

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about GRS 3.1, General Technology Management Records

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INTRODUCTION

1. What is the purpose of GRS 3.1?

This schedule provides disposition authority for records related to technology management, including records related to developing, operating, and maintaining computer software, systems, and infrastructure improvements; complying with information technology policies and plans; and maintaining data standards.

2. From whom may I request more information about this schedule?

Please contact NARA's General Records Schedules Team at GRS_Team@nara.gov with questions about this schedule.

CHANGES FROM THE OLD GRS

3. How does GRS 3.1 differ from the old General Records Schedules?

GRS 3.1 replaces half of the items from GRS 24, Information Technology Operations and Management Records. Other GRS items have been moved to 3.1 because they are similar in function and content, such as GRS 16, item 9, Feasibility Studies. Three items from GRS 20, Electronic Records now appear in 3.1:

- GRS 20, item 1a, Records Created to Test System Performance
- GRS 20, item 10, Special Purpose Programs
- GRS 20, items 11a1 and 11a2, Documentation

IT Customer Service Files (GRS 24, items 10a and 10b) are planned for development in a future GRS; the existing authorities are unchanged and are valid for use. The remaining items from GRS 24 are rescheduled in the new GRS 3.2, Information Systems Security Records.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN THIS SCHEDULE

4. What are the definitions of subject-specific terms used in GRS 3.1?

Information technology infrastructure (item 010)

Information technology (IT) Infrastructure means the basic systems and services used to supply the agency and its staff with access to computers and data communications. Components include hardware such as printers, desktop and laptop computers, network and web servers, routers, hubs, and network cabling, as well as software such as operating systems and shared applications (e.g., word processing).

The services necessary to design, implement, test, validate, and maintain such components are also considered part of an agency's IT infrastructure.

System development (item 011)

System development is the development of information technology (IT) systems and software applications through their initial stages up until hand-off to production and includes planning, requirements analysis, design, verification and testing, procurement, and installation.

Special purpose computer programs and applications (item 012)

Special purpose computer programs and applications are software that is developed by the agency or under its direction solely to use or maintain electronic records. (Item 012 covers such software for electronic records that are authorized for disposal in a GRS item or a NARA-approved records schedule.)

Master files (item 012)

Master files are the actual content of the electronic records series or system, or in other words the recordkeeping copy of an electronic record or system. Master files may consist of data, scanned text, PDFs, digital images, or some other form of electronic information. They may include the information content of an entire system or that of a group of related files. Related records within a single master file are not always the same format.

Configuration and change management (item 030)

Configuration and change management is a process or methodology used to develop, operate, and maintain computer software, systems, and infrastructure improvements.

Data administration (items 050 and 051)

Data administration includes maintenance of data standards, corporate data models, registries, and data definitions and dictionaries.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

5. Why doesn't GRS 3.1 cover system backups and other information security types of records?

GRS 3.1 addresses general records related to technology management. We devised GRS 3.2, Information Systems Security Records, to cover more specialized information security records. System backups are listed in GRS 3.2.

6. Why doesn't GRS 3.1 cover IT help desk records?

Since there are many types of help desks, GRS 24, items 10a and 10b, IT Customer Service Files, will be expanded and moved to GRS 5.8, Internal Help Desk Services Records. Since this schedule has not been developed, the current GRS 24, item 10a and 10b, disposition authorities remain valid and available for use.

7. Why doesn't GRS 3.1 apply to system data or content?

GRS 3.1 excludes system data or content because it would be impossible to apply an across-the-board retention period for these records. Instead, each dataset should be evaluated by an agency and submitted to NARA on a records schedule for approval.

8. Why does GRS 3.1 exclude records documenting the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the US Federal Chief Information Officers Council (CIO Council) government-wide information management planning and programming records?

These records are not included in the GRS since they are scheduled as agency records. Certain records maintained by Federal Chief Information Officers (CIO) and their program offices are covered currently under GRS 27, Records of the Chief Information Officer. CIO Committee Records and CIO Subject and Office Records will be addressed in another GRS.

9. Why aren't the OMB Exhibit 300 records covered explicitly by this GRS?

OMB Exhibit 300 business cases for major investments, systems, acquisitions, or operational assets identified in the agency's capital investment portfolio and related clearance and review records are covered under GRS 27, item 3, IT Capital Investment Records. There may be copies of the Exhibit 300 records within case files in GRS 3.1, such as Infrastructure Project Records (item 010). However, agencies should continue to file the recordkeeping copy as part of IT Capital Investment Records in GRS 27.

10. Why can't I use this schedule for contracts for IT projects?

Records needed to support contracts should be in procurement files, which are scheduled under GRS 1.1, Financial Management and Reporting Records.

11. I see several major series are being retained for 5 years with various implied cutoff instructions. Why can't I just keep everything in GRS 3.1 for 5 years?

The quick answer is these records are not maintained for a flat 5 years. Different series have different points in time in which the retention period starts based on the business processes related to the records. For instance, for one series the 5 year retention doesn't start until the project has terminated. For another, the retention period starts when the system itself is superseded or terminated. This can lead to considerably different amounts of time records are held by an agency. That being said, this does not preclude agencies from aggregating records into big buckets without NARA approval, provided they are not destroying records too soon. The reason is that this schedule allows agencies to retain all temporary records on the schedule for longer periods of time to meet business needs.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO ITEM 012

12. Why does Item 012 exclude software or applications necessary to use or maintain any unscheduled master file or database or any master file or database scheduled for transfer to the National Archives? Why does it also exclude commercial, off-the-shelf (COTS) programs or applications, unless modified?

Software and applications used in conjunction with permanent records are not covered by this GRS schedule because they may be needed to maintain and access the permanent records and therefore may be of permanent value. Such software and applications need to be scheduled and appraised on a case-by-case basis. Similarly, software and applications related to unscheduled records are excluded from this schedule because the related records may be of permanent value. Commercial, off-the-shelf (COTS) programs or applications, unless modified for use, are considered non-records.

13. Why does computer software need to be kept?

Computer software needs to be kept as long as needed to ensure access to, and use of, the electronic records in the system throughout the authorized retention period to comply with 36 CFR Sections 1236.10, 1236.12, 1236.14, and 1236.20.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO ITEM 030

14. Why do system management records need to be kept? Which schedule is appropriate for these types of records?

System management records are kept not only to keep track of systems changes, but also because they have a secondary value in that they are needed to understand electronic records transferred to NARA. Should system management activities have a major impact on a system or lead to a significant change, those records should be maintained as part of Item 014 Configuration and Change Management Records.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO ITEM 040

15. Why aren't security plans or Privacy Act System of Records Notices (SORNs) covered by Item 040?

While there may be copies of both documents interfiled within this series, oversight and compliance are not the primary functions associated with either document. Rather, security plans are scheduled under the GRS 3.2, Information Systems Security Records, and SORNs are covered by GRS 4.2, item 150.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO ITEM 050

16. Why do I not cite a separate GRS disposition authority for documentation when it is transferred to NARA with associated permanent electronic records?

Per NARA practice, documentation for permanent electronic records must be transferred with the related records using the disposition authority for the related electronic records rather than the GRS disposition authority. So, you will not be citing the GRS authority when you actually transfer the records but the disposition authority for the electronic records themselves.

This practice is to simplify transfer. NARA practice has been to accession system documentation along with the related records. Prior to the establishment of NARA's Electronic Records Archives (ERA), the GRS authority for system documentation was included along with the agency-specific authority for the master files on the paper SF-258. ERA, however, requires a separate Transfer Request for each disposition authority. To eliminate the need to create a separate transfer request for system documentation, practice has been to simply include the system documentation along with the related

records in the same Transfer Request. Additionally, records covered by GRS authorities cannot currently be transferred using ERA and a paper SF-258 must be used.

17. Why should I use item 050 for certain technical documentation (e.g., data dictionaries, file specifications, code books, record layouts, etc.) rather than items 011 System Development and 030 Configuration and Change Management Records?

When electronic records are scheduled as permanent in the GRS or in a NARA-approved agency schedule, the documentation that is needed to read and/or understand the records must be transferred to the National Archives to allow for continued access. Without these records NARA cannot provide access to the information; therefore the specific record types listed in item 030 have additional value beyond their use in system development and configuration management.