Form

1. SYSTEM TITLE		2. SYSTEM CONTROL NUMBER	
3. AGENCY PROGRAM SUPPORTED BY SYSTEM		4. PROGRAM AUTHORITY	
5. SYSTEM DESCRIPTION			
5A. PURPOSE/FUNCTION OF SYSTEM			
5B. SOURCE(S) OF DATA (Include inputs from other systems)			
5C. INFORMATION CONTENT			
5D. SYSTEM OUTPUTS (Include outputs from other systems)			
6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRINCIPAL PROGRAM OFFICE SUPPORTED BY THE SYSTEM (Include room numbers)			
7. AGENCY CONTACTS (Names, addresses, and phone numbers of system and program personnel who can provide additional information about the system and the program it supports.)			
8. PREVIOUS DISPOSITION JOBS			
9A. PREPARER'S NAME		9B. OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS	
9C. PHONE NUMBER			
SIGNATURE			DATE

Figure 3-3b. Information System Description Instructions

Definition

An *Information System* is the organized collection, processing, transmission, and dissemination of information in accordance with defined procedures. NARA's concern is with the government information in the system, that is, with information created, collected, processed, transmitted, disseminated, used, stored, and disposed of by the Federal Government. An electronic information system includes the inputs and outputs that are generated, as well as the information on electronic media. The system may contain budgetary, fiscal, social, economic, scientific-technical or program-related data and information, operated in support of agency programs and management responsibilities.

Explanations

1. The commonly used name and acronym of the system [e.g., Budget System, Grain Monitoring System]
2. The internal control number assigned to the system for reference, control, or cataloging purposes [e.g., Information System Inventory Number, ADP Plan control number]
3. What agency programs or missions does the system support?
4. What laws, directives, etc., authorize these programs?
5. Description has the following sections:
 - a. *Purpose/Function*: The reasons for and the requirements met by the system.
 - b. *Sources of Data*: The primary sources or providers of data to the system [e.g., broadcast license holders, corporations doing business in the U.S.]. Does this system receive information from other systems, either from within or outside your agency?
 - c. *Information content*: The principal subject matter, data coverage, time span, geographic coverage, update cycle, whether the system saves superseded information, major characteristics of the system, and whether the system contains microdata or summary data.
 - d. *Outputs*: The principal products of the system [e.g., reports, tables, charts, graphic displays, catalogs, correspondence], and an indication of the frequency of preparation. Is information from this system transferred to other systems?
6. Self-explanatory.
7. Self-explanatory.
8. Citations of previous NARA disposition jobs approving disposition of components [e.g., input forms, printouts, COM, output reports] of the system.
9. Self-explanatory.

NA FORM 14028 BACK (9-88)

1. *Name of the system.* Indicate the commonly used name and acronym of the system. For example, the Grain Monitoring System (GMS) or the State Energy Data System (SEDS).

2. *System control number.* Specify the internal control number assigned to the system for reference, control, or cataloging purposes. For example, the information system inventory number or the ADP plan control number.

3. *Agency program supported by the system.* Show the agency program(s) or mission(s) to which the system relates, and cite any authorizing laws or directives. Also list the names, office addresses, telephone numbers, and locations of program personnel who can provide additional information about the program and the system supporting it.

4. *Purpose of the system.* Indicate the reasons for the system and the requirements it meets.

5. *Data input and sources.* Describe the primary data input sources and the providers of the data to the system. For example, broadcast license holders or corporations doing business in the United States. Indicate the form numbers of any agency forms used as input sources. Also give the names of any other systems, either inside or outside the agency, from which this information system receives data.

6. *Major outputs.* Show the system's main products and the frequency of their preparation. For example, reports, tables, charts, graphic displays, catalogs, or correspondence prepared weekly, monthly, or yearly. Also indicate whether the information is transferred to other systems.

7. *Information content.* Indicate what persons, places, or things are the subjects of the records in the system and what information is maintained on those subjects. Also indicate timespan, geographic coverage, update cycle, and other major characteristics of the system. Finally, tell whether the system saves superseded information and whether it contains microdata or summary data.

8. *Hardware/software environment.* Indicate the computer system manipulating this information and the software used. For example, IBM 38XX, COBOL application programs; DEC VAX 780, BASIS DBMS.

9. System managers. List the name, office, telephone number, and location of the system manager or other system personnel who can provide more information about the system and the program it supports.

10. Location of documentation needed to read and understand the files. Show where the codebooks and file layouts are maintained. Indicate the office, room number, and name of the person having custody of them.

11. Restrictions on access and use. Indicate national security, privacy, or other restrictions. Cite any Privacy Act restrictions on records proposed for eventual destruction and any Freedom of Information Act restrictions on records proposed for immediate transfer to the National Archives.

12. Authorized disposition of the information as determined by the General Records Schedules or a NARA-approved SF 115. For example, "Permanent." If not covered by a schedule, then indicate "Unscheduled" and recommend a disposition.

13. Disposition authority citation. Cite any records schedule and item number(s) covering the records contained in this system. Include any NARA-approved records schedule(s) and item number(s) authorizing disposition of system components, such as input forms, printouts, COM, and output reports. If there are no such citations, indicate "None."

14. Location and volume of any storage media containing identical information. Show the location of any magnetic tapes or disks containing information identical to that in the system being inventoried. Also indicate the number of tapes and/or disks and their storage capacity.

15. Identification of the person conducting the inventory. List that person's name, office, telephone number, and location.

16. Date prepared. List the date the inventory was prepared.

- Figure 3-3a. [Information System Description Form](#)

- Figure 3-3b. [Information System Description Form - Back](#)

Description Sources for Information Systems

An agency normally already has existing descriptions of each electronic information system. These descriptions may be found in one or more of the following places:

IRM office. This office will have an inventory of the agency's major information systems or will know which organizational component has it. The IRM office may also maintain the agency's current master ADP plan, which may contain management overviews of the systems and identify the program office(s) supported by the information in the system.

Agency clearance officer. If an agency collects information from the public, its clearance officer, sometimes assigned to the IRM office, will have documentation on requests for OMB clearance. This documentation will include the information's purpose, the legal authority for collecting it, the part of the public affected, the program officer's name, and the office originating the request. It may also include a justification of the system and a description of its inputs and outputs as well as its intended use.

Interagency liaison officer. Sometimes assigned to the reports control office, this person should maintain a file of applications to GSA for collecting information from other Federal agencies. This file has the same type of information as that maintained by the agency clearance officer.

Privacy Act coordinator. This person is responsible for publishing annual notices on systems of records containing information retrievable by personal identifiers. The systems may be either manual or electronic. The notices include the name of the system of records, the categories of individuals on whom records are kept, the use(s) made of the information, policies affecting the records, and the office responsible for the system.

ADP facility. In most agencies with advanced computer applications, persons in the ADP facility will know which program activities are using ADP resources, what their purposes are, and perhaps which files are associated with those offices.

Records schedule. Any references in the agency schedule to computer printouts or computer input documents usually indicate the existence of an electronic information system.

Public information office. If an agency sells copies of computer files or statistical abstracts to the public, its public information office may have a catalog describing them. These public use files are outputs of an information system.

National Technical Information Service (NTIS), Department of Commerce. If an agency does not distribute computer files directly to the public, it may do so through NTIS. Files available from NTIS are outputs of agency information systems.

Other sources, such as the FOIA coordinator, the agency librarian, the agency historian, and program officers.

For further guidance, the agency records officer should contact the appropriate NARA appraisal archivist.

Verification

Once the records have been inventoried, the records manager needs to assess the quality of the inventory's results. If the records are nonelectronic, the results should be spot-checked for obvious errors, such as failing to indicate the location of the records inventoried, exaggerating their volume, and intermixing two or more potentially permanent series or two or more temporary series having potentially varying retention periods. If someone else has prepared the inventory, the records manager should physically examine some of the records inventoried to confirm the accuracy of the information recorded on the inventory form.

If electronic records are involved, the results should also be checked for obvious errors, such as failing to indicate inputs and outputs. If someone else conducted the information system inventory, the records manager should schedule some office visits to ask for confirmation and also sample printouts if these have not already been provided.

Regardless of whether or not the records are electronic, the records manager should verify more thoroughly and even reinventory the records when spot checks reveal serious and frequent problems with the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the original inventory.

Conclusion

The scheduling process begins with a review of agency functions and recordkeeping requirements and practices. It continues with an inventory of agency records. The inventory provides the information needed to develop a schedule as well as to identify various records management problems. While nonelectronic records are normally inventoried by series, electronic records are best inventoried in the context of an information system.

After the inventory is completed and verified, the next steps are to evaluate the records for disposition and to draft recommended disposition instructions. Analyzing the inventory's results is treated in the next chapter as part of the process of evaluating the records.

IV. Record Values and Schedule Instructions

- [Introduction](#)
 - [Evaluating Records: The Agency's Viewpoint](#)
 - [Evaluating Records: NARA's Viewpoint](#)
 - [Preparing Disposition Instructions](#)
 - [Understanding General Records Schedules](#)
 - [Applying General Records Schedules to Agency Records](#)
 - [Conclusion](#)
-

IV. Record Values and Schedule Instructions

- *Records are evaluated from the agency's and NARA's viewpoints to determine their final disposition.*
- *All agency records have value to the agency, but only a small percentage have permanent value.*
- *Records with temporary value should be identified and scheduled for disposal.*
- *Records officers should use NARA's guidelines to help identify records with permanent value.*
- *Records with potentially permanent value should be proposed for scheduled transfer to the National Archives.*
- *NARA's guidelines for preparing disposition instructions should be followed.*
- *General Records Schedules (GRS) are NARA-issued schedules governing the disposition of specified series of records common to several or all Federal agencies.*
- *Normally the GRS authorities are mandatory.*
- *Since the GRS authorities do not apply to program records, agencies need to submit an SF 115 to NARA for such records.*
- *Applicable GRS disposition authorities should be included in the agency's records schedule either by interspersing them among authorities derived from SF 115's or by including the entire GRS as part of the schedule or as an appendix.*

- *Each agency needs to review and, if necessary, update its records schedule at least annually and within 6 months of NARA's issuance of new or revised GRS items for which the agency has no authorized exception.*
-

Introduction

Objectives

Once the agency has reviewed its functions and recordkeeping requirements and practices and has inventoried its records, it is ready to evaluate those records and prepare draft disposition instructions. This evaluation and scheduling process, which includes information analysis and decision-making, places all records into one of two categories:

- **Temporary:** Authorized for disposal immediately or after a specified retention period.
- **Permanent:** Disposal not authorized. Unless otherwise agreed to by NARA, authorized for transfer to the National Archives.

Agency and NARA Roles

Agencies play an important part in this process by establishing retention periods for nonrecord materials and recommending to NARA retention periods for records. Although NARA is solely responsible for appraising Federal records and approving their final disposition, agency records officers need an understanding of appraisal objectives and standards to prepare and implement schedules.

Appraisal is the process by which NARA evaluates records to determine their final disposition, designating them as either temporary (disposable) or permanent (archival). It is basic to records disposition, which in turn is basic to all of records and information management. The appraisal process is complex and challenging and requires an understanding of:

- The agency's functions, its documentation practices, and its record and information policies, procedures, and systems.
- The importance of records, especially permanent records, in documenting and preserving the memory of an agency, the Federal Government, and American society.

- The role of records disposition, including appraisal, in avoiding both a loss of documentation and too much documentation.
- The agency and NARA perspectives on the value of records.

Records fall into three categories—those easy to appraise because they are obviously permanent, those easy to appraise because they are clearly temporary, and those in between that are difficult to appraise. Some records, such as treaties, laws, executive orders, and Supreme Court decisions, obviously have permanent value. Likewise, records of an administrative, or housekeeping, nature clearly have only temporary value and are disposable after a suitable retention period.

Between these two extremes fall many modern program records. Such program records are difficult to appraise because they document diverse agency functions, reflect differing record systems and practices, have various physical forms and characteristics, and contain a broad range of unique information. They require considerable attention in the appraisal and scheduling process.

Guidelines for Evaluating and Scheduling Records

In evaluating and scheduling records for final disposition, it is important to recognize that:

- Records may have permanent value regardless of their physical form or characteristics. The medium may be paper, electronic, audiovisual, microform, or some other, but as records they must be scheduled for an appropriate disposition, which may be permanent.
- The agency may avoid recommending duplicate information for permanent retention by comparing similar records created at different organizational levels. NARA generally designates as permanent only the most complete series of records. In rare instances, two series of records documenting the same activity or containing substantially the same information are designated for permanent retention if they are arranged differently (e.g., chronologically as opposed to alphabetically by subject) and if these different arrangements make them easier to use.
- Because agency programs vary in importance, the number of record series or systems designated as permanent will also vary.

- An agency does not need to evaluate or schedule all its records simultaneously. Instead it may do so incrementally, that is, office by office or function by function, until all its records are covered.
- The NARA appraisal archivist is available for advice and assistance throughout the process.

Inventory Analysis

After completing and verifying the inventory, records managers should examine the inventory for an overview of agency documentation practices. In doing so, it is helpful to bear in mind these three characteristics of Federal agency records:

- Program records are generally more voluminous than administrative, or housekeeping, records.
- Comparatively few records are permanent, although the exact proportion varies from agency to agency and from office to office.
- Case files are generally far more voluminous than all other types of Federal records combined.

In analyzing the records described in the inventory, records managers should focus on the agency's organization, functions, and activities and distinguish between program and administrative records. They should also ensure that all records, regardless of medium, have been identified for the organizational unit or function covered. Sometimes it may be necessary to obtain more information from program and other agency officials before proposing disposition instructions for particular series or systems.

Record Values

All records have value to the agency creating or receiving them or to oversight or other agencies. A few also have permanent value and warrant preservation by the National Archives once the agency no longer needs them to conduct regular current business. The following sections of this chapter describe the agency's and NARA's perspectives on the value of records.

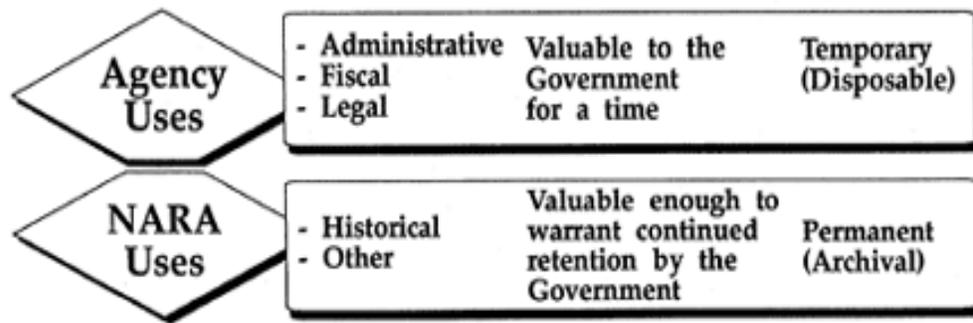


Figure 4-1. An Overview of Record Values and Uses

General Records Schedules

In evaluating its records and preparing disposition instructions, the agency should make proper use of the General Records Schedules (GRS) as it continues to develop a draft comprehensive records schedule. Such a draft schedule is based on records disposition authorities derived from the GRS and one or more approved SF 115's, Request for Records Disposition Authority. This chapter explains how to use the GRS. [Chapter V](#) will describe how to complete, clear, and submit an SF 115 and will review the components of a draft records schedule.

Evaluating Records: The Agency's Viewpoint

Records have value to an agency because:

- They are the basic administrative tool by which the agency conducts its business.
- They document the agency's organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions.
- They furnish the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities.

Agency record values fall into three overlapping categories: (1) administrative, (2) fiscal, and (3) legal. Understanding these values can help records officers propose to NARA retention periods that will satisfy agency needs.

Administrative Value

All records have administrative value because they are necessary to conduct the agency's current business. The duration of this value may be long or short. Some records, such as program directives, have long-term administrative value. Others, such as messenger service files, have short-term administrative value. Many records at operating levels have short-term administrative value because they are correspondence duplicated elsewhere, reports summarized at higher agency levels, or logs serving as temporary controls.

Fiscal Value

Along with general administrative value, some records may have fiscal value. Records with fiscal value document the agency's financial transactions and obligations. They include budget records, which show how expenditures were planned; voucher or expenditure records, which indicate the purposes for which funds were spent; and accounting records, which classify and summarize agency expenditures. Such agencies as the Office of Management and Budget, the General Accounting Office, the Treasury Department, and the General Services Administration prescribe the form and content of many fiscal records. In most instances, only the data on the forms differ from agency to agency. Consequently the General Records Schedules (GRS) provide disposition authorities for many temporary fiscal records.

Legal Value

Besides administrative and fiscal value, records may also have legal value. Some legal values relate to records that the law requires the Government to create and maintain in the course of its operations. Others, however, are quite broad and do not necessarily involve an agency's operations. Instead they are intended to protect the rights of individuals and organizations. Such records are useful in documenting legally enforceable rights or obligations, both those of the Government and those of persons directly affected by an agency's activities.

Records with legal value contain information that may be used to support rights based on the provisions of statute or regulation. These provisions may be general, such as the statute of limitations on claims or fraud; or they may be specific, such as those providing benefits to persons who have been discharged from the military.

Legal value has long been associated with records documenting such matters as benefits and property ownership. More recently, however, it has also been identified with records documenting environmental and potential health concerns, such as the handling or regulation of chemical and nuclear materials.

Examples of records with legal value include formal decisions and legal opinions; documents containing evidence of actions in particular cases, such as claims papers and legal dockets; and documents involving legal agreements, such as leases, titles, and contracts. They also include records relating to criminal investigations, workers' compensation, exposure to hazardous material, and the issuance of licenses and permits. Still other examples include records relating to loans, subsidies, and grants; entitlement programs such as food stamps and social security; and survivor benefits in Government pension and other programs.

Special concern for legal value applies only to temporary records, because if records are permanent they will always be available to protect legal rights. The GRS designates as temporary many records with legal value, such as those relating to contracts, claims, property disposal, payroll, and civilian personnel.

The duration of legal value varies with the matter at hand. For example, the legal value of contracts and claims records diminishes rapidly after final settlement, and it ends when relevant statutes of limitations expire. Based on statutes of limitation and fraud, other statutory provisions, and practical considerations such as lifespan, records with legal value may be disposable, although they may require a long retention period.

Before recommending retention periods for records that may have legal value, agencies should seek the advice of their general counsel. Factors to be considered in determining retention periods include applicable statutes of limitation, regulatory limits for claims or prosecution, the potential for fraud, and litigation trends involving procedural or substantive rights. They also include particular statutes or regulations granting or limiting a specific legal right as well as the availability of the same information in other record series or systems.

Agencies should retain documentation adequate to establish that they have fully considered legal rights in proposing retention periods for temporary records.

Evaluating Records: NARA's Viewpoint

NARA's Appraisal Responsibility

Although agencies recommend retention periods, only NARA can determine and approve final disposition. In carrying out this responsibility, NARA:

- Works with agencies to ensure that retention periods of temporary records are adequate, but not excessive, for agency needs and for the protection of individual rights.
- Makes sure that disposition instructions meet the requirements of other agencies having an interest in certain categories of records; for example, the Office of Personnel Management in civilian personnel records and the General Accounting Office in program and financial records.
- Cooperates with agencies to identify and schedule records having permanent value.

NARA designates records as permanent if they have sufficient historical or other value to warrant their continued preservation by the Government. Such records may be kept mainly because they document an agency's origins, organization, functions, and significant transactions and activities. Or they may be kept mainly because they document the persons, places, things, or matters dealt with by an agency; that is, because they contain information with significant research or reference value.

[Appendix C](#) of this handbook contains guidelines that records officers should use to help identify potentially permanent records in terms of their evidential or informational value.

NARA's Use of Sampling and Other Selection Techniques

Although records appraisal normally involves determining the disposition of a series or system as a whole, occasionally NARA selects only individual files from one series for permanent retention. This selection may be qualitative (based on the information content of the files) or quantitative (based on a random or statistical sample). [Guideline 14](#) in appendix C of this handbook contains a list of frequently used selection criteria for case files, and [figure 4-2](#) contains a schedule item involving a selection of permanent records. When recommending such selection, agencies should include the type and the proposed method of accomplishment.

Figure 4-2. Examples of Disposition Instructions for Permanent Records

1. Unfair Labor Practices Official Case Files.

All papers relating to the agency's processing of charges of unfair labor practices ("C" cases). Arranged alphabetically by name of case while pending, by type of case and thereunder by case number after the case is closed.

Close case upon notification of final action by regional director, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), or the court, and place in closed case file. Cut off file at end of calendar year.

a. Selected for permanent retention: Between 1 and 3 percent of all NLRB case files, these illustrate significant developments in the administration of the National Labor Relations Act or otherwise represent the most important cases considered by the Board in a given year and are selected according to the following factors:

- (1) The nature of the substantive or procedural issues involved, as constituting a landmark or lead case.
- (2) The intensity of public interest and comment.
- (3) The impact upon the local or national economy of the actions giving rise to the case.
- (4) The unique character of the issues or procedures involved, as demonstrating the agency's resourcefulness.
- (5) The case's influence on the development of principles, precedents, policies, or standards of judgment in such matters as the definition of the jurisdiction of the Board and the limits of interstate commerce; the meaning of unfair practices; the implications of bargaining in good faith; the determination of what constitutes undue interference, restraint, or coercion; the unit appropriate for purposes of collective bargaining; and the problem of inclusion in bargaining units of fringe group or supervisory employees.
- (6) The numbers of workers affected or the size of the establishment shall not be regarded alone as a criterion of importance, but attention should be given to the preservation of the history of the efforts to organize a given industry.

Permanent. Transfer to Headquarters Case Records Unit 2 years after cutoff. Case Records Unit will transfer merged cases to FRC 3 years after cutoff. Transfer to the National Archives in 5-year blocks 20 years after cutoff (e.g., transfer 198185 block in 2006).

b. Not selected for permanent retention.

Transfer to FRC 2 years after cutoff. Destroy 6 years after cutoff.

2. Advisory Opinions.

Petitions for advisory opinions questioning National Labor Relations Board jurisdictional limits, the Board's response, and related papers. Arranged alphabetically.

Permanent. Cut off file at end of fiscal year. Transfer to FRC 2 years after cutoff. Transfer to the National Archives in 5-year blocks 20 years after cutoff (e.g., transfer 198185 block in 2006). Where representation petition or unfair labor practice charge is subsequently filed, place copy of documents in official case file.

3. Master File Photographs.

Color and black-and-white photographic prints acquired or produced by the agency for use in its information programs.

Permanent. Cut off file at end of fiscal year. Transfer to the National Archives in 5-year blocks when 10 years old (e.g., transfer 198185 block in 1996).

4. Environmental Support Group (E.G.) Vietnam Experience/Agent Orange Study.

Study tracks location of 23,000 U.S. Army military personnel in Vietnam. Study supports requirements by the Congress and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to research, abstract, and maintain information for CDC from U.S. military records relating to potential exposure of U.S. Army personnel to herbicide spray.

a. Master file and historical data tapes.

Permanent. Record dates: 1984-87. 6 tapes. Transfer a copy to the National Archives immediately.

- b. Input data tapes and paper records.

Destroy after 5 years.

- c. Output data and reports.

Destroy after 5 years.

- d. System documentation.

Permanent. Record dates: 1984-87. 1 cubic foot. Transfer a copy to the National Archives along with the master file and historical data tapes.

Preparing Disposition Instructions

Introduction

After the records have been evaluated for disposition, the next step is to write recommended cutoffs, retention periods, and other disposition instructions for all records, along with necessary instructions for nonrecord materials.

Although instructions for cutting off records are included in this step, such instructions should be implemented as soon as possible, even if the records are not yet scheduled. This prompt action will avoid unnecessary delays in applying a specific retention period once the agency has received NARA's approval.

Central to preparing disposition instructions is the need to propose specific retention periods for the records that have been inventoried and evaluated. Records with potentially permanent value deserve special attention.

Schedule instructions should be clear, especially those on the final disposition of records. The timing of destruction or transfer to the National Archives must not be left to chance or be subject to possible misinterpretation.

If NARA does not approve the proposed disposition, the agency may include the series or system in its schedule but only with this disposition statement: "Do not destroy. Disposition authorization pending NARA's approval."

Instructions for Permanent Records

If records are proposed as permanent, the disposition instructions need to include these elements:

- The word "Permanent." Use the word "permanent" to designate record series or systems that may have sufficient value to warrant archival preservation by the National Archives. Alternate words, such as "indefinite" or "retain," should not be used. Lengthy retention periods are not equivalent to "permanent."
- Cutoff instructions.
- Instructions for transferring the records to a records center, if applicable. The timing should be based on the length of time after the cutoff, although it may be expressed either as "Transfer ___ years after cutoff" or "Transfer when ___ years old." The particular record center should be specified if it is an exception to the general rule.
- Instructions for transferring the records to the National Archives, including both timing and blocking. The timing should be based on the length of time after the cutoff, although it may be expressed either as "Transfer ___ years after cutoff" or "Transfer when ___ years old." The timing of the transfer should normally be within 30 years for paper records, within 5-10 years for audiovisual or microform records, and as soon as electronic records become inactive or the agency cannot meet maintenance requirements for them. Blocking means the chronological grouping of records consisting of one or more segments of cutoff records that belong to the same series and are dealt with as a unit for purposes of their efficient transfer (e.g., transfer in 5-year blocks). Blocking does not apply to permanent electronic records because they need to be transferred to the National Archives as soon as they become noncurrent or can no longer be maintained properly. If permanent records are to be transferred to a National Archives regional archives, the name of that facility should be specified whenever possible. (See [List of Regional Records Services Facilities](#).)

[Figure 4-2](#) illustrates how to word disposition instructions for records proposed as permanent.

Instructions for Temporary Records

All records not identified as permanent should be scheduled for disposal after a specific retention period. This step is unnecessary if the General Records Schedules already include an appropriate retention period for the records. Recommended retention periods for temporary records are to be based on realistic and informed assessments of their administrative, legal, and fiscal values, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

If records are proposed for destruction, the disposition instructions should contain the term "destroy" (or "delete" if the records are on reusable media, such as magnetic tape or disk). The wording "dispose of" should be avoided because it does not necessarily mean destruction but may include the donation of records as provided for in [36 CFR 1228](#).

Retention periods for temporary records may be expressed in two ways:

1. A fixed period after records in the series or system are created (normally a fixed period after their regular cutoff). For example, the phrase "destroy when 2 years old" provides continuing authority to destroy records in a given series 2 years after their creation (normally 2 years after their regular cutoff).
2. A fixed period after a predictable event (normally a fixed period after the systematic cutoff following that event). The wording in this case depends on the kind of action involved. Note the following examples:
 - "After completion" (as of a study, project, audit).
 - "After sale or transfer" (as of personal or real property).
 - "After publication" (as of monthly reports).
 - "After superseded" (as of an administrative directive).
 - "After revision or cancellation" (as of a form).
 - "After acceptance or rejection" (as of an application).
 - "After audit" (as of accounts).
 - "After settlement" (as of accounts or a claim).
 - "After acceptance" (as of a bid or a recommendation).
 - "After end of fiscal year" (as of budget reports).
 - "After termination" (as of a contract).
 - "After transfer" (as of an employee).

- "After conversion to paper or microfilm" (as of information contained in an office automation system).

Other specific wording depends on the nature of the action involved. Some retention periods are based on the likelihood that two different future events may affect a series of records. For example:

- "Destroy when property is sold or vacated, whichever is later."
- "Destroy when superseded by revised plan or when building is sold, whichever is sooner."

Every effort should be made, however, to establish retention periods that are fixed rather than contingent.

The wording of retention periods should be realistic. For example, records should not be scheduled for destruction on termination of the office or program. More often offices or programs are reorganized, or they are incorporated into a second office, or they liquidate so slowly that the precise time of termination becomes a complex legal matter. Instead a different retention approach, such as a fixed time period, should be used.

Likewise, temporary records should not normally be scheduled for destruction "when no longer needed." Since the application of this retention period would vary from person to person, the agency would in effect lose management control of such records, and the agency may inadvertently destroy records that are still needed.

[Figure 4-3](#) illustrates how to word disposition instructions for temporary records.

Figure 4-3. Examples of Disposition Instructions for Temporary Records

1. Security Violation Files.

Case files relating to investigations of alleged violations of Executive orders, laws, or agency regulations for the safeguarding of national security information.

- a. Files relating to alleged violations of a sufficiently serious nature that they are referred to the Departments of Justice or Defense for prosecutive determination, exclusive of files held by Department of Justice or Defense offices responsible for making such determinations.

Cut off at end of fiscal year in which case is closed. Destroy 5 years after cutoff.

- b. All other files, exclusive of documents placed in official personnel folders.

Cut off at end of fiscal year in which final action is taken. Destroy 2 years after cutoff.

2. **Budget Report Files.**

Periodic reports on the status of appropriation accounts and apportionment.

- a. Annual report (end of fiscal year).

Destroy when 5 years old.

- b. All other reports.

Destroy 3 years after the end of the fiscal year.

3. **Suspense Files.**

Documents arranged in chronological order as a reminder that an action is required on a given date or that a reply to action is expected and, if not received, should be traced on a given date.

- a. A note or other reminder to take some other action.

Destroy after action is taken.

- b. The file copy, or an extra copy, of an outgoing communication, filed by the date on which a reply is expected.

Withdraw papers when reply is received. (1) If suspense copy is an extra copy, destroy immediately. (2) If the suspense copy is the file copy, incorporate it into the appropriate files.

4. Word Processing Files.

Documents such as letters, messages, memorandums, reports, handbooks, directives, and manuals recorded on electronic media such as hard disks or floppy diskettes when used to produce a hard copy that is maintained in organized files.

Delete when no longer needed to create a hard copy.

5. Case Handling Information Processing System (CHIPS).

This system is designed to provide management controls over all cases brought before the board. Categories of information include types of cases, case status, and regional distribution of cases. The system is used to manage the agency's resources, monitor the processing of cases, prepare the agency's budget, and publish the annual report to the Congress.

- a. Input forms.

Destroy after data has been verified.

- b. Electronic data.

Delete when superseded or no longer needed for administrative purposes.

- c. Computer printouts.

Cut off at end of fiscal year. Destroy 2 years after cutoff.

Understanding General Records Schedules

In evaluating records and preparing disposition instructions, agencies should make proper use of the General Records Schedules (GRS). NARA issues the GRS to provide disposition authority for records common to several or all Federal agencies. The GRS covers records documenting administrative, or housekeeping, functions rather than program functions. Many of these administrative functions are regulated by oversight agencies, such as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the General Accounting Office (GAO), and the General Services Administration (GSA). Excluded from GRS

coverage are those records maintained by such oversight agencies that relate to their Government-wide management of administrative functions.

Besides many paper-based office files, the GRS covers certain electronic, audiovisual, cartographic, architectural, engineering, and related records. The [Index to the General Records Schedules](#) is a list of the current GRS (see <http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/ardor/>). Use of the GRS allows records officers to concentrate on scheduling records unique to their agencies.

GRS disposition authorities are legally mandatory ([44 U.S.C. 3303a\(d\)](#)). Agencies must apply the GRS to the greatest extent possible. In practical terms, this means applying the GRS to the types of records specified unless one of two situations exist:

1. The agency has already received approval of a shorter retention period in a NARA-approved SF 115. In this situation the agency may apply the shorter retention period unless NARA advises otherwise.
2. NARA has approved an SF 115 granting an exception to the GRS-prescribed disposition authority. When submitting the SF 115, the agency must provide written justification for the exception. In deciding whether to request an exception to a GRS authority, the agency follows the same internal clearance procedure used for proposing retention periods for records not covered by the GRS.

If neither situation exists, then it is necessary to apply the new or revised GRS items within 6 months of their issuance by NARA. This action may involve incorporating GRS revisions and additions into the agency records schedule and then distributing the updated portion of that schedule to agency records personnel. Or it may involve distributing the GRS revisions and additions directly to agency records personnel, along with appropriate instructions.

Applying General Records Schedules to Agency Records

Getting Started

Before using the GRS to determine the disposition of records, an agency should have an overview of the entire process and its component steps, which are listed in [figure 4-5](#) and explained in the remainder of this chapter.

Figure 4-5. How to Apply General Records Schedules

1. Before using the GRS:

- a. Examine organization charts and functional statements to find out which agency and office functions are administrative, or housekeeping, and which are program, or mission-related. For example, an oversight agency should regard as program records all its records related to the Government-wide management of administrative functions.
- b. Identify the record series or systems documenting the agency's administrative and program functions.
- c. Remember that GRS dispositions apply to records common to several or all agencies rather than records unique to an individual agency.
- d. Make sure the GRS version being used is the latest edition, including all changes issued by NARA.
- e. Read the GRS's overall introduction, each schedule's introduction, and all NARA issuances transmitting changes to the GRS, and note any limitations on use.

2. Use the GRS retention periods for all applicable agency records unless NARA has already approved a shorter retention period for particular agency records or unless the agency has clear grounds to request an exception by submitting an SF 115 to NARA. (In some instances NARA may announce that a revised or new GRS retention period must be applied without exception.)

3. Follow these other rules for applying the GRS to agency records:

- a. Use the GRS table of contents to find a particular category of records.
- b. Use the subject and forms indexes to match record series or systems with GRS items.
- c. Do not use a GRS item if it applies to only part of a record series or system.
- d. Do not use the GRS for program records. Instead submit an SF 115 to NARA.

- e. Do not expect the GRS to contain disposition authorities for all administrative records. Submit an SF 115 for those not scheduled by the GRS.
- f. Do not use GRS correspondence items for general correspondence (i.e., correspondence covering multiple functional areas) maintained as a single series.
- g. Follow NARA guidelines in tailoring GRS items to fit agency records.
- h. As with all records, remember to cut off, or break, records covered by the GRS before applying the disposition instructions.
- i. Refer to NARA any GRS-related questions not resolved within the agency.

4. Incorporate applicable GRS disposition authorities into the agency records schedule by using one of the following methods:

- a. Interspersing them item by item among disposition authorities approved on SF 115's.
- b. Attaching the GRS as a whole to the remainder of the agency records schedule.

5. Review and, if necessary, update the agency's records schedule at least annually and within 6 months of NARA's issuance of new or revised GRS items for which the agency has no exception.

Noting GRS Limitations

Before using the GRS, it is important to read the introduction to each GRS and note any limitations. Such limitations fall into three main categories:

- **Record Limitations.** Agencies must not attempt to use the GRS for program records. Nor does the GRS necessarily cover all series of administrative records found in agencies. Finally, NARA may grant exceptions to GRS disposition standards when an agency submits an SF 115 along with sufficient written justification.
- **Agency Limitations.** Some agencies or parts of agencies are excluded from using a particular GRS to schedule their records. For example, GRS 1 (Civilian

Personnel Records) does not apply to the program records of the Office of Personnel Management, the Public Health Service's Bureau of Medical Services, the Labor Department's Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

- **Date Limitations.** Most agency records accumulated before 1921 do not fall under the GRS but must be scheduled by using an SF 115. GRS 3, 11, 16, and 17 have other limiting dates.

Finding GRS Items

The GRS contains three finding aids for users. (1) The table of contents provides a list of GRS titles. (2) The subject index is a list of topics with citations of relevant schedule and item numbers. As in all indexes, it may be necessary to check under more general topics or under synonyms to find the desired subject. (3) The forms index consists of separate lists of standard forms and optional forms referred to in the GRS, along with citations of relevant schedule and item numbers.

Tailoring GRS Items to Fit Agency Records

Records officers must sometimes modify generally-worded GRS items to fit the records of their own agency when adding these items to the agency's records schedule. By drawing on their knowledge of agency functions, records, terminology, and procedures, they can ensure that their tailored descriptions accurately reflect the actual records in their agency's custody. For example, they may insert the name of an organizational unit, include titles of agency forms as illustrations, and reword the series or system title or the description to conform to the agency's normal usage or editorial style. Although the substance of the GRS disposition must remain the same if a definite retention period is specified, appropriate cutoff and retirement instructions may be added.

However, when the GRS disposition authorizes destruction, or deletion, "when no longer needed" for the records, the agency should apply a more specific disposition instruction, such as "Destroy when 1 year old" or "Delete after 2 update cycles," which will meet its particular program needs. NARA approval is not needed to establish specific retention periods for records authorized by the GRS for destruction, or deletion, when no longer needed.

Sometimes it might not be readily apparent how the agency will use its records authorized by the GRS for destruction, or deletion, when no longer needed. For example,

the Records Disposition Files covered by GRS 16, Item 2a may be used to answer Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests or to find out what records may be accretions to those permanent records already accessioned by the National Archives.

All records described in the GRS are scheduled as temporary (that is, disposable or nonpermanent). Usually the GRS authorizes destruction of such records, although occasionally, as in GRS 4, Item 4, it may direct the transfer of records.

A few GRS items have as their disposition cross-references to related records covered elsewhere in the GRS or in agency schedules. In these instances the GRS simply instructs the user to apply the disposition instructions authorized by NARA for the related records.

Giving Special Care to OPM and GAO Records

Several record series are unique because the agency that creates and maintains them does not have full legal control over them. They therefore require special care in their disposition. These series, most of which are covered by the GRS, are:

- **Records of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).** The two main examples of OPM records maintained in agencies are:
 - Official Personnel Folders (OPF's). The OPF's document Federal employment for each individual, including service, rights, and benefits. They travel with each employee from agency to agency, beginning with first employment and being closed on separation. If an employee is rehired, the OPF is reopened, and the service continues to be documented until separation. Authorized disposition instructions for OPF's appear in GRS 1, items 1 and 10.
 - The Individual Retirement Record (SF 2806). This shows the amount deducted from pay for the retirement fund. The agency forwards this form, or its equivalent, to OPM when an employee transfers or is separated. The records are not scheduled by the GRS; in fact, GRS 2 specifically excludes coverage of retirement records, such as the SF 2806 or its equivalent. Their disposition is prescribed by a NARA-approved OPM schedule.
- **Records of the General Accounting Office (GAO).** Since 1950, agency programs have dealt with records of accountable officers that are held in agency space for GAO audit. These records reflect an audit responsibility GAO has had since its creation in 1921. It is necessary to distinguish the GAO site audit records

from agency "memorandum" copies of accountable officers' records. For example,

- GRS 6, item 1a covers the original or ribbon copy of accountable officers' accounts maintained in the agency for site audit by GAO.
- GRS 6, item 1b covers memorandum copies of accountable officers' returns (with some exceptions).

Title 8 of the "GAO Policy and Procedures Manual for Guidance of Federal Agencies" contains GAO requirements and related program information.

Issuing General Records Schedules Within an Agency

Agencies should include applicable [GRS](#) disposition authorities in their comprehensive records schedule, which they should issue and update as a part of a directives system. They generally do so in one of two ways:

- Interspersing the GRS disposition standards item by item among those derived from NARA-approved SF 115's. Taking this approach requires keeping track of the citations of the GRS items dispersed throughout the schedule. Otherwise the agency will be unable to update its comprehensive schedule promptly when NARA issues changes to particular GRS disposition authorities.
- Attaching the entire GRS to the remainder of the comprehensive schedule and updating it promptly when NARA makes additions and changes to the GRS authorities. This approach may require placing cross-references in the non-GRS portion of the schedule to aid the user.

Whichever approach is used, each agency must review and, if necessary, update its records schedule at least annually and within 6 months of NARA's issuance of new or revised GRS items for which the agency has no exception.

Conclusion

Evaluating records and preparing appropriate disposition instructions are essential steps in scheduling records. During this process each agency needs to combine its own disposition instructions for nonrecord materials with records disposition authorities obtained from NARA. These authorities are obtained partly by using the General Records Schedules issued by NARA and partly by submitting to NARA a [Standard Form 115](#),

Request for Records Disposition Authority. The GRS disposition authorities are intended primarily for the administrative, or housekeeping, records common to several or all Federal agencies. In contrast, SF 115 disposition authorities are intended primarily for each agency's program records.

After an agency has reviewed its functions and recordkeeping requirements and practices and has inventoried and evaluated the records of an office or function, it is time to use the GRS. Without further NARA approval, records managers should incorporate GRS authorities into the agency's schedule and have them applied to as many administrative records as possible. Proper use of the GRS involves following carefully the instructions given in the GRS, NARA regulations, and this chapter. Any remaining questions should be referred to a NARA appraisal archivist.

For those administrative records not covered by the GRS and for all program records, it is necessary to complete and submit to NARA an SF 115 in accordance with procedures explained in [Chapter V](#). Furthermore, [Chapter VI](#) contains general instructions on implementing and updating a comprehensive schedule, whether derived from GRS or SF 115 authorities approved by NARA.

V. Schedule Preparation and Clearance

- [Introduction](#)
 - [Completing an SF 115](#)
 - [Description and Added Information](#)
 - [Electronic, Audiovisual, and Other Special Records](#)
 - [Other Considerations in Completing an SF 115](#)
 - [Arranging a Records Schedule](#)
 - [Assembling a Draft Records Schedule](#)
 - [Obtaining Internal Clearances and GAO's Approval](#)
 - [Submitting an SF 115 for NARA's Approval](#)
 - [Conclusion](#)
-

V. Schedule Preparation and Clearance

- *The Standard Form 115 (SF 115) is used to request disposition authority for all records not covered appropriately by the General Records Schedules (GRS).*
- *Usually the agency initiates the SF 115, but occasionally NARA does so.*
- *The SF 115 is used to schedule both recurring and nonrecurring series and systems of records.*
- *Completing the SF 115 properly can minimize delays during the clearance and approval process.*
- *For records proposed as permanent, NARA requires information on the arrangement and total volume of all such records, the transfer date and annual accumulation of recurring records, and any access restrictions applicable to records proposed for immediate transfer, such as restrictions on classified information.*
- *Following NARA's guidelines is especially important in scheduling electronic, audiovisual, and other special records.*

- *Besides adequately describing the records, regardless of media, and proposing retention periods for them, the agency should provide necessary cutoff and transfer instructions.*
- *Schedules can be arranged by organization, function, or a combination of these.*
- *Assembling a draft comprehensive schedule can make it easier to issue the entire schedule once the agency has cleared the schedule and obtained NARA's approval of the SF 115.*
- *The records officer needs to clear the comprehensive schedule within the agency and obtain any necessary approval from NARA and GAO before issuing the disposition standards it contains.*
- *Before submitting an SF 115 for approval, the records officer should consult with the NARA appraiser and understand what NARA looks for in reviewing an SF 115 and what actions it may take.*

Introduction

Besides applying appropriate [General Records Schedule](#) (GRS) authorities to as many administrative records as possible, the agency needs to schedule its program records and any remaining administrative records. To do so, it must complete, clear, and submit to NARA a Standard Form 115 (SF 115), Request for Records Disposition Authority. After NARA processes and approves the SF 115, the agency is ready to issue and apply a schedule consisting of an appropriate combination of GRS and SF 115 disposition authorities.

Like using the GRS, completing an SF 115 is based on previous steps in the overall scheduling process; namely, reviewing agency functions and recordkeeping requirements and practices and inventorying and evaluating agency records. Completing an SF 115 involves recording information from the inventory and recommending appropriate cutoffs, retention periods, and other disposition instructions.

Agencies initiate most SF 115's because they have detailed information on the records and generally have physical custody of them. Occasionally, however, NARA initiates an SF 115 when doing one of the following:

- Carrying out projects to schedule unscheduled records or reduce apparently excessive retention periods. These projects often involve agency records stored in Federal records centers.

- Proposing for disposal records already a part of the National Archives' holdings but reappraised and determined no longer to have sufficient value for continued preservation.

If NARA initiates the SF 115, it still must obtain the agency's written concurrence before final approval. If the agency initiates the SF 115, it needs to follow carefully the guidance given in this chapter.

After the disposition instructions are drafted, it is time to organize and clear the records schedule. By this stage, the agency should have determined the schedule's arrangement. It is often helpful to assemble the draft comprehensive schedule before clearing it within the agency and obtaining any necessary approval from NARA and GAO.

The draft schedule should be based on GRS and proposed SF 115 authorities for records, as well as on the agency's own disposition standards for nonrecord materials. The GRS authorities have already been approved by NARA and, if necessary, by GAO. The proposed SF 115 authorities, however, require NARA's approval and sometimes GAO's before they can be issued and applied.

Completing an SF 115

To complete the SF 115 properly, agencies need to follow the general and specific instructions given in this chapter and on the back of the form. (See [figure 5-2](#) for a copy of the SF 115.) They should also carry out any new or revised instructions announced in NARA bulletins or incorporated into NARA regulations.

General Instructions

An SF 115 is required for all records not scheduled by the GRS and all records scheduled by the GRS for which the agency needs a different retention period. There are various ways in which this form is used:

- To schedule recurring records as temporary or permanent.
- To schedule nonrecurring records as permanent. Such nonrecurring permanent records are normally excluded from the agency's published schedule.
- To schedule nonrecurring records for disposal. Sometimes called items on a disposal list, such records are normally excluded from the agency's published schedule if they are ready for immediate disposal.

- To convert paper records or other originals (source documents) to microform records, and then destroy the originals, if the originals are unscheduled or scheduled as permanent. No SF 115 is required if the originals to be converted to microform are already scheduled for disposal.

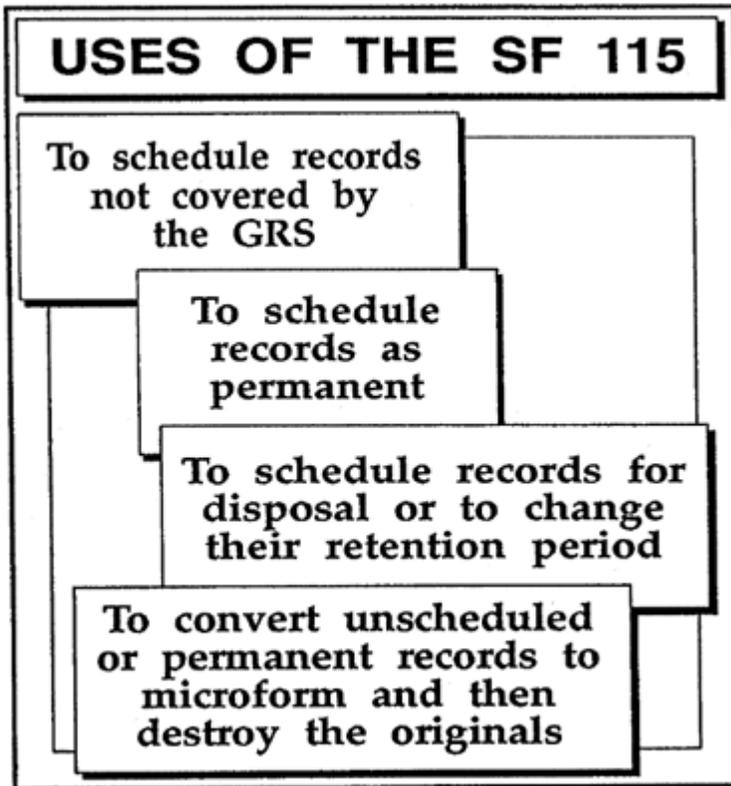


Figure 5-1. Uses of the Standard Form 115

Figure 5-1 emphasizes the basic uses of the SF 115.

If an agency automates its recordkeeping system, an SF 115 is required for disposition authority unless the resulting electronic records are already disposable under the GRS.

The agency should submit two copies of the SF 115 to NARA and retain one copy for its own use. Blank SF 115's may be obtained from GSA supply depots and stores, and blank SF 115A's (continuation sheets) from NARA. The SF 115 may be used either as the first page of a schedule or, in effect, as a cover sheet. When using the form as a cover sheet, the agency attaches it to a printed or processed copy of the draft schedule, arranged as it will be when incorporated into the agency's records disposition manual.

Figure 5-2a. Standard Form (SF) 115

REQUEST FOR RECORDS DISPOSITION AUTHORITY		JOB NUMBER	
To: NATIONAL ARCHIVES & RECORDS ADMINISTRATION 8601 ADELPHI ROAD COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740-6001		Date received	
1. FROM (Agency or establishment)		NOTIFICATION TO AGENCY	
2. MAJOR SUBDIVISION		In accordance with the provisions of 44 U.S.C. 3303a, the disposition request, including amendments, is approved except for items that may be marked "disposition not approved" or "withdrawn" in column 10.	
3. MINOR SUBDIVISION			
4. NAME OF PERSON WITH WHOM TO CONFER	4. TELEPHONE NUMBER	DATE	ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES
<p>5. AGENCY CERTIFICATION I hereby certify that I am authorized to act for this agency in matters pertaining to the disposition of its records and that the records proposed for disposal on the attached _____ page(s) are not needed now for the business for this agency or will not be needed after the retention periods specified; and that written concurrence from the General Accounting Office, under the provisions of Title 8 of the GAO Manual for Guidance of Federal Agencies,</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> is not required <input type="checkbox"/> is attached; or <input type="checkbox"/> has been requested. </p>			
DATE	SIGNATURE OF AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE		TITLE
7. ITEM NO.	8. DESCRIPTION OF ITEM AND PROPOSED DISPOSITION	9. GRS OR SUPERSEDED JOB CITATION	10. ACTION TAKEN (NARA USE ONLY)
	See attached sheets		

Specific Instructions

The following is a list of the numbered entries on the SF 115, along with instructions and comments. (See [figure 5-2](#).)

- **ENTRIES 1, 2, AND 3:** Under entry 1, give the name of the organization submitting the form. The organization may be an executive branch department or independent agency, a legislative branch agency, or the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts for the judicial branch. Under entries 2 and 3, show the major and minor organizational subdivisions that create or maintain the records described on the form. If the organization is not the same one that originally accumulated the records, explain this under entry 8. If more than one subdivision maintains the records, specify the various office names under entry 8 of the form.

If the agency's records schedule is arranged organizationally, list as the subdivisions the organizational units with custody of the records. Examples:

Entry 1: Department of Commerce

Entry 2: Bureau of the Census

Entry 3: Geography Division

Entry 1: Department of Agriculture

Entry 2: Soil Conservation Service

Entry 3: Technical Staff

The schedule's coverage may not be so specific as to permit identifying under entry 3 the name of the minor organizational unit having custody of the records (e.g., Geography Division). If so, it may be possible to identify the organizational level of the offices with custody of the records (e.g., all field units or all state offices). If the current custodial unit did not originally accumulate the records, explain this under entry 8.

If the agency's records schedule is arranged functionally, it is unnecessary to list the major and minor subdivisions under entries 2 and 3, provided that offices with custody of proposed permanent records are identified under entry 8, whenever possible.

- **ENTRIES 4 AND 5:** Show the name and phone number of the person to contact about the records. This may be the records officer or the records custodian.
- **ENTRY 6:** Show the agency representative's certification on the two copies submitted to NARA. Both copies must contain the signature (with at least one being original), date of signature, and title of the agency official authorized to certify that the proposed retention periods meet agency needs. After indicating the number of any schedule pages attached to the SF 115, the official must certify that the General Accounting Office's (GAO's) written concurrence, if required, is attached to the SF 115 or has been requested. One box under entry 6 must be checked. If no box is checked, NARA will return the form to the agency without action.
- **ENTRY 7:** Number schedule items in sequence (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4). Subitems, if any, may be numbered consecutively (e.g., 1a, 1b, 1c).
- **ENTRY 8:** This is the heart of the SF 115 because it contains descriptions of each item (i.e., each record series or part of an information system), along with its proposed disposition. Under this entry include centered headings to indicate the office of origin if all records described on the form are not those of the same office or if they are records created by another office or agency. Describe the records clearly, including those on nonpaper media. For more guidance on describing records, refer to later sections of this chapter and to the instructions on the back of the SF 115.
- **ENTRY 9:** Indicate for each item or subitem the General Records Schedule and item numbers, the previous NARA disposition job and item numbers, and the agency directive or manual and item numbers, whichever may be applicable. Leave entry 9 blank only if the records are being scheduled for the first time. If continuation sheets are used, provide the required citations in a format acceptable to NARA.
- **ENTRY 10:** Leave this entry blank. It is for NARA's use.

NARA uses the space in the upper right corner for registering the request and notifying the agency of final action. In the box marked "Job No.," NARA assigns a transaction number to the request. For example, in N1-217-93-1, the symbol "N1" represents NARA and an internal classification number, the number "217" the record group number, "93" the fiscal year, and "1" the first SF 115 submitted for that record group during that year.

The box marked "Notification to Agency" contains a statement of approval, disapproval, or withdrawal.

Description and Added Information

Describing records properly on the SF 115 makes it easier to determine their disposition. Furnishing additional information can speed NARA's approval of the SF 115. Adequate, clear, and accurate descriptions aid in implementing an approved schedule .

Importance of Describing Records Properly

It is important to describe clearly and accurately each record series or each part of an information system listed on the SF 115. This task is much easier if the agency has properly inventoried its record holdings. (See [Chapter II](#).) The following guidelines are useful in describing series or systems under entry 8 of the SF 115:

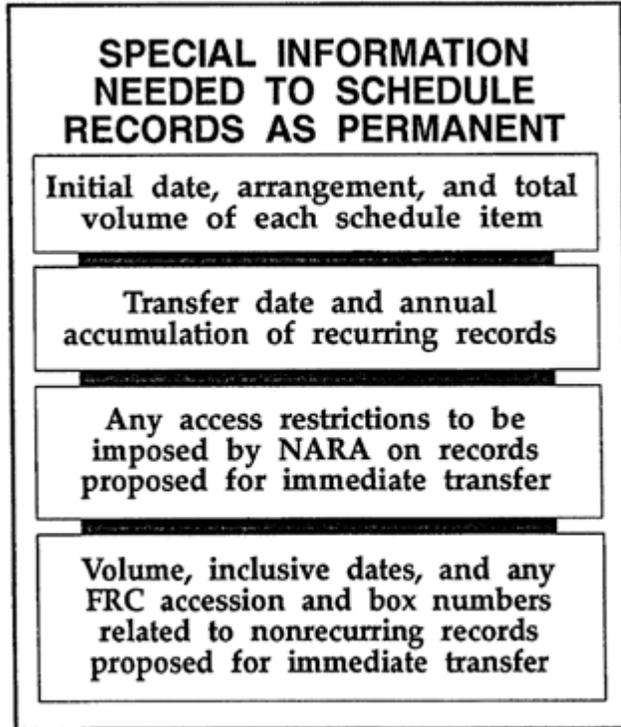
- Describe and title a series or system by the subject or function to which it relates.
- Consider using a single schedule item to cover several closely related temporary series if the records will have the same retention period. If not, then subdivide the schedule item.
- In scheduling the records in an electronic information system, describe all input records (source documents), all information recorded on electronic media, all output records, the documentation associated with the system, and any related indexes. Propose a specific retention period for each of these.
- Identify each potentially permanent series as a separate schedule item.
- Elaborate on any sampling criteria and procedures for selecting files within a series for permanent retention.
- Identify reports as statistical or narrative and indicate their frequency.
- Describe correspondence files more precisely as "program subject," "reading," or the like.
- Instead of form numbers alone, use "such as" before the form number or use "forms relating to." Otherwise, changing form numbers can void disposition authorizations.
- Consider ending a long description with words such as "related records" or "equivalent forms" if appropriate, provided the preceding description is adequate.

Need for Additional Information

Besides describing each item, agency records managers should include additional information to help in the appraisal process. They should assess the value of the records, describe the functions reflected in them, indicate any duplication of content, and document the relationship between that content and information maintained elsewhere in the agency. They should also indicate if the series is a Privacy Act system of records. Above all, they need to provide on, or with, the SF 115 the following information about permanent records:

- The initial date, arrangement, and total volume of each schedule item proposed as permanent.
- In functional schedules, the current organizational location of each series and system.
- The transfer date and annual accumulation of recurring records proposed as permanent.
- Any access restrictions consistent with the Freedom of Information Act that are to be imposed by NARA on records proposed for immediate transfer. Such restrictions include security-classified information.

Finally, if nonrecurring records are proposed on an SF 115 for immediate destruction or for immediate transfer to the National Archives, it is necessary to indicate both their volume and inclusive dates, along with any applicable NARA records center accession and box numbers.



**Figure 5-3. Information Needed for Permanent
Records**

Electronic, Audiovisual, and Other Special Records

Introduction

Special records are records maintained separately from regular paper records because their physical form or characteristics require unusual care or because they have nonstandard sizes. They include electronic, audiovisual, microform, cartographic and remote-sensing imagery, architectural and engineering, printed, and card records. Description of these records must be accurate and complete, especially for records proposed as permanent. Before submitting an SF 115 to cover such records, agencies should make sure that the records are not already scheduled appropriately by the GRS. If they are, an SF 115 is unnecessary. If not, agencies should take the steps needed to schedule the records, including describing on the SF 115 each record series or each part of an information system.

Creation, maintenance, and disposition requirements for special records are prescribed by NARA in [36 CFR 1222 through 1234](#). Particularly important are the requirements for the maintenance and prompt transfer to the National Archives of permanent special records. Transfer instructions are discussed later in this chapter.

Special care should be taken to schedule electronic, audiovisual, and other special records maintained for the agency by contractors. The contract should clearly state the Government's ownership of such records, and the agency must take physical possession of the records if they are needed by the Government. (See [36 CFR 1222](#).)

More detailed guidance is contained in the NARA publications, specifically [Managing Audiovisual Records](#) and [Managing Cartographic and Architectural Records](#).

Electronic Records

Electronic records are records stored in a form that only a computer can process. The systems containing such records must be designed so that adequate maintenance and disposition procedures are in place from the start. Some electronic records are scheduled for disposal under authorities prescribed by the General Records Schedule. An SF 115 is required for all other electronic records, including those requiring retention periods differing from the GRS standards. Agencies should schedule these records in the context of entire information systems, along with appropriate documentation and related indexes, and provide the necessary information elements as described in [Chapter III](#) under the information system inventory heading.

In scheduling an information system, it is important to describe each of the following:

- All input records, or source documents.
- All information recorded on electronic media.
- All output records.
- The documentation associated with the system.
- Any related indexes.

Sometimes it is necessary to describe each of these as separate items. Otherwise two or more of these may be described together under one schedule item, provided they have the same proposed retention period. The records manager should consult with the NARA appraisal archivist in considering what approach to take in scheduling a particular information system.

The records manager should work with the information system manager and the information technology manager to schedule and otherwise manage electronic records. The information system manager, also called the program manager, oversees the creation and use of records in an information system. The information technology manager, also called the ADP manager, oversees the purchase and technical operation of an information system.

The recorded information associated with many systems should be proposed as temporary. The master files and appropriate documentation and indexes associated with some systems, however, may be permanent. Although it is impossible to compile a comprehensive list, these examples suggest the variety of potentially permanent electronic records:

- Electronic records replacing paper or microform records, such as reports and indexes, already scheduled as permanent on nonelectronic media.
- Automated indexes to permanent records.
- Unique and important scientific and technical data resulting from observations of natural events or phenomena or from controlled laboratory or field experiments.
- Management data having Government-wide coverage or significance.
- Socioeconomic data on topics such as trade, education, health, or behavior.
- Natural resources data related to land, water, minerals, or wildlife.
- Data documenting military or civilian operations during times of war, civil emergency, or natural disaster.
- Political or judicial data related to such topics as elections, special investigations, or court proceedings.
- Digital cartographic data used to map the earth's surface and atmosphere, other planets, and planetary satellites.
- Digital architectural and engineering data used to plan and construct selected buildings or other structures, complete major public works projects, and produce significant weapons and machines.
- National security and international relations data documenting such activities as strategic or foreign policy assessments, intelligence collection, foreign public opinion, or international negotiations.

Audiovisual Records

Audiovisual records are records in pictorial or aural form. They include still and motion pictures; graphic materials, such as posters and original art; audio and video recordings; and combinations of media, such as slide-tape productions. It is important to identify and describe separately each series of these records and to avoid combining them into one item, such as all photographs or all motion pictures. In describing audiovisual records, agencies should follow these guidelines:

- Identify the working title of the series, and indicate the physical form of the records: Motion pictures, still pictures, posters or original art, audio recordings, video recordings, or slide-tape productions.
- Specify the kind of copy. For motion pictures, indicate black-and-white or color, sound or silent, the millimeter size, edited or unedited, and whether the copies are original negatives, master positives, with separate sound tracks, and/or projection prints. For still photographs, indicate black-and-white or color, the size and type of negatives (glass, nitrate, or acetate), and the availability of duplicate negatives, transparencies, or paper prints. For audio and video recordings, indicate disks (vinyl, compact disk, or laser) or tapes, the type of tape (reel-to-reel or cassette), and the availability of original, master, or use copies.
- Describe the subject content, arrangement, and uses of the records.
- Show the volume by giving both the cubic footage and an item count, including the number of reels for motion picture films, the number of negatives and positives for still photographs, and the number of disks or tapes for audio and video recordings.
- For potentially permanent series, specify the physical location of all copies and give the inclusive dates.
- Identify all related records, especially production files and finding aids. Production files include scripts, contracts and releases. Finding aids include indexes, catalogs, shelf lists, log books, caption sheets, and shotlists.

Microform Records

Microform records are records on any form containing greatly reduced images, normally on microfilm. If an agency plans to convert to microfilm paper records or other originals that are unscheduled or scheduled as permanent, it must submit an SF 115 requesting

authority to destroy the originals (source documents). In some instances NARA may not approve the destruction of the original records because of their intrinsic value or because of special access problems or other considerations.

In requesting authority to destroy the originals, the agency must certify on the SF 115 that the microfilming will meet the standards set forth in [36 CFR 1230](#). That regulation also contains standards for storing and inspecting such microform records and taking proper steps for their use and disposition. Care should be taken to schedule related indexes along with the microform records, and to ensure their transfer to the National Archives if they are approved for permanent retention.

If NARA has already approved the originals for destruction, an SF 115 is not required to convert the records to microform. Agencies are authorized to apply the approved retention period for such temporary records to the microform. They may also destroy these disposable originals immediately after verifying the microform for quality and completeness, unless the originals are still required for legal purposes. NARA's regulations (36 CFR 1230) cover both temporary and permanent microform records.

Cartographic, Remote-Sensing Imagery, and Related Records

Cartographic records are graphic representations drawn to scale of selected features of the earth's surface and atmosphere and of other planets and planetary satellites. They include maps, charts, photomaps, atlases, cartograms, globes, relief models, and related records, such as field survey notes, map history case files, and finding aids. Also included are digital cartographic records, such as geographic information system records, which should be managed like other electronic records.

Remote-sensing imagery records are aerial photographs and other visual images of the surface of the earth and other planets taken from airborne or spaceborne vehicles to evaluate, measure, or map the cultural and/or physical features of the landscape. They also include related indexes.

The following are some guidelines for scheduling such records on an SF 115:

- Identify separate series of nondigital cartographic and remote-sensing imagery records and describe each series as a single schedule item. (Treat digital cartographic and remote-sensing imagery records as electronic records.)
- Describe the subject matter, arrangement, and uses of each record series.

- Provide any related file headings, numbers, or descriptive symbols for each series.
- Provide titles or designations for the group of records.
- State the origin of the records if they were not produced by the agency submitting the SF 115.
- Show the physical form of the records, whether manuscript, annotated, or photoprocessed and whether filed, rolled, or in some other form.
- Provide the approximate number of maps and the cubic footage.
- Give inclusive dates.
- Describe related indexes and other finding aids.

Architectural, Engineering, and Related Records

Architectural records are drawings and related records depicting the proposed and actual construction of stationary structures such as buildings, bridges, and monuments. Engineering records are drawings and related records depicting the planning and construction of such objects as roads, canals, ships, planes, weapons, and machines. They include design and construction drawings and related records. Also included are computer records relating to architecture or engineering, which should be managed like other electronic records.

The following are some guidelines for scheduling such records on an SF 115:

- Identify separate series of nondigital architectural and engineering records and describe each series as a single schedule item. (Treat digital architectural and engineering records as electronic records.)
- Provide file headings or symbols, if any.
- Describe the subject matter, arrangement, and uses of the records.
- State whether tracings or other types of reproductions are included.
- Show the size of the records.
- Describe origin of the plans, if they were not produced by the agency.
- Provide the approximate number of architectural or engineering drawings and the cubic footage.
- Give inclusive dates.
- Describe related indexes and other finding aids.

Printed Records

Printed records are published materials (such as books, maps, and posters) or serial issuances (such as directives and press releases) produced by or for a particular agency, in contrast to extra copies kept in stock or distributed inside or outside that agency. Each issuing office should maintain, as potentially permanent records, a "record set" of each series of its publications. The following are guidelines for scheduling printed records on an SF 115:

- Identify the office(s) responsible for maintaining the record sets of publications created by or for the agency.
- List under separate schedule items the record sets of printed records published by the Government Printing Office (GPO) and those published by other sources.
- Distinguish between the publication record sets and extra copies of the publication.
- Describe and schedule related finding aids along with the printed records.

Card Records

Finally, in managing card records, an agency should follow these guidelines:

- Because of their nonstandard size, maintain paper-based cards separately from regular paper records.
- Except for their size, describe paper-based cards in the same way as regular paper records.
- Note that paper-based cards are sometimes finding aids to related records and often have the same disposition as that of the related records.
- Treat microform-based cards as microform records and digital cards as electronic records.

Other Considerations in Completing an SF 115

In completing an SF 115, agencies should follow the general instructions on scheduling records, especially the guidance on drafting disposition instructions. In addition, they should consider record cutoffs and transfers and the extent and limits of the schedule's coverage.

Importance of Instructions on Record Cutoffs and Transfers

SF 115's should include instructions for cutting off records and, if appropriate, for transferring them to agency holding areas or records centers for temporary storage and to the National Archives for archival preservation. Agencies may issue general instructions applicable to all their records with a particular retention period, incorporate specific instructions into each schedule item, or issue general instructions applicable except where unique cutoff and transfer instructions are included in individual schedule items. [Figure 4-2](#) and [figure 4-3](#) in chapter IV show examples of disposition instructions for permanent and temporary records.

- **Record cutoffs.** All record series need to be cut off, or broken, before the approved disposition can be applied. In other words, the retention period normally does not start until the records have been cut off. Each agency should provide guidance to users on when to cut off records having a particular retention period. Cutoffs involve ending the old files and starting new ones at regular intervals. Unless unusual volume or other circumstances create a need for different cutoffs, the agency should consider following the guidelines given in [figure 5-4](#). Series of nonrecord materials, such as technical reference files, do not need to be cut off but should be purged periodically of material no longer needed.
- **Transfers.** Some noncurrent agency records are destroyed in current office space because their high reference activity or short retention periods make transfer unnecessary or inappropriate. But semicurrent records with longer retention periods and low reference activity are suitable for transfer to storage facilities for temporary storage. Still other records are scheduled for transfer to the National Archives for permanent retention, either directly from the agency or from a storage facility. The timing of the transfer to the National Archives should normally be within 30 years for paper records, within 5-10 years for audiovisual or microform records, and as soon as electronic records become inactive or the agency cannot meet maintenance requirements for them.

Agencies should provide instructions on all such transfers. For information on transferring records to NARA records centers, they should consult publications of the records centers and NARA regulations and bulletins. For information on transferring

records to the National Archives, they need to consult NARA [regulations](#) and [bulletins](#) along with [Chapter VI](#) of this handbook.

In short, records personnel need to know when and how to transfer records out of the office. The records manual is the place to give such instructions, both in the general introduction and, if appropriate, under specific schedule items. If it is necessary for an agency to change transfer instructions contained in an approved SF115, a new SF 115 is not required. Instead the agency should address a letter of request to the appropriate NARA office.

Figure 5-4. General Instructions for Record Cutoffs

For records with retention periods of less than 1 year:

Cut off at an interval equal to the retention period.

- For example, if a record series has a 1-month retention period, cut the file off at the end of each month and then apply the retention period (that is, hold the file 1 more month before destroying.)

For records with retention periods of 1 year or more:

Cut off at the end of each fiscal (or calendar) year.

- For example, if the disposition for a correspondence file is "destroy when 3 years old", then destroy it 3 years after the annual cutoff.

For records with retention periods based on an event or action:

Cut off on the date the event occurs or the action is completed and then apply the retention period.

- For example, if the disposition for case working papers is "destroy when related case file is closed," then cut off and destroy the working papers when closing the related file.

For records with retention periods based on a specified time period after an event or action:

Place in an inactive file on the date the event occurs or the action is completed and cut off the inactive file at the end of each fiscal (or calendar) year; then apply the retention period.

- For example, if the disposition for a case file is "destroy 6 years after case is closed," then destroy 6 years after the annual cutoff along with other case files closed during that year.

Extent and Limits of a Schedule's Coverage

One SF 115 can cover the program records of an entire agency or only part of it, or else it can cover the records of one or more functional areas within the agency. Thus, except for records covered appropriately by the GRS, an SF115 may include all agency records, central office records only, field office records only, or one organizational unit's records only. But an agency must schedule all of its records regardless of the number of SF 115's generated.

Certain limits apply to the schedule's coverage. As already indicated, if the NARA-approved disposition authorities specify an organizational component as creator or custodian of the records, the same agency may apply such authorities to the same records after internal reorganization but only if the nature, content, and functional importance of the records remain the same.

One department or independent agency must not apply disposition authorities approved for another. If interagency reorganization reassigns functions to an existing department or agency, the gaining organization may not use the disposition authorities approved for the transferring one. Instead it needs to submit an SF 115 to NARA within 1 year of the interagency reorganization. If a new department or a new independent agency assumes functions from an existing one, it has 2 years to schedule such records and all its other records by applying the GRS to eligible records and submitting an SF 115 to NARA to cover the remainder.

Unless the schedule specifies otherwise, disposition authorities apply retroactively to all existing records described in the schedule. Such records include those previously acquired by transfer of function within or between agencies and then scheduled by the receiving organization, with the usual proviso that the nature, content, and functional importance of the record series or system must remain the same.

Arranging a Records Schedule

Before the draft schedule has been assembled and cleared, its arrangement should already have been decided on. The schedule is usually arranged primarily by organization or function.

Organizational Arrangement

This is a hierarchical listing arranged by name of organizational unit (by each bureau or other major unit and thereunder by its subordinate units). It shows as separate items the record series and systems maintained by each major and subordinate unit. To prevent confusion, agencies need to update schedules promptly after internal reorganization either by amending them when the changes do not affect the nature, content, and functional importance of the records or by submitting an SF 115 when they do. (See [figure 5-5](#).)

Figure 5-5. Sample of an Organizational Schedule

Office of the Director and Deputy Director

Voice Of America (VOA/M)

1. Directorate Subject Files. Letters, memorandums, telegrams, Radio Marti Program Fact Sheets, weekly reports to the Director of USIA, other reports, speeches, briefing books, minutes of staff meetings, and other materials relating to the Radio Marti mandate. Arranged by subject-numeric filing system.

PERMANENT. Cut off annually. Transfer to WNRC 5 years after cutoff. Transfer to the National Archives 25 years after cutoff in 5 year blocks.

2. Biographic Files.

- a. Biographies of prominent Cubans, mainly government officials, compiled from interviews by Radio Marti and other USIA personnel and from published sources. Arranged alphabetically.

PERMANENT. Cut off file every 5 years. Transfer to the National Archives when 25 years old or when no longer needed for research, whichever is sooner.

- b. Tapes of interviews used as sources for biographies.

TEMPORARY. Destroy when no longer needed.

Functional Arrangement

A functional schedule combines series or systems serving the same purpose. Records described in the schedule items are covered regardless of where they are created and maintained. For example, many of the General Records Schedules are arranged by function. A functional approach may be suitable for a number of offices performing the same work. For permanent records, however, the organizational location should be given in the schedule for all permanent records series and systems. (See [figure 5-6](#).)

Figure 5-6. Sample of a Functional Schedule

General Records Schedule No. 10 (Excerpt)
Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Operation Records

Item Number and Description of Records	Authorized Disposition
1. Motor Vehicle Correspondence Files. Correspondence in the operating unit responsible for maintenance and operation of motor vehicles not otherwise covered in this schedule.	Destroy when 2 years old.
2. Motor Vehicle Operating and Maintenance Files. a. Operating records including those relating to gas and oil consumption, dispatching, and scheduling.	Destroy when 3 months old.
b. Maintenance records, including those relating to service and repair.	Destroy when 1 year old.
3. Motor Vehicle Cost Files. Motor vehicle ledger and work sheets providing cost and expense data.	Destroy 3 years after discontinuance of ledger or date of work sheet.
4. Motor Vehicle Report Files. Reports on motor vehicles (other than accident, operating, and	Destroy 3 years after date of

<p>maintenance reports), including SF82, Agency Report of Motor Vehicle Data, and SF82-D, Agency Report of Sedan Data.</p>	<p>report.</p>
<p>5. Motor Vehicle Accident Files. Records relating to motor vehicle accidents, maintained by transportation offices, including SF 91, Operator's Report of Motor Vehicle Accident; SF 91A, Investigation Report of Motor Vehicle Accident; and SF 94, Statement of Witness.</p>	<p>Destroy 6 years after case is closed.</p>
<p>6. Motor Vehicle Release Files. Records relating to transfer, sale, donation, or exchange of vehicles, including SF 97A, Agency Record Copy of U.S. Government Certificate of Release of Motor Vehicle.</p>	<p>Destroy 4 years after vehicle leaves agency custody.</p>
<p>7. Motor Vehicle Operator Files. Records relating to individual employee operations of Government-owned vehicles, including driver tests, authorization to use, safe driving awards, and related correspondence.</p>	<p>Destroy 3 years after separation of employees or 3 years after rescission of authorization to operate Government-owned vehicle, whichever is sooner.</p>

Other Arrangement Patterns

Some agencies may find it desirable to make their schedule's arrangement partly organizational and partly functional. In addition, the schedule's basic arrangement can be supplemented with other arrangement patterns, such as:

- **By Files Commonly Held Within an Agency.** This is a listing of records and nonrecord materials commonly held by most or all offices. This approach avoids repeating the same items throughout the schedule. Such a schedule, entitled "Files Common to Most or All Offices" (see, for example, [GRS 23](#)), may include:
 - Nonrecord materials, such as extra copies of publications and reference copies of directives.

- Certain temporary program records, such as general correspondence files and case files documenting program functions.
- Office administrative files, which relate to the internal housekeeping activities of an office, such as staffing, supplies, and space, rather than the functions for which the office exists.
- **By Coordination With the Filing System.** The agency may combine its comprehensive schedule with its files manual to make a single document. Retention periods are prescribed for each entry, whether it is subject-numeric, numeric only, or otherwise. A disposition-filing system arrangement requires that:
 - Case files are clearly identified and scheduled. Most agency records are case files.
 - All offices use the prescribed filing system. Those not using the system will find application of the schedule difficult, if not impossible.
 - Identical retention periods apply to small groups of records whenever possible. Otherwise, the disposition process can become too costly.

For example, in the Modern Army Recordkeeping System (MARKS), the disposition plan determines the filing system. Folders or other file units are identified by the schedule's "file numbers," which correspond to the Army's system of regulations. They are then arranged in the same order as the schedule items. (See [figure 5-7](#).)

Figure 5-7. Combining the Schedule and the Filing System

350

General training correspondence files

Description and Disposition:

- a. *General correspondence relating to training that cannot logically be filed with the detailed records listed below: Destroy after 2 years.*
- b. *Documents relating to training that are received for information only, on which no action is required: Destroy after 1 year.*

350a

Unit-level individual training files

Rescinded. Use file number 350-37a.

350-1a**Training inspections**

Documents related to scheduled training and training inspections. Included are training schedules, training inspection reports, and related information.

Disposition:

HQDA, major Army commands, and major subordinate commands: Destroy after 2 years.

Other offices: Destroy after 1 year.

350-1b**Physical fitness evaluation scorecards**

Documents used to monitor the physical fitness of individual soldiers.

Disposition:

Destroy on retirement, separation, death, or transfer of information to new card.

350-1c**Training facility requirements**

Documents related to deciding needs for training facilities. Included are requirements for acquiring, activating, retaining, using, expanding, consolidating, deactivating, and disposing of facilities. Also included are studies, justifications, maps, and similar information.

Disposition:

Office performing Army-wide responsibility: Destroy after 10 years.

Other offices: Destroy after 5 years.

Assembling a Draft Records Schedule

After the schedule's arrangement has been determined but before the SF 115 is cleared and approved, it is often useful to combine into one draft document the components of the agency's proposed comprehensive records schedule or of the schedule being prepared for records relating to a particular function or organizational unit. These components are:

- The records disposition authorities proposed in the SF 115, along with any SF 115 authorities approved earlier that require no substantive change in their descriptions and no change in their retention periods. One-time authorities are normally excluded from this draft document and later from the published version of the agency's schedule. To these disposition authorities it is usually necessary to add cutoff instructions and, if appropriate, transfer instructions.
- The applicable records disposition authorities already approved in the GRS, especially if they are to be dispersed item by item throughout the schedule. For GRS items, it is usually necessary to add specific retention periods, cutoff instructions and, if appropriate, instructions for transfer to an agency storage area or a records center.
- The disposition instructions proposed for the agency's nonrecord materials.

Assembling this draft document will make it easier to issue the schedule once the agency has cleared it and obtained NARA's approval of SF 115 items.

Obtaining Internal Clearances and GAO's Approval

After completing a draft records schedule and before submitting the SF 115 to NARA, the records officer needs to obtain clearances from agency program offices and to request GAO's approval, if necessary.

Internal Clearances

To obtain internal clearances, the records officer should send the completed draft schedule to liaisons in program offices for circulation and comment. Each office should receive only those parts of the schedule relating to its records. Program officials should be asked if:

- All records are covered.
- Descriptions are clear.
- Retention periods are adequate.
- Cutoff and transfer instructions are clear.
- Nonrecord materials are covered.

The records officer should also ask for comments on the entire schedule from the agency's historian and, especially for records series or systems that involve legal rights,

from the agency's legal office. After all comments are received, any differences should be resolved with program officials or files custodians. These internal clearances are necessary to avoid having to recall the SF 115 after it has been sent for approval or having to submit a new SF 115 to revise an inappropriate disposition.

GAO's Approval

The GAO requires that agencies obtain its written approval for SF 115 items falling under three general categories:

- **Administrative Records Proposed for Retention Periods Shorter Than Those Prescribed by GRS 2 Through GRS 10.** GAO has already approved, when necessary, the retention periods of records covered by the GRS. Therefore agencies should not request GAO's approval of retention periods meeting or exceeding GRS standards. They must, however, obtain GAO's written approval when proposing retention periods shorter than those prescribed by the following:
 - [GRS 2](#), Payrolling and Pay Administration Records
 - [GRS 3](#), Procurement, Supply, and Grant Records
 - [GRS 4](#), Property Disposal Records
 - [GRS 5](#), Budget Preparation, Presentation, and Apportionment Records
 - [GRS 6](#), Accountable Officers' Accounts Records
 - [GRS 7](#), Expenditure Accounting Records
 - [GRS 8](#), Stores, Plant, and Cost Accounting Records
 - [GRS 9](#), Travel and Transportation Records
 - [GRS 10](#), Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Operation Records

Agencies should indicate the particular General Records Schedule and item number in requesting GAO approval of a retention period shorter than that found in the GRS.

- **All Program Records Having a Proposed Retention Period of Less Than 3 Years.** GAO requires the agency to justify fully any such retention period. It neither approves nor disapproves proposed retention periods for program records held 3 years or longer, although it recommends that their retention periods be as short as practicable.

- **Records Relating to Claims or Demands by or Against the Government.**

Excluded from this category are any such records covered by the GRS, provided that the proposed retention period is not shorter than that prescribed by the GRS.

If GAO's approval is necessary, the agency must request it when submitting an SF 115 to NARA. While GAO's approval is pending, NARA processes the SF 115 but withholds approval until it receives GAO's written concurrence. Title 8 of the "GAO Policy and Procedures Manual for Guidance of Federal Agencies" contains further details on GAO requirements and related program information.

Submitting an SF 115 for NARA's Approval

Introduction

Agencies need to submit an SF 115 to NARA to request disposition authority for all records not scheduled by the GRS. (See [figure 5-8](#) for an example of a completed and approved SF 115.) To avoid unnecessary delays, they should consult with NARA appraisers beforehand and understand what NARA looks for in reviewing an SF 115 and what actions it may take.

Figure 5-8. Completed and Approved Standard Form (SF) 115

REQUEST FOR RECORDS DISPOSITION AUTHORITY <i>(See instructions on reverse)</i>		LEAVE BLANK (NARA use only)	
10 NATIONAL ARCHIVES and RECORDS ADMINISTRATION (NIR) WASHINGTON, DC 20408		JOB NUMBER <i>N1-60-92-1</i>	DATE RECEIVED <i>10/28/91</i>
1. FROM (Agency or establishment) <i>Department of Justice</i>		NOTIFICATION TO AGENCY	
2. MAJOR SUBDIVISION <i>Environment and Natural Resources Division</i>		In accordance with the provisions of 44 U.S.C. 3303a the disposition request, including amendments, is approved except for items that may be marked "disposition not approved" or "withdrawn" in column 10.	
3. MINOR SUBDIVISION		DATE <i>10/3/92</i>	ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES <i>[Signature]</i>
4. NAME OF PERSON WITH WHOM TO CONFER <i>Ann Sloan</i>	5. TELEPHONE <i>514-3411</i>		
6. AGENCY CERTIFICATION I hereby certify that I am authorized to act for this agency in matters pertaining to the disposition of its records and that the records proposed for disposal on the attached _____ page(s) are not now needed for the business of this agency or will not be needed after the retention periods specified; and that written concurrence from the General Accounting Office, under the provisions of Title 8 of the GAO Manual for Guidance of Federal Agencies. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> is not required; <input type="checkbox"/> is attached; or <input type="checkbox"/> has been requested.			
DATE <i>10-24-91</i>	SIGNATURE OF AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE <i>[Signature]</i> <i>Bernard W. Berglund</i>	TITLE <i>Records Officer Systems Policy Staff Justice Management Division</i>	
7. ITEM NO.	8. DESCRIPTION OF ITEM AND PROPOSED DISPOSITION	9. GRS OR SUPERSEDED JOB CITATION	10. ACTION TAKEN (NARA USE ONLY)
1.	Duplex-numeric Classification 90-1-23, Actions Against the United States Involving Real Property. Disposition: Transfer to WNRC one year after close of case. Destroy 20 years after close of case.	N1-60-88-12, Item 1B(23)	
<i>Copies sent to NN-W, NNT, NCF 4/15/92</i>			
115-109 NSN 7540-00-834-4064 PREVIOUS EDITION NOT USABLE		STANDARD FORM 115 (REV. 3-91) Prescribed by NARA 36 CFR 1226	

Figure 5-8. Completed and Approved Standard Form 115

NARA's Review of the SF 115

When NARA receives an SF 115, it determines whether the SF 115 should be rejected, treated as a draft, or formally registered. If rejected, the SF 115 is returned to the agency with a letter of explanation. If NARA treats the SF115 as a draft or a formally registered job, it so notifies the agency. In the process, before appraising the records, NARA normally examines the completed SF 115 for features such as the following:

- Contact person's name and telephone number.
- Centered headings if the records of more than one subdivision are described.
- Indication of any differences between the custodial agency and the agency of origin.
- Agency representative's signature, with date, on NARA's two copies of the form. At least one copy must have an original signature.
- Indication whether GAO concurrence is attached, has been requested, or is unnecessary.
- Sequential numbering of all pages and schedule items.
- Clear description of each item.
- Clear retention period for each item.
- Instructions, where appropriate, for cutting off and transferring records.
- Citation, if appropriate, of the most recent GRS or SF 115 item covering the records. (The cited item will be superseded if NARA approves the new disposition request.)
- Citation of any Privacy Act restrictions on records proposed for eventual destruction.
- Exclusion from the SF 115 of any items unchanged from previously approved dispositions, including those items involving only editorial changes or changes in transfer instructions.
- Written justification of any proposed exceptions to GRS disposition standards.
- Inclusion of a review cycle in the disposition instructions for contingent temporary records to be retired to a records center.
- Arrangement and total volume of each schedule item proposed as permanent.

- Transfer date and annual accumulation of recurring records proposed as permanent.
- Volume and inclusive dates and, if applicable, NARA records center accession and box numbers for all nonrecurring records proposed for immediate destruction or for immediate transfer to the National Archives.
- Any access restrictions on nonrecurring records proposed as permanent and ready for immediate transfer to the National Archives, including restrictions on classified information.
- Certification of compliance with [36 CFR 1230](#) if proposing to convert permanent or unscheduled originals to microform records and then to destroy the originals.
- Citation, whenever applicable, of statutes or regulations governing records retention and also justification of any longer retention periods.

NARA Actions

In processing the SF 115, NARA takes one or more of the following actions:

- **Consultation and Examination.** After reviewing the SF 115 for completeness, NARA appraisers may need to consult with agency officials and either see samples of the records or examine them at the agency or a records center.
- **Publication of Disposal Notices in the Federal Register.** According to Federal law (44 U.S.C. 3303a(a)), NARA must publish in the Federal Register a notice of agency requests for the disposal (i.e., destruction or donation) of records. If NARA has previously approved disposal of the records covered in an agency request, a notice is published only if the proposed retention period is shorter. The publication of these notices allows interested persons to submit written comments on the records to NARA before disposal is approved or else reapproved with a shorter retention period.
- **Changes in Disposition Requests.** To improve clarity and accuracy, the NARA appraiser may make changes to a completed SF 115 but only with the agency's approval. Minor changes, such as renumbering the items or correcting punctuation or typographical errors, require only the agency's oral approval. Major changes, such as modifying the description or the disposition instructions, require the agency's written approval on the SF 115.

- **Withdrawn Requests.** If both the agency and NARA agree to withdraw an entire SF 115 or individuals items, NARA will mark the job or the items "withdrawn" and request a new SF 115 if the records require scheduling.
- **Disapproved Requests.** If NARA disapproves an entire SF 115, it will return the SF 115 to the agency with a letter requesting appropriate revisions and submission of a new SF 115. Sometimes disagreements or revisions result in a substantial delay in approving an entire schedule. In such instances, NARA stamps the questionable items "disposition not approved" in entry 10 of the SF 115 to the agency with a letter requesting submission of a new SF 115 covering the disapproved items. Normally the agency should submit the new SF 115 within 6 months.
- **Approved Requests.** If NARA approves the request, it sends the agency a copy of the approved SF 115 and, if necessary, a letter outlining any special steps to take in its implementation.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained how to complete an SF 115 covering those records whose dispositions are not prescribed, or appropriately prescribed, by the GRS. The agency also should receive NARA's approval before issuing and applying these SF 115 authorities as part of its comprehensive records schedule. This chapter has also explained how to organize and clear a records schedule and to obtain SF 115 approval from NARA and, if required, from GAO.

Once the schedule has been drafted, organized, cleared internally, and approved externally, the agency is ready to implement the schedule and take steps to keep it current. This process involves issuing the approved schedule as a directive, training employees in its use, and applying it to appropriate documentary materials. It also involves reviewing and, if necessary, updating the schedule as part of a coordinated effort to manage the records disposition program.

VI. Schedule Implementation

- [Introduction](#)
- [Issuing the Schedule](#)
- [Training Employees](#)
- [Applying the Schedule to Permanent Records](#)
- [Applying the Schedule to Temporary Records](#)
- [Reviewing and Updating the Schedule](#)
- [Related Disposition Matters](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

VI. Schedule Implementation

- *Implementing an approved comprehensive records schedule involves issuing it as an agency directive, training appropriate employees, and applying the schedule to agency records.*
- *The agency directive(s) should include not only approved records schedules but also related information about the entire records disposition program.*
- *Effectively applying records schedules depends in large part on the proper training of agency employees.*
- *Permanent records require special care while in agency custody.*
- *Agencies should use Standard Form 258 to transfer permanent records to the National Archives.*
- *Records may be donated only with NARA's approval.*
- *With few exceptions, before transferring records to other agencies, the creating agency needs NARA's approval.*

- *In some circumstances NARA may approve a temporary extension of retention periods or withdraw disposal authority.*
- *Agencies must report to NARA any unauthorized disposition of Federal records.*
- *Records schedules must be reviewed annually and updated whenever necessary.*

Introduction

Each agency should implement its approved comprehensive records schedule by issuing it as a directive, training appropriate employees to use it, and carefully applying its provisions to both permanent and temporary records. The schedule should be reviewed at least annually and updated whenever necessary by following the procedures described in this chapter.

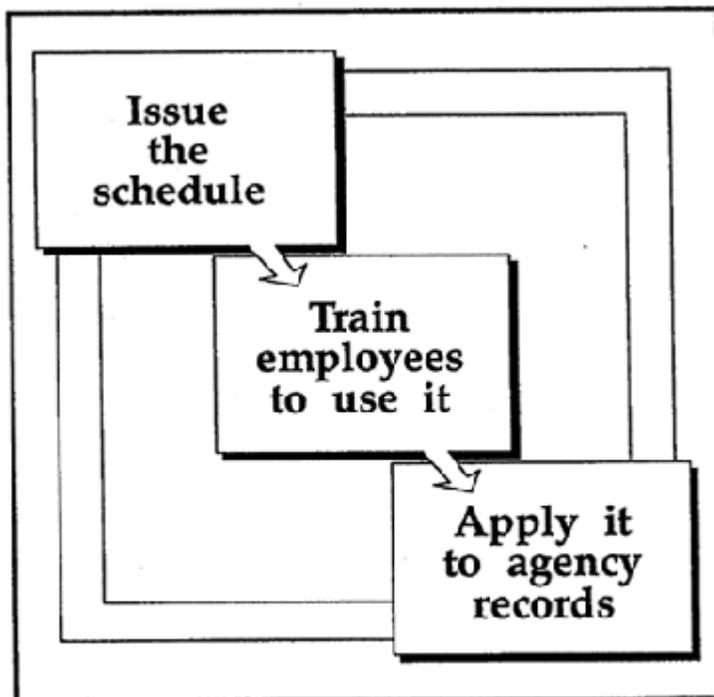


Figure 6-1. Implementing an Agency Records Schedule

Preliminary Steps

Issuing the schedule as a directive indicates its mandatory nature. The published schedule should combine the NARA-approved GRS and SF 115 disposition authorities for

recurring records, along with instructions for retention and disposition of nonrecord materials. It should not contain any one-time authorities covering nonrecurring records. At the time the schedule is issued, it is essential to train those employees responsible for applying the schedule.

Before applying the schedule for the first time to an office's records, the agency should take these steps:

- Review the office's functions.
- Consult a current inventory of the office's records.
- Match the records identified in the inventory with those described in the agency's schedule, and alert the records manager to any unscheduled records.
- Develop a file plan for each office. An office file plan is a document containing the identifying number, title or description, and disposition authority of files held in an office. [Figure 6-2](#) shows a suggested [file plan form](#).

Before the schedule is applied in an office with an established records disposition program and a file plan, it is necessary to check the file plan against the schedule. The file plan should contain up-to-date and accurate disposition authorities and retention periods for all records and nonrecord materials maintained in the office.

Figure 6-2. File Plan

FILE PLAN			Page of
Office (name and symbol)			For FY
Prepared by (files custodian)	Phone No.	Room No.	Date
Reviewed by (supervisor)		Approved by (records manager)	
PLAN ITEM NO.	TITLE OR DESCRIPTION OF SERIES OR SYSTEM	DISPOSITION CITATION (Records Schedule Item Number)	

General Guidelines

Unless the schedule specifies otherwise, disposition authorities apply retroactively to all existing records described in the schedule. Such records include those acquired by transfer of function within or between agencies, as long as there is no change in the nature, content, and functional importance of the record series or system.

In applying the schedule, the agency should take these actions:

- Avoid filing unnecessary materials, such as extra copies in the same series.
- Cut off, or break, files regularly.
- Transfer eligible records to an agency storage facility or a Federal records center.
- Promptly destroy or properly donate temporary records when their retention periods expire.
- Care for permanent records until their timely transfer to the National Archives.

In the process the agency should review the schedule at least annually and update it, whenever necessary, by using new or revised GRS authorities or by submitting an SF 115 to NARA.

Issuing the Schedule

Making the Schedule a Directive

Whether they are derived from the GRS or from an SF 115, NARA-approved records disposition authorities are mandatory. Except for one-time authorities covering nonrecurring records, all disposition authorities should be incorporated into the agency's directives system to ensure proper distribution and application of the schedule. The directive should cite the GRS or SF 115 and item numbers for all schedule items covering records. It should also cite any agency and Privacy Act restrictions for each series or system of records authorized for eventual destruction. Before issuing this directive and related procedural directives, the agency may wish to consult with NARA.

If the agency has scheduled its records one office or one function at a time, it may issue each schedule as approved until all its records and nonrecord materials are covered. All schedules issued should be consolidated into a comprehensive schedule. The schedule, or schedules, should be issued as a directive, reviewed at least annually, and updated whenever necessary. The directive may be published in a looseleaf format to permit easy updating.

Internal distribution of the directive should include at least the following:

- All staff officials.
- All office, bureau, division, and branch heads.

- All custodians of major record holdings, such as central files.
- All records management liaison officers.

Agencies need to send NARA 20 copies of all formally published directives containing schedules and schedule changes. They must also send NARA three copies of any other directive or issuance affecting the agency's records disposition program. (See [36 CFR 1228](#).)

Including Related Program Information

Besides transmitting the schedules, the directive should include detailed information on the agency's records disposition program unless a related program directive already does so. (See [Chapter I](#).) The directive should include the following:

- A statement of the program's objectives.
- Any necessary information from laws and regulations governing records disposition, including citations.
- A description of NARA's oversight responsibilities in records management, particularly records disposition.
- Definitions of relevant terms in a glossary.
- Provisions for proper training of all employees taking part in the agency's records disposition activities.
- Instructions on how to maintain and cut off files.
- A statement that the records schedule authorities must be applied to all relevant agency records on a continuing basis.
- Provisions for keeping records schedules current.
- Procedures for retiring records to, and retrieving them from, agency records centers or holding areas, if applicable, and NARA-operated records centers.
- Instructions on the disposal of temporary records in agency space and guidance on the NARA records center system of disposal notification.
- Instructions for transferring permanent records to the National Archives.
- An indication of the records officer's involvement in developing and monitoring electronic and other recordkeeping systems to ensure proper disposition.
- Provisions for periodic evaluation of the agency's records management program, including records disposition.

Training Employees

When a new or revised comprehensive records schedule is issued, the agency needs to train those employees responsible for applying the schedule and carrying out other aspects of the records disposition program. Such employees include records management staff members (if not already trained), records liaison officers in central and field offices, and files custodians. This is also an ideal time to brief program managers regarding records disposition and other aspects of the records management program.

For general training, resources are available from NARA records centers. Besides multiagency courses, NARA provides customized training to individual agencies on a reimbursable basis. Training opportunities are described on the NARA [records management training](#) web page.

Applying the Schedule to Permanent Records

Permanent records are those determined by NARA to have sufficient historical or other value to warrant continued preservation by the Federal Government, generally as part of the National Archives, unless otherwise agreed to by NARA. Their disposition authority comes from NARA-approved SFs 115. The agency must give special attention to these records and transfer them to the National Archives in accordance with the schedule's instructions and with regulations ([36 CFR 1228](#)) and guidance issued by NARA.

Caring for Permanent Records

Permanent records require special attention and should be scheduled for transfer to the legal custody of the National Archives as soon as the agency no longer needs them for current operations. They should be created on archival-quality media and kept properly and in good order. For example, they should be stored in appropriate containers and facilities and not be intermixed with other permanent or temporary records.

To prevent their loss or destruction, the records officer should keep a current list of permanent records. The list should identify them by schedule item number and show locations, custodians, and any transfer instructions.

If permanent records are no longer needed in current office space but are not yet ready for scheduled transfer to the National Archives, they often can be stored in a records center or else in an agency holding area set aside exclusively for such records. If no such offsite

storage is possible, they should at least be kept separate from the office's temporary records. Besides meeting general requirements for storing records properly, each agency must store its microform, audiovisual, and electronic records under conditions complying with the requirements of [36 CFR 1230, 1232, and 1234](#).

Permanent electronic records, for example, require special care and storage. Necessary steps include controlling temperature and humidity, recopying the information periodically, and testing the readability of an annual sample. Specific requirements are set forth in [36 CFR 1234](#).

Caring for permanent audiovisual records likewise requires special procedures. These include separating them from nonpermanent records; filing separately the master and use copies, such as negatives and prints; using captions or their equivalent for identification purposes; and recording unique identification numbers on every negative jacket or storage container as well as on all corresponding prints or other use copies. Specific requirements are set forth in [36 CFR 1232](#) and explained in the NARA publication [*Managing Audiovisual Records*](#).

If an agency wishes to lend permanent or unscheduled records to a non-Federal user, it must first obtain NARA's written approval by submitting a letter of request that includes the information required by [36 CFR 1228](#). All formally executed loan agreements for such records must have the signature of the Archivist of the United States before their implementation. If the loan request is denied, the Archivist will notify the agency and provide written instructions for the disposition of the records.

Transferring Permanent Records to the National Archives

The agency's records schedule should contain instructions for transferring permanent records to the National Archives, including both timing and blocking instructions. (See [Chapter IV](#) for examples of such instructions.) The transfer's timing should be based on the length of time after the records are cut off. It is normally within 30 years of the cutoff for paper records, within 5-10 years for audiovisual or microform records, and as soon as electronic records become inactive or the agency cannot meet maintenance requirements for them.

The schedule's blocking instructions are also important in the transfer of permanent records. Blocking means the chronological grouping of records consisting of one or more segments of cutoff records that belong to the same series and are dealt with as a unit for

efficient transfer (e.g., transfer in 5-year blocks). Blocking does not apply to permanent electronic records because they need to be transferred to the National Archives as soon as they become inactive or can no longer be maintained properly.

In addition to the schedule's instructions, the agency's disposition program directive should explain how to transfer permanent records to the National Archives.

Permanent records more than 30 years old must be transferred to the National Archives unless the agency head certifies in writing to the Archivist of the United States that the records must be retained in the agency to conduct its regular current business. This certification must meet the requirements set forth in 36 CFR 1228. Permanent records may be transferred earlier if the agency no longer needs them and if any proposed restrictions on their use are acceptable to the National Archives.

Each agency needs to send NARA a report identifying and describing all permanent or unscheduled records in the agency's legal custody if they are more than 30 years old, unless they are held in a NARA records center. The report is to be made on [NA Form 13148](#), which includes [detailed instructions](#).

While records stored in records centers remain in the transferring agency's legal custody, permanent records transferred to the National Archives pass to the legal custody of the Archivist of the United States. The form documenting the legal transfer of permanent records is [Standard Form 258](#), Agreement to Transfer Records to the National Archives of the United States. (See [figure 6-4](#).) In using the SF 258 to transfer permanent records to the National Archives, agencies must comply with NARA regulations and bulletins, including special requirements for electronic, audiovisual, and microform records. (See 36 CFR 1228, 1230, 1232, and 1234.)

If permanent records are stored in a NARA records center at the time of the scheduled transfer, the center's computer system will automatically generate the SF 258 for agency action. After the agency submits the SF 258 and NARA approves it, the records will be transferred from records center space to the National Archives.

If the permanent records to be transferred are stored in agency space, the National Archives will contact the agency and provide shipping or delivery instructions. If the records are stored in a records center, the National Archives will contact the records center. Legal custody of the records passes to NARA when the NARA official signs the

SF 258 to acknowledge receipt of the records or occasionally to confirm their deposit in another location as specified in a NARA-approved agreement.

The NARA [records management publications](#) contain more detailed guidance on transferring these types of permanent records to the National Archives.

Figure 6-3a. NA Form 13148: Report to NARA on Permanent and Unscheduled Records Over 30 Years Old in Agency Custody

1. Department or Independent Agency Name	
2. Name of Agency Contact Person	Telephone Number
Office	
3. Description of Records	
a. Series Title	
b. Dates	c. Volume (cubic feet)
d. Series Description	
4. Disposition Authority	
5. Location of Records (Complete Office Address)	
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION	NA FORM 13148 (9-90) INTERAGENCY REPORTS CONTROL NO. 0376-NAR-AR

Figure 6-3b. Instructions for NA Form 13148: Report to NARA on Permanent and Unscheduled Records Over 30 Years Old in Agency Custody

Describe only records that have been appraised as permanent on a Standard Form 115 (Request for Records Disposition Authority) or that are unscheduled, and that are held by the agency or for the agency by an institution other than a Federal records center. Excluded from this reporting requirement are (a) records authorized for disposal by the General Record Schedules or by an approved SF115 and (b) records that have been transferred to a Federal records center.

Entry 1. Enter the name of the department or independent agency that has custody of the records identified on the form.

Entry 2. Enter the name, telephone number, and office affiliation of the individual within the agency who should be contacted for further information on these records. It is very important that this entry be filled in on every form submitted.

Entry 3. Describe the records at the series level, just as on the SF 115. A record series is a group of documents filed or maintained together because of subject, function, physical form, or some other factor related to their creation, receipt, or use.

Follow these instructions for the individual subentries:

- a. Each series should be given a brief descriptive title.
- b. Give the inclusive dates for the series of records. The dates can be expressed in years.
- c. The volume of records should be expressed in cubic feet. It is not necessary to be more precise than to the nearest cubic foot.
- d. The series description should be brief but should include information on the function for which the records were created, their current use, the media or format of the records, and their content and arrangement. The existence of any finding aids should be noted, as should the level of security classification or any other restrictions on access to and use of the records.

Agencies that retain numerous series of records over 30 years old may fill out one form for all records series that would have the same entry for Location of Records (*entry 5*) and attach a listing of the series or a copy of an agency finding aid that describes the record series.

Entry 4. Give the manual and item number and the SF 115 and item number for scheduled permanent records. Indicate "unscheduled" if no disposition has been approved. If multiple series are included on one form, please provide all appropriate disposition authorities.

Entry 5. Give the location of the series of records as precisely as possible, including the complete address of the office that is responsible for maintaining the records.

Applying the Schedule to Temporary Records

Temporary records are those determined by NARA to be disposable, or nonpermanent. Either through an approved SF 115 or the GRS, NARA approves them for destruction or occasionally for donation to an eligible person or organization.

NARA-approved retention periods for temporary records are normally mandatory, but exceptions may be made. In rare instances, certain individual files may have permanent value lacking in the other records found in a series or system scheduled as temporary. For example, if particular cases attract congressional and national media attention or lead to significant changes in policy or procedures, they may well deserve special consideration even if they are part of a series scheduled for disposal. If such a case comes to the agency's attention, the records officer should consult with the NARA appraisal archivist before submitting an SF 115 to cover the particular file that appears to warrant permanent retention. Normally, however, temporary records should be disposed of promptly in accordance with a NARA-approved records schedule.

Destruction of Temporary Records

Most temporary records are authorized for destruction when their retention periods expire. Methods of destruction include:

- **Sale or salvage of the record medium.** This is the normal method unless quantities are too small, the market price is too low, or processing time is too great. Paper records are normally sold as wastepaper. The record medium of nonpaper records, such as audiovisual or electronic records, is normally salvaged for reuse or sale. Security-classified or otherwise restricted records require special procedures, including witnessed destruction. Executive Order 12356 governs the destruction of security-classified documents. Specific laws (including the Privacy Act) and regulations govern the destruction of other restricted records. Any sale contract for unrestricted records must prohibit their resale as records or documents. Finally, all sales must comply with the procedures for the sale of surplus personal property. (See 41 CFR 101-45.)
- **Burning, pulping, shredding, macerating, or discarding with other waste materials.** Records without national security or other restrictions may be discarded with other waste materials. These methods are used when the record medium cannot be advantageously sold or salvaged.

If temporary records are stored in a NARA records center when their retention periods expire, they are destroyed according to procedures set forth in NARA regulations (36 CFR 1228) and bulletins and publications.

Exceptions to Destruction of Temporary Records

Temporary records may be donated to an eligible person or organization, but only after the agency has obtained NARA's approval. (See 36 CFR 1228.) To obtain such approval, the agency needs to send NARA a letter of request with the following information:

- The name of the department or agency and the units having custody of the records.
- The name and address of the proposed recipient of the records.
- A list identifying by series or system the records to be transferred, indicating their inclusive dates, and citing the NARA disposition job (SF 115) or GRS and item numbers authorizing disposal of the records.
- Evidence that (1) the proposed transfer is in the best interests of the Government, (2) the proposed recipient agrees not to sell the records, and (3) the transfer will cost the Government nothing.
- Certification that (1) the records contain no information whose disclosure is prohibited by law or contrary to the public interest, (2) any records donated to a person or business relate directly to the custody or operation of property acquired from the Government, and/or (3) any foreign government desiring the records has an official interest in them.

After reviewing the agency's request, NARA will determine whether the donation is in the public interest and will then notify the agency in writing of its approval or disapproval. If NARA disapproves, the agency must destroy the records in accordance with the proper disposal authority.

Reviewing and Updating the Schedule

Introduction

Agencies need to review their records schedules at least annually and update them whenever necessary, including within 6 months of receipt of a NARA issuance of new or

revised GRS items. As agencies change, so do their records. These changes include the following:

- Changes in legislation or program regulations.
- Changes in program priorities, policies, procedures, or information flow.
- Discontinued programs and responsibilities.
- New programs and responsibilities.
- The impact of automation on records, such as electronic or microform systems that replace paper-based systems.
- Internal reorganizations affecting the nature, content, and importance of existing records, especially in agencies arranging their schedules organizationally.
- Increases or decreases in office space.

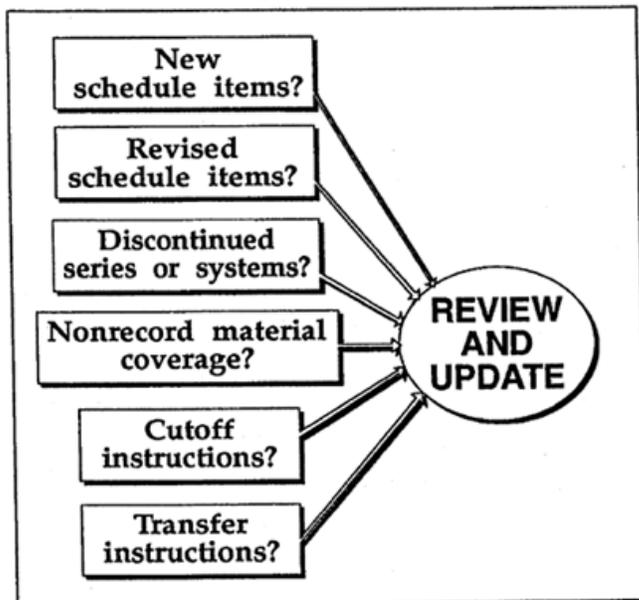


Figure 6-5. Reviewing and Updating Agency Records Schedules

These changes can make it necessary to add, revise, or delete schedule items covering record series and systems. It may also be necessary to update instructions for handling nonrecord materials and for transferring records. In making any schedule changes, agencies should follow the procedures described in [Chapter V](#).

Annual reviews or spot checks can reveal situations affecting the schedule. In large agencies, records officers should ask liaison personnel to report any proposed schedule changes on a form such as the one in [figure 6-6](#).

Figure 6-6. Records Disposition Recommendation

RECORDS DISPOSITION RECOMMENDATION		1. ACTION RECOMMENDED ~ Addition ~ Revision ~ Deletion
2. FROM:	3. THROUGH:	4. TO:
5. OFFICE ACCUMULATING THE RECORDS		6. SERIES OR SYSTEM TITLE
7. PRESCRIBING DIRECTIVE(S) OR OTHER AUTHORITY CREATING THE RECORDS (Submit copies)		
8. TYPE(S) OF DOCUMENTATION/INFORMATION IN THE SERIES OR SYSTEM		
9. HOW FILED ~ Alphabetical ~ Geographical ~ Other (Specify) ~ Chronological ~ Numerical		10. CURRENT OFFICE VOLUME (in cu. ft.)
11. ANNUAL ACCUMULATION	12. IF RECOMMENDED AS PERMANENT, INCLUDE CUBIC FEET AT (1) Records Centers _____ (2) Staging Areas _____	
13. MEDIUM		
~Paper	~Electronic	~ Other (Specify)
~ Microform	~ Magnetic Tape	
	~Hard Disk	
	~ Floppy Disk	
	~ OpticalDisk	
14. PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENTS/INFORMATION AND FREQUENCY OF USE		
15. ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL(S) MAINTAINING DUPLICATE RECORDS AND PURPOSE SERVED AT EACH		

16. RELATED DOCUMENTS		17. SAMPLES ARE: ~ Attached ~ Not Available
18. CURRENT/PROPOSED SCHEDULE AND ITEM NUMBER		
19. RECOMMENDED DISPOSITION INSTRUCTIONS AND JUSTIFICATION		
20. DATE	21. NAME AND TITLE OF INITIATING OFFICIAL	22. SIGNATURE

New Schedule Items

Some series or systems may be missing from the schedule because they were overlooked during the inventory. Others result from new programs or new responsibilities for old programs. While a new agency has 2 years to develop a comprehensive schedule, an established agency must schedule the records of a new program within 1 year of the program's implementation.

Revised Schedule Items

Schedule items typically need revision for three reasons:

- **Lack of clarity.** The approved schedule may have items with unclear descriptions or imprecise disposition instructions. Files custodians may not be able to match schedule items to their records. Or they may find that the retention periods are based on a rare event or on an incorrect cutoff date. Case files normally filed together may appear on the schedule as several series with different retention periods. Or a schedule item may need revision because a form has had its number changed or been merged with other forms. Finally, unclear schedule descriptions may have resulted from incorrect inventory information. Whatever the source of the problem, it needs to be corrected promptly. An agency must submit an SF 115 to modify the retention period of a record series or system or to change the substance of the description. An SF 115 is unnecessary if the changes are merely editorial ones not affecting the final disposition or the description's substance.
- **Inadequate retention periods for non-GRS items.** Experience may show that the original retention periods may be too long or too short. To identify records held too long, agencies should concentrate first on those record series or systems with retention periods exceeding 10 years and then on those with shorter retention

periods. Whatever the proposed change in retention period, it is necessary to submit an SF 115 to NARA to request approval.

- **New or revised GRS items.** Whenever NARA issues a change to the GRS, the agency has 6 months to update its comprehensive schedule covering any applicable records. This update is unnecessary if the agency has already received approval of a shorter retention period in a NARA-approved SF 115, provided NARA has not stated otherwise. It is also unnecessary if the agency submits an SF 115 requesting and receiving NARA's approval of an exception to the GRS disposition standard.

Discontinued Series or Systems

Some records described in the agency schedule may no longer accumulate because:

- A function is transferred by statute, Executive order, or treaty to another agency. Before transferring the records, the creating agency should destroy all temporary records whose retention periods have expired. As soon as it loses custody of the remaining records, the agency should delete the relevant items from its schedule.
- An agency program is terminated. After meeting its immediate needs, the agency should destroy all temporary records whose retention periods have expired and retire the remainder to a records center unless all the records can be proposed for immediate destruction. The schedule items should remain in effect until all applicable records are disposed of or transferred to the National Archives.

Nonrecord Material Coverage

Since a comprehensive schedule also contains disposition instructions for nonrecord materials, the agency should review these instructions for accuracy and clarity and make any necessary changes. The instructions should include a warning against mixing such materials with the office's records and against letting them proliferate in expensive office space.

Cutoff Instructions

The schedule should be reviewed for any necessary revisions to the instructions for cutting off, or breaking, records. (See chapter V of this handbook for [general guidance on record cutoffs](#).)

Transfer Instructions

The agency should review its instructions for transferring records to agency storage areas, records centers, and the National Archives to ensure compliance with agency needs and NARA regulations. The schedule and related directives should be amended to require the prompt and systematic transfer of eligible records to such storage facilities. If the agency needs to change its instructions for transferring records to records centers or the National Archives, it should not submit an SF 115 but simply send NARA a letter of request, citing the appropriate SF 115.

Related Disposition Matters

In implementing and updating a comprehensive records schedule, each agency should be aware of related disposition matters. These include screening files, superseding a disposition authority, transferring records to other agencies, temporarily extending retention periods, having disposal authority withdrawn, and destroying records in an emergency. Above all, they involve monitoring schedule implementation to prevent the unauthorized disposition of Federal records.

The Screening Process

In records disposition, screening means examining files to identify and remove documents of short-term value, particularly when they are mixed with long-term or permanent records. This process usually involves paper-based files. Decisions to screen, or weed, paper-based files require rigorous analysis because of the cost involved. The amount of time and money spent depends on whether or not:

- Complete folders, or at least sections of folders, can be removed.
- It is easy to identify the materials to be removed.
- The records are easily accessible.
- Physical processing, such as removal of paper clips or fasteners, is unnecessary.

Screening is no substitute for following proper filing procedures, and it should be unnecessary if such procedures are in effect. It is normally cost-effective only if the records to be retained are permanent, are scheduled for periods exceeding 30 years, or constitute less than half of the file. Alternatives to screening paper-based files include retaining them in the office until final disposition, moving them to an agency holding

area, or retiring them intact to a records center. The best way to avoid screening problems is to make sure that permanent or long-term records are not filed with short-term records or with nonrecord materials.

Supersession of Disposition Authority

If two SF 115 authorities cover the same record series or system, the more recent authorization applies, even though it may require longer retention. New or revised GRS items supersede NARA-approved SF 115 items unless the latter have shorter retention periods or unless the agency obtains NARA's approval of an exception to the GRS standard.

Transfers of Records to Other Agencies

In accordance with NARA regulations (36 CFR 1228), agencies must obtain NARA's written approval before transferring records to another executive agency. NARA's approval is unnecessary when the transfer is required by statute, Executive order, Presidential reorganization plan, or treaty or when the records are transferred to records centers or the National Archives. It is also unnecessary when the records are lent for official use or when the transfer is between two parts of the same executive department. The agency's letter requesting such approval should include the following information:

- A concise description of the records, including inclusive dates and the volume in cubic feet.
- Any access restrictions, including those placed on classified information.
- The agencies and persons using the records and the purpose of this use.
- The current and proposed physical and organizational locations of the records.
- Justification of the proposed transfer, including an explanation as to why it is in the best interests of the Federal Government.

Along with the letter, the agency should send copies of concurrences by the other agencies concerned.

If agencies wish to transfer records to recipients other than Federal agencies, they should follow NARA regulations for donating records, which are discussed earlier in this chapter. If permanent or unscheduled records are proposed for loan to non-Federal recipients, NARA's prior approval is required.

Temporary Extension of Retention Periods

Program audits, litigation, investigations, or other special circumstances may require the retention of record series or systems beyond their scheduled destruction date. According to NARA regulations 36 CFR 1228), an agency may request approval of a temporary extension by sending NARA a letter. The letter should contain a concise description of the records and a complete citation of the schedule items governing the disposition of the records. It should also contain the estimated length of the extension and the current and proposed physical location of the records, including specific records centers.

If NARA approves a temporary extension for records of one agency, it will notify that agency by letter. If it approves such an extension for records common to several or all agencies, it will issue a bulletin. If records in records centers are affected, the agency should send NARA 20 copies of all formal instructions on extending retention periods. When the approved extension expires, NARA will notify the affected agencies to resume applying the normal retention periods.

NARA's approval is unnecessary when a court order requires the retention of records beyond the scheduled retention period. Agencies need to notify NARA of the extension within 30 days after the court order was issued. Besides enclosing a copy of the court order, they should provide the same information as required in the letter of request.

Separate procedures govern individual shipments of records retired to a records center. If the records center sends the agency a notice of intent to destroy specified records eligible for disposal, the agency may send the records center a letter requesting longer retention of such records if it provides written justification, including a new disposal date, and if it makes the request within 90 days of the records centers notice. If the agency wants to make a lasting change in the retention period of records in a series or system, it needs to follow the procedures for submitting an SF 115 to NARA.

Withdrawal of Disposal Authority

In emergencies or for reasons of efficiency, NARA is authorized to withdraw, temporarily or permanently, disposal authority previously granted. It will do so whenever the disposal would harm Government interests or individual rights. If the withdrawal affects only one agency, NARA will send a letter of notification. If it affects more than one agency, a NARA bulletin will be issued. If the withdrawal is only temporary,

agencies will be notified when to resume applying the normal retention periods; but if it is lasting, NARA will issue further instructions.

Emergency Destruction of Records

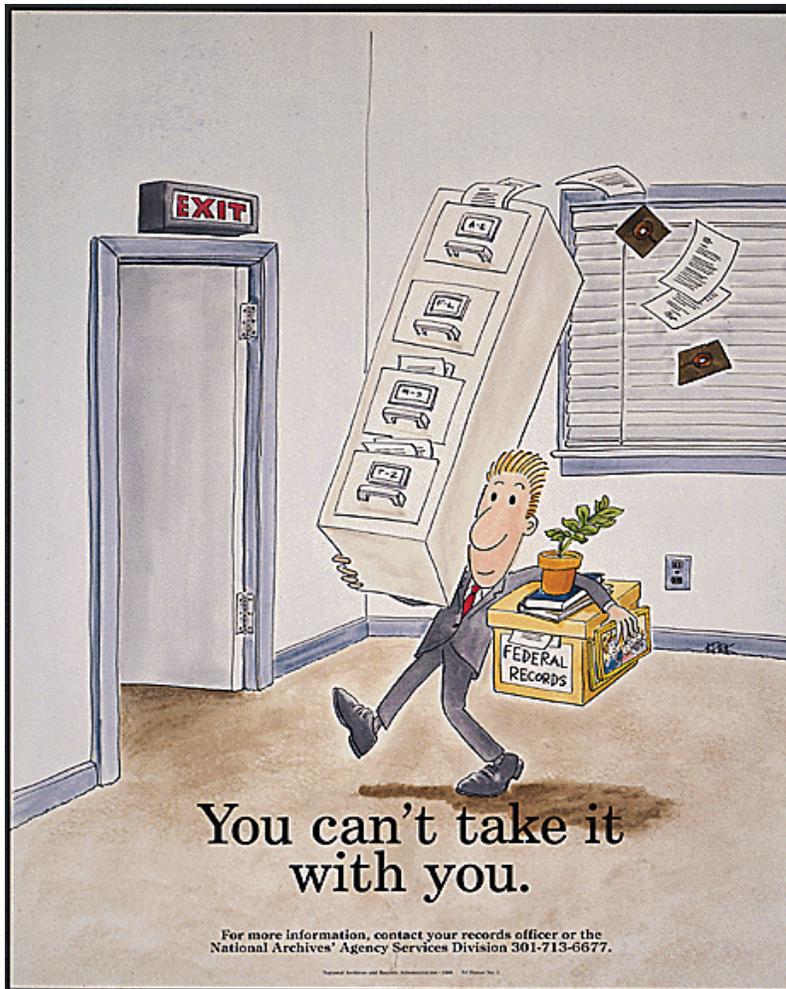
Under certain conditions, agencies may destroy records regardless of schedule provisions. Such conditions involve:

- *Records whose physical condition makes them a menace to human health or life and to property.* They may be infested by vermin or may be stored under such adverse conditions that they cannot be used or repaired. In accordance with NARA regulations (36 CFR 1228), the agency must obtain NARA's prior approval, except for records stored on nitrate film. If an agency decides such film threatens humans or property, it is authorized to destroy it. Within 30 days the agency head must send NARA a written report describing the film and explaining when, where, and how it was destroyed. Before destroying nitrate film, the agency should be aware of the conditions under which it actually poses a threat to persons and property. Such conditions exist when the film becomes soft and sticky, emits a noxious odor, contains gas bubbles, or has retrograded into an acrid powder. NARA provides guidance to agencies regarding how to handle nitrate film and how to correct certain infestation problems through fumigation.
- *Records outside the territorial limits of the continental United States when war or other hostile action exists or threatens.* The agency head may authorize the destruction of such records on grounds of harm to U.S. interests or of urgent space needs for military operations combined with a lack of sufficient administrative, legal, research, or other value to warrant continued preservation ([44 U.S.C. 3311](#)). Within 6 months the agency official responsible for the destruction must send NARA a written statement describing the records and explaining when and where they were destroyed.

Unauthorized Disposition of Federal Records

Both NARA and agencies are responsible for preventing the unauthorized disposition of Federal records, including their unlawful or accidental destruction, defacement, alteration, or removal from Federal custody. Agencies should carefully monitor the implementation of approved records schedules to prevent such unauthorized disposition. They should also inform their employees that the unauthorized disposition of Federal

records is against the law ([44 U.S.C. 3106](#)) and may lead to a \$2,000 fine, a 3-year imprisonment, or both ([18 U.S.C. 2071](#)). Employees should be instructed to report any such violations of the law.



Agency heads must report to NARA any unlawful or accidental removal, defacing, alteration, or destruction of records in the custody of their agency (See 36 CFR 1228.) The report should include the following:

- A complete description of the records, along with volume and dates if known.
- The office of origin.
- An explanation of the exact circumstances surrounding the unauthorized action.
- Details, when appropriate, of the actions taken to salvage, retrieve, or reconstruct the records.
- A statement of safeguards established to prevent further losses.

NARA will assist the agency head in contacting the Attorney General to recover any unlawfully removed records. If the agency head does not notify the Attorney General within a reasonable time, NARA will request action by the Attorney General and so inform the Congress.

Conclusion

After a comprehensive schedule has been properly prepared and approved, it can be effective only if it is implemented properly and updated whenever necessary. Effectiveness also depends on understanding the related records disposition matters discussed in this chapter. At the same time it is necessary to manage the entire records disposition program, based on a review of agency recordkeeping requirements and practices. Evaluating the program is an important part of this management process and will be described in [Chapter VII](#) of this handbook.

VII. Program Evaluation

- [Introduction](#)
 - [Reports on the Program](#)
 - [Self-Evaluation Guidelines](#)
 - [NARA's Evaluation of Agency Programs](#)
 - [Conclusion](#)
-

VII. Program Evaluation

- *Each agency needs to evaluate its records disposition program periodically.*
 - *Requiring internal reports on record holdings and cost avoidance helps in the evaluation process.*
 - *Instances of unauthorized disposition of Federal records must be reported to NARA.*
 - *Agencies should follow NARA guidelines for evaluating a records disposition program.*
 - *NARA conducts single-agency and interagency evaluations of records management programs, including records disposition.*
-

Introduction

Good management necessarily involves evaluating an agency's records disposition program to make improvements. These may include clearer schedule instructions, shorter retention periods for temporary records, prompter disposal or transfer of eligible records, better design of information systems to address disposition concerns, enhanced safeguards against unauthorized disposition, and better relations with other agency managers and NARA.

Besides reviewing its records schedule annually, each agency is required to evaluate periodically its records management programs, including records disposition, for compliance with relevant laws and regulations and for effectiveness. Likewise, in its oversight role, NARA periodically conducts single-agency and interagency evaluations for the same purposes. (See [36 CFR 1220](#).)

Reports on the Program

To aid in the evaluation process, the agency should consider requiring at least two statistical reports: one on record holdings and another on cost avoidance. It should also require reports on any instances of unauthorized disposition of Federal records, whether accidental or deliberate.

Report on Record Holdings

This report can help show how well offices are applying approved schedules. It should include volume data (in cubic feet) on record holdings, disposals, and transfers taking place during the past year. The report should distinguish between transfers of eligible records to records centers and transfers of permanent records to the National Archives. It should also distinguish paper-based records from electronic, audiovisual, and other special records. Analysis of this report can show trends, such as total volume, volume per employee, and the increased use of electronic information systems.

Report on Cost Avoidance

To compute costs avoided because of the disposition program, records officers should consider these factors:

- Replacement cost of each file cabinet, magnetic tape, or other item released.
- Value of shelving released (per linear foot), including shelving in tape libraries.
- Value of office and storage space released (per square foot).
- Avoidance of personnel costs.

Since unit costs generally change from year to year, records officers should obtain current figures from GSA or NARA. Periodic reports to high officials should emphasize the benefits of good records management. Other means of communicating the program's value include posters, flyers, newsletters, and articles in agency publications.

Report on Unauthorized Disposition

Agencies must report to NARA any instances of unauthorized disposition of Federal records because such unauthorized action is illegal ([44 U.S.C. 3106](#)) and may lead to

fines and imprisonment ([18 U.S.C. 2071](#)). Reporting requirements are set forth in [36 CFR 1228](#) and are discussed in [chapter VI](#) of this handbook. Records officers should review all such reports during the evaluation process.

Self-Evaluation Guidelines

Agencies should follow guidelines issued by NARA for evaluating their records disposition program and other records management programs, such as files maintenance. NARA has issued a self-evaluation guide for agency use entitled "*Records Management Self-Evaluation Guide*," of which part V relates to records disposition.

[Figure 7-1](#) contains basic questions to answer in evaluating an agency's records disposition program.

Figure 7-1. Disposition Program Evaluation Guidelines

- Does the agency have specific recordkeeping requirements for all agency activities at all levels and locations and for all record media?
- Does the agency have a current disposition handbook, manual, or other directive that sets forth its records disposition policies and procedures?
 - Are these policies and procedures consistent with current NARA regulations and guidance?
 - Does the directive define records, nonrecord materials, and personal papers and provide general instructions regarding their disposition?
 - Does it contain the agency records schedule? If not, how is the schedule issued?
 - Does the directive explain how to transfer eligible records to an agency records storage facility and the Federal records centers?
- Does the agency records schedule cover all recorded information regardless of medium (e.g., paper, electronic, audiovisual, and microform), and does it cover all agency functions or activities?

- Is the disposition authority of each record series or system in the agency schedule based on the General Records Schedules or a NARA-approved SF 115?
- When proposing records as permanent on an SF 115, does the agency follow NARA's permanent records appraisal guidelines found in the *Disposition of Federal Records* handbook?
- Do SF 115's proposing records as permanent include arrangement statements, volume on hand, annual accumulations, cutoff and blocking instructions, and transfer dates to the National Archives?
- Is an SF 115 submitted to NARA when the agency proposes to convert permanent and unscheduled records to microfilm; and, if so, does it include the certification statement and other information required by 36 CFR 1230?
- How are SF 115's cleared internally before the agency submits them to NARA? Do program officials review those parts of the schedule relating to their office or function? Does the general counsel review all or particular schedules before their submission? Is the agency historian consulted regarding records proposed as permanent?
- Does the agency send to the General Accounting Office for concurrence only those SF 115 items required by Title 8 of the *GAO Policy and Procedures Manual for the Guidance of Federal Agencies*?
- Does the agency review and, if necessary, update its records schedule at least annually and within 6 months of NARA's issuance of new or revised GRS items for which the agency has no exception?
- Does the records schedule also contain disposition instructions for nonrecord materials?
- Do file custodians follow approved disposition instructions and take prompt action to cut off files, destroy records whose retention periods have expired, and retire eligible records to a Federal records center or other records storage facility?
- Does the agency prepare SFs 135 or equivalent form properly? Does it maintain a complete file of such forms for records previously retired to a records storage

facility, and does it routinely update the forms for accessions that have been returned to the agency or that have been destroyed or relocated?

- Do the appropriate agency offices review and take timely action on records center requests, such as Federal NA Form 13000, Agency Review for Contingent Disposal and NA Form 13001, Notice of Intent to Destroy Records, or equivalent notifications from other storage facilities?
- Does the agency transfer permanent records to the National Archives promptly in accordance with approved schedules? Does it follow NARA regulations and guidance in completing and submitting SF 258's and in transferring the records?
- Has the agency instituted safeguards against the unauthorized disposition of Federal records, including their unauthorized destruction or removal; and does it report violations to NARA and take corrective action whenever necessary?
- Does the agency have a policy covering personal documentary materials? Does it permit creation and removal of extra or convenience copies of documents? Is there any policy with regard to payment for such extra copies? Does the agency have any policy regarding the removal of materials involving confidentiality or privacy? Does the agency have a policy regarding the removal of security-classified documents?
- Does the agency review the personal documentary materials of all officials at all levels before their departure from the agency?
- Has the records management staff received records disposition training from NARA, and has internal training been provided for all those responsible for applying records schedules and carrying out other aspects of the disposition program?
- Does the agency periodically evaluate its records disposition program for compliance with relevant laws and regulations and for effectiveness?

NARA has also issued a "*Checklist for Evaluating Recordkeeping Practices in Your Office.*" Although this checklist relates primarily to files maintenance at the individual office level, its use should help ensure that records are ready for appropriate disposition action.

NARA's Evaluation of Agency Programs

NARA periodically evaluates the records management programs of Federal agencies. These evaluations usually cover overall program management, records creation and maintenance, and records disposition. The records disposition aspects include scheduling, the use of records storage facilities, and the transfer of permanent records to the National Archives.

The purpose of NARA's evaluations is to assist agencies in adequately documenting their activities and in providing for the proper maintenance and disposition of records. NARA bases its evaluations of records disposition programs on the requirements set forth in 36 CFR 12286 and on the guidelines already contained in this chapter. Such evaluations enable NARA to assess the effectiveness of its regulations, especially as they relate to rapidly changing technologies and agency needs.

When NARA has completed a program evaluation, the agency has an opportunity to comment on the findings before a final report is issued. NARA then requires the agency to submit an action plan, detailing how and when the recommendations will be implemented. After NARA reviews and comments on the action plan, the agency needs to report every 6 months on its progress in implementing the recommendations until it is notified otherwise. Meanwhile, NARA assists the agency in implementing the recommendations.

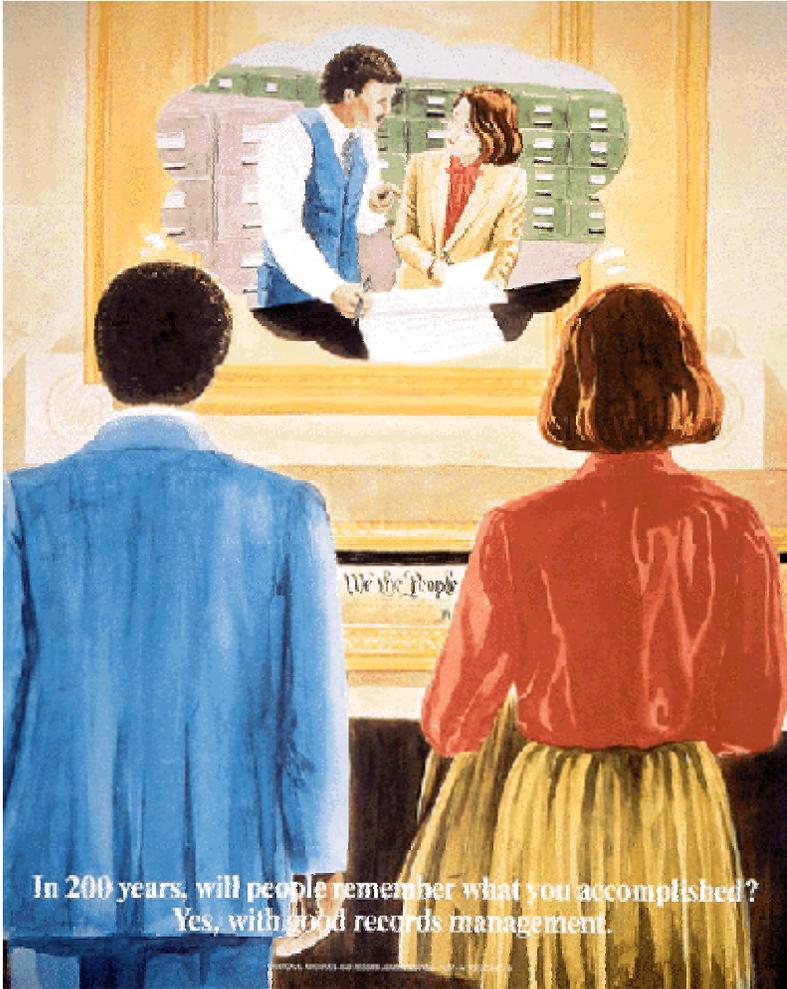
Besides evaluating the records management programs of specific agencies, NARA also conducts interagency evaluations and issues general evaluation reports. For example, in 1991 it published a report entitled "The Management of Audiovisual Records in Federal Agencies." This report summarized five individual agency evaluations as well as other available information. In examining recent patterns and trends, it concluded that most Federal agencies still needed to develop comprehensive inventories and records schedules for audiovisual records. It recommended that agencies develop comprehensive recordkeeping requirements for such records, implement basic management and preservation steps, take immediate measures to safeguard specific audiovisual media, and establish procedures for transferring permanent audiovisual records to the National

Conclusion

Periodically evaluating the records disposition program enables the agency to identify needed improvements. But just as a records schedule is useless without implementation, so a program evaluation is pointless without follow up. If the agency is to have a successful records disposition program, it must implement the evaluation's recommendations and allocate the necessary staff and other resources.

NARA evaluates Federal records management programs, including records disposition, to assist agencies in managing their records. It also uses such evaluations to determine if its regulations are keeping up with rapidly changing technologies and agency needs.

In short, managing a records disposition program is an important responsibility. A successful program helps ensure that the agency has the recorded information necessary to conduct Government business, avoid waste, and preserve America's documentary heritage.



In 200 years, will people remember what you accomplished?
Yes, with good records management.

Appendix A. Records Disposition Statutes

44 U.S.C. Chapter 21 - National Archives and Records Administration

- [§2107 Acceptance of records for historical preservation](#)
- [§2108 Responsibility for custody, use and withdrawal of records](#)

44 U.S.C. Chapter 29 - Records Management by the Archivist of the United States and by the Administrator of General Services

- [§ 2901. Definitions.](#)
- [§ 2902. Objectives of records management.](#)
- [§ 2903. Custody and control of property.](#)
- [§ 2904. General responsibilities of Administrator.](#)
- [§ 2905. Establishment of standards for selective retention of records; security measures.](#)
- [§ 2906. Inspection of agency records.](#)
- [§ 2907. Records centers and centralized microfilming services.](#)
- [§ 2908. Regulations.](#)
- [§ 2909. Retention of records.](#)
- (§ 2910. Repealed.)

44 U.S.C. Chapter 31 - Records Management by Federal Agencies

- [§ 3101. Records management by agency heads; general duties.](#)
- [§ 3102. Establishment of program of management.](#)
- [§ 3103. Transfer of records to records centers.](#)
- [§ 3104. Certifications and determinations on transferred records.](#)
- [§ 3105. Safeguards.](#)
- [§ 3106. Unlawful removal, destruction of records.](#)
- [§ 3107. Authority of Comptroller General.](#)

44 U.S.C. Chapter 33 - Disposal of Records

- [§ 3301. Definition of records.](#)

- [§ 3302. Regulations covering lists of records for disposal, procedure for disposal, and standards for reproduction.](#)
- [§ 3303. Lists and schedules of records to be submitted to Archivist by head of each Government](#)
- [§ 3303a. Examination by Archivist of lists and schedules of records lacking preservation value; disposal of records.](#)
- (§3304 to §3307. Repealed.)
- [§ 3308. Disposal of similar records where prior disposal was authorized.](#)
- [§ 3309. Preservation of claims of Government until settled in General Accounting Office; disposal authorized upon written approval of Comptroller General.](#)
- [§ 3310. Disposal of records constituting menace to health, life, or property.](#)
- [§ 3311. Destruction of records outside continental United States in time of war or when hostile action seems imminent; written report to Archivist.](#)
- [§ 3312. Photographs or microphotographs of records considered as originals; certified reproductions admissible in evidence.](#)
- [§ 3313. Moneys from sale of records payable into the Treasury.](#)
- [§ 3314. Procedures for disposal of records exclusive.](#)

[18 U.S.C. Chapter 101 - Records and Reports](#)

- [§2071 Concealment, removal, or mutilation generally](#)

Appendix B. Records Disposition Regulations ([36 CFR 1228](#))

Part 1228 was last amended on 1/14/05.

Sec.

1228.1	Scope of part.
------------------------	----------------

Subpart A -- Records Disposition Programs

1228.10	Authority.
1228.12	Basic elements of disposition programs.

Subpart B -- Scheduling Records

1228.20	Authorities.
1228.22	Developing records schedules.
1228.24	Formulation of agency records schedules.
1228.26	Request for records disposition authority.
1228.28	Scheduling permanent records.
1228.30	Scheduling temporary records.
1228.32	Request to change disposition authority.

Subpart C -- General Records Schedules

1228.40	Authority.
1228.42	Applicability.
1228.44	Current schedules.
1228.46	Availability.

Subpart D -- Implementing Schedules

1228.50	Application of schedules.
1228.52	Withdrawal of disposal authority.
1228.54	Temporary extension of retention periods.
1228.56	Transfer of permanent records.
1228.58	Destruction of temporary records.
1228.60	Donation of temporary records.

Subpart E -- Loan of Permanent and Unscheduled Records

1228.70	Authority.
1228.72	Approval.
1228.74	Agency action.

1228.76	NARA action on request.
1228.78	Retrieval of records.

Subpart F -- Emergency Authorization to Destroy Records

1228.90	General provisions.
1228.92	Menaces to human life or health or to property.
1228.94	State of war or threatened war.

Subpart G -- Damage to, Alienation, and Unauthorized Destruction of Records

1228.100	Responsibilities.
1228.102	Criminal penalties.
1228.104	Reporting.
1228.106	Exclusions.

Subpart H -- Transfer of Records From the Custody of One Executive Agency to Another

1228.120	Authority.
1228.122	Approval.
1228.124	Agency request.

1228.126	Agency concurrences.
1228.128	Records of terminated agencies.
1228.130	Equipment.
1228.132	Costs of transfers.
1228.134	Restrictions on use of records.
1228.136	Exceptions.

Subpart I -- Transfer of Records to Records Storage Facilities

1228.150	Where can a Federal agency transfer records for storage?
1228.152	Under what conditions may Federal records be stored in records storage facilities?
1228.154	What requirements must an agency meet when it transfers records to a records storage facility?
1228.156	What procedures must an agency follow to transfer records to an agency records center or commercial records storage facility?

Subpart J -- Transfer, Use, and Disposition of Records in a NARA Records Center

1228.160	How does an agency transfer records to a NARA records center?
1228.162	How does an agency transfer vital records to a NARA records center?

1228.164	What records must be transferred to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC)?
1228.166	How does an agency transfer records to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC)?
1228.168	How can records be used in NARA records centers?
1228.170	How are disposal clearances managed for records in NARA records centers?

Subpart K -- Facility Standards for Records Storage Facilities

General

1228.220	What authority applies to this subpart?
1228.222	What does this subpart cover?
1228.224	Publications incorporated by reference.
1228.226	Definitions.

Facility Standards

1228.228	What are the facility requirements for all records storage facilities?
1228.230	What are the fire safety requirements that apply to records storage facilities?
1228.232	What are the requirements for environmental controls for records storage facilities?

Handling Deviations From NARA's Facility Standards

1228.234	What rules apply if there is a conflict between NARA standards and other regulatory standards that a facility must follow?
1228.236	How does an agency request a waiver from a requirement in this subpart?
1228.238	How does NARA process a waiver request?

Facility Approval and Inspection Requirements

1228.240	How does an agency request authority to establish or relocate records storage facilities?
1228.242	What does an agency have to do to certify a fire-safety detection and suppression system?
1228.244	When may NARA conduct an inspection of a records storage facility?

Subpart L -- Transfer of Records to the National Archives of the United States

1228.260	Authority.
1228.262	Types of records to be transferred.
1228.264	Certification for retention of records in agency custody.
1228.266	Audiovisual records.
1228.268	Cartographic and architectural records.
1228.270	Electronic records.

1228.272	Transfer of records.
1228.274	Restrictions on transferred records.
1228.276	Records subject to the Privacy Act of 1974.
1228.278	Release of equipment.
1228.280	Use of records transferred to the National Archives.
1228.282	Disposal clearances.

Appendix A -- Minimum Security Standards for Level III Federal Facilities

Appendix B -- Alternative Certified Fire-safety Detection and Suppression System(s)

Authority: 44 U.S.C. chs. 21, 29, and 33.

Appendix C. Appraisal Guidelines for Permanent Records

These appraisal guidelines take the form of 15 general series and system descriptions intended to illustrate the types of records normally appraised by NARA for permanent, or archival, retention. Records officers should use these descriptions as guides to help identify permanent records, regardless of physical form or characteristics. Because of the wide variety of records accumulated by the Government and because of differences in agency organizations, functions, and recordkeeping systems, these guidelines cannot include all the records that may be eligible for permanent retention.

Many of the records described in this appendix may be created in multiple formats. Sometimes the format is specified, such as in the case of audiovisual and graphic records; but many textual records are increasingly being created electronically, often along with related electronic indexes. If an agency maintains in electronic form any of the records described in this appendix or any indexes related to them, it should bring such records to NARA's attention and not destroy them without NARA's prior approval.

These guidelines apply only to current records whose life cycle has been controlled. Because many important pre-20th century records were destroyed by fire, flood, and neglect, otherwise routine administrative, or housekeeping, records are often preserved for that period to document the Government's organization, functions, and activities.

More detailed appraisal guidelines for electronic, audiovisual, and other records appear in the NARA publications "[*Managing Audiovisual Records*](#)" and "[*Managing Cartographic and Architectural Records*](#)" and in records management [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

1. Records on Organization and Functions.

- a. **Organizational charts and reorganization studies.** Organizational charts are graphic illustrations providing a detailed description of the arrangement and administrative structure of the functional units of an agency. Reorganization studies, conducted to design an efficient organizational framework to carry out the agency's programs, include materials such as final recommendations, proposals, and staff evaluations. These files also usually contain administrative maps showing regional boundaries and headquarters of decentralized agencies, or the geographic extent or limits of an agency's programs and projects.

b. **Functional statements.** These are formally prepared descriptions of the responsibilities assigned to agency officials at the division level and above.

2. **Formal Minutes of Boards and Commissions.**

These document substantive policy and procedural decisions, especially when a board or commission rather than an individual appointee gives an agency executive direction. Typically, these agencies are regulatory bodies but also include organizations such as the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation and the Commission of Fine Arts. Minutes may be literal transcriptions or edited summaries. Audio or video recordings of the meetings also should be preserved.

3. **Records of Internal Agency, Interagency, and NonFederal Committees.**

Included are minutes, agenda, proposals submitted for review, and final recommendations of meetings of ad hoc committees as well as more formally established councils, conferences (e.g., White House Conferences), and task forces and study groups attended by senior agency officials. Meetings may be limited to internal agency personnel or may include representatives from other Federal agencies or nonFederal groups. The minutes may be summaries, verbatim transcripts, or audio or video recordings. Records selected for permanent retention to document interagency meetings normally are those of the agency designated as the group's secretariat.

4. **Legal Opinions and Comments on Legislation.** These are memorandums prepared by an agency's legal counsel or program officials on interpretations of existing laws and regulations, or the effects of proposed laws and regulations governing the agency or having a direct effect on its operations. Records selected concern the agency's primary missions and normally exclude general opinions and comments relating to other Federal agencies. Included are formal comments on pending legislation prepared at the request of the Congress or the Office of Management and Budget. Most of these records are permanent when created in the offices of general counsels of departments and independent agencies. Excluded are copies of bills, hearings, and statutes held for convenient reference. Similar records maintained below the departmental level may or may not be permanent depending on their content and relationship to records of the departmental counsel.

5. Formal Directives, Procedural Issuances, and Operating Manuals Relating to Program Functions.

Formal directives are distributed as orders, circulars, or manuals announcing major changes in the agency's policies and procedures. Normally these are issued by authority of the agency's head. Extensive procedures are frequently detailed in lengthy operating manuals. NARA generally designates as permanent those formal directives, procedural issuances, and operating manuals relating to program functions, but generally not those relating to routine administrative, or housekeeping, functions.

6. Selected Evaluations of Internal Operations.

These are studies conducted to determine the effectiveness of the procedures adopted to achieve established policy goals. Audit case files are generally excluded. The studies may include evaluations of both program and administrative operations and may be made by the agency itself (inspectors general) or by outside oversight agencies (e.g., General Accounting Office). Only those studies recommending significant changes in policies and procedures merit preservation. Studies prepared by outside oversight agencies should be proposed as permanent by the creating agency. All other copies that have not been annotated or integrated into operational files are disposable.

7. Analytical Research Studies and Periodic Reports.

This category includes analytical research studies and periodic reports prepared by the agency, or by private organizations or individuals under contract to the agency or in receipt of a grant from the agency. Studies and reports selected for permanent retention may be statistical or narrative and may be recorded on paper, electronic, audiovisual, or other media. Regional reports prepared by field offices and forwarded to the agency's headquarters are frequently permanent because they contain information on ethnic, social, economic, or other aspects of specific localities. Sometimes only selected studies and reports are designated as permanent. Excluded from selection are published studies and reports included elsewhere in the agency's record set of publications. ([See guideline 11 for publications permanently retained.](#))

8. **Agency Histories and Selected Background Materials.**

This category consists mainly of narrative agency histories and histories of agency programs, including oral history projects completed by agency historians, public affairs officers, or private historians under agency contract. Some background materials, such as interviews with past and present personnel, generated during the research stage may also be selected for permanent retention.

9. **Briefing Materials.**

These consist of statistical and narrative reports and other summaries, including audiovisual materials, created to inform agency heads and their senior advisers of the agency's current status or of major issues confronting the agency. They may be used to prepare such officials for hearings, press conferences, or major addresses.

10. **Public Relations Records.**

- a. **Speeches, addresses, and comments.** These include remarks made at formal ceremonies and during interviews by agency heads or their senior assistants concerning agency programs and activities. The speeches and addresses may be presented to executives from other Federal agencies, representatives of State and local governments, or private groups, such as university students and members of business associations and cultural organizations. Interviews may be granted to radio, television, or printed news commentators. The medium selected may be paper, audiovisual, microform, or electronic.
- b. **News releases.** These consist of one copy of each prepared statement or announcement issued by the agency's public affairs office for distribution to the news media regarding such significant events as the adoption of new agency programs, the termination of old programs, major shifts in policy, and changes in senior agency personnel. The medium selected may be paper, audiovisual, microform, or electronic. Excluded are news releases that provide only transitory or routine information.

11. **Publications.**

This category consists of formal publications printed or issued by the Government Printing Office, the National Technical Information Service, an outside contractor, or the agency itself. Examples include annual reports to the Congress; studies conducted by the agency or under contract for the agency; and procedural brochures, pamphlets, and handbooks distributed for guidance to other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and private organizations and citizens. Also included are maps and posters as well as instructional and educational materials in audiovisual form (audio or video recordings, motion pictures, filmstrips, and slidetape productions) and film productions and television and radio programs prepared to furnish information on agency policies or to promote agency programs and operations. Even though there may be reference copies of audiovisual publications in nonFederal depositories, the Government still needs to retain the original production elements and related textual records required to ensure the preservation and facilitate the use of such audiovisual publications.

12. Selected Audiovisual and Graphic Records.

These consist of agency originated motion pictures, still photographs, posters, audio and video recordings, cartographic materials, and architectural drawings created to record substantive events or information that cannot be or normally is not recorded in written form, along with related records needed to identify and facilitate the use of such records. Examples include instantaneous recordings or photographic coverage of significant scientific or technological phenomena and significant nonrecurring events, such as combat operations, lunar and planetary explorations, extemporaneous occurrences, discussions, and interviews. Also included are maps recording topographic information for specific geographic areas as well as architectural or engineering drawings of significant Federal buildings and other structures.

13. General Correspondence, or Subject, Files Documenting Substantive Agency Programs.

These files include correspondence with the President and the Executive Office of the President, Members of Congress and congressional committees, other Federal agencies, and private organizations and individuals; internal agency memorandums; narrative and statistical reports; budget estimates and justifications; and other records documenting all of the agency's substantive

program functions. Whether in paper or electronic form, these records show the development of major policies and procedures and are often designated for permanent retention when created at the following levels: Secretary; under secretary; deputy secretary; assistant secretary; administrators, chairpersons, commissioners, and directors of administrations, bureaus, and services within a department; and heads of independent Federal agencies and their chief assistants. When the agency's important programs are not documented in correspondence maintained at these higher levels, NARA generally designates as permanent similar records created at lower office levels.

How many general correspondence files are selected as permanent depends not only on their importance but also on the extent of their duplication at various office levels. Where substantial duplication exists, those created at the highest level should be chosen. Where little or no duplication exists, those at more than one level may be chosen for permanent retention.

14. Selected Case Files.

Many Federal records are maintained as case files, which are records, regardless of media, documenting a specific action, event, person, place, project, or other matter. Sometimes called project or transaction files, they document particular agency activities from initiation to conclusion. Although the case files in most series or systems are scheduled for disposal, sometimes NARA designates all of those in a series or system for permanent retention, especially when they are electronic master files. Occasionally, however, NARA selects only a few of those in a series or system for permanent retention. Individual case files may be chosen because the case meets one or more of the following criteria:

- a. It establishes a precedent and results in a major policy or procedural change.
- b. It is involved in extensive litigation.
- c. It receives widespread attention from the news media.
- d. It is widely recognized for its uniqueness by specialists or authorities outside the Government.
- e. It is reviewed at length in the agency's annual report to the Congress.

- f. It constitutes a significant accumulation of documentary material and information on a particular subject (a "fat file").
- g. It is selected to document agency procedures rather than capture information on the subject of the individual file.

Criteria "a" through "f" indicate the exceptional nature of particular case files, whereas criterion "g" relates to routine files chosen because they illustrate the agency's procedures. Individual case files selected as permanent under these criteria may include, but are not limited to, research grants awarded for studies; research and development projects; investigative, enforcement, and litigation case files; social service and welfare case files; labor relations case files; case files related to developing natural resources and preserving historic sites; and public works case files.

Sometimes a case file series may be approved for disposal because the agency maintains an electronic index containing extensive information on the cases. Such indexes themselves may be selected for permanent retention. NARA may also select as permanent those final reports and decisions drawn from case files but maintained separately.

15. **Selected Data.**

- a. **Scientific and technical data.** These data result from observations of natural events or phenomena or from controlled laboratory or field experiments. They generally are created at project or operating levels rather than at higher office levels. They may be found in laboratory notebooks, completed forms, tabulations and computations, graphs, microforms, and electronic files. Generally data selected for permanent retention are unique, accurate, comprehensive, and complete, and they are actually or potentially applicable to a wide variety of research problems.
- b. **Social and economic microdata.** These are unsummarized data collected for input into periodic and onetime studies and statistical reports including information filed to comply with Government regulations. The information may be on such subjects as economic conditions, taxes, health care, demographic trends, education, discrimination, and other social science areas. It may also consist of data on natural resources including

their use, condition, and ownership; emergency operations including military actions and civil strife; political and judicial proceedings; national security activities; and international relations. Although agency reports and studies, briefing materials, and official releases often summarize these data, the unsummarized information, usually in the form of electronic records, may have permanent value.

In conclusion, many of the records described in this appendix are increasingly created in electronic form. For more detailed guidance on potentially permanent electronic records, agencies should refer to the examples given in [Chapter V](#) of this handbook.

Appendix D: Records Management Publications

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/records-mgmt.html>

Appendix E: List of Regional Records Services Facilities

<http://www.archives.gov/locations/>