

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about GRS 5.7, Agency Accountability Records

INTRODUCTION

1. What is the purpose of GRS 5.7?

This schedule provides disposition authority for records agencies create and receive in the course of documenting accountability, both internally and to external oversight entities.

2. Whom do I contact for further information about this schedule?

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

GENERAL QUESTIONS

3. Why are you rescinding GRS 3, item 17?

GRS 3, item 17, Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization Files, covered the records of a special program initiated by Public Law 95-507 in 1978. That program ended in 2015. Therefore, agencies are no longer creating these records. As of mid-2017, some records under this authority remained in storage at Federal Records Centers. GRS 3, item 17, covers them until they are destroyed. If agencies still hold any of these records locally, they should destroy them when three years old per GRS 3, item 17. But agencies can no longer use the authority to retire records from this point forward.

4. Why are you rescinding GRS 16, item 11?

GRS 16, item 11, Information Resource Management Triennial Review files, was added to the GRS in 1987. It has continued in force despite the fact that the requirement to conduct this review was repealed in 1996. Since agencies no longer create these records, the item ceases to have purpose. As of mid-2017, some records retired to Federal Records Centers under this authority remained in storage. They will be covered by that authority until such time as they are destroyed. But agencies cannot use the authority to retire records from this point forward. Agencies should destroy any records still in their custody immediately, since their retention period under GRS 16, item 11, has long since passed.

QUESTION RELATED TO ITEM 010

5. Why do you exclude reports related to agency mission activities and consolidated final agency reports submitted to OMB or Congress?

We exclude these records from the GRS because, depending on the agency's mission, they may be of permanent value for historical research. That is why agencies must schedule them individually.

QUESTION RELATED TO ITEM 040

6. Does this item cover records created in the course of processing and submitting reports?

No. This item covers only the records administering a report's framework: why it exists, why it must be prepared and submitted, what subject matter it must include, how it is formatted, and similar parameters. In other words, these are records about the report's existence and structure. This item does not cover the final product (a prepared and submitted report) or the process whereby a particular report is assembled. Agencies must schedule those records based on the report's subject matter and the value of its information to both the agency's business processes and the Federal Government's historical record.

QUESTION RELATED TO ITEM 050

7. This item supersedes old GRS items that had 7-year and 6-to-10-year retention periods. How did you determine that a 6-year retention period is sufficient?

Old GRS 3, item 18a, Federal Activities Inventory Reform (FAIR) Act Records--Circular No. A-76 case files/studies maintained by office having primary responsibility, authorized agencies to destroy records within a 6-to-10-year band. The catch was that it required each agency to select a fixed period within that band. This band is not mentioned in Circular A-76 itself. New item 050 requires minimum a 6-year retention period and allows longer retention for business use. This is consistent with the old item except that the new item does not require an agency to set a single fixed period.

Old GRS 16, item 12, Information Collection Budget Files, had a 7-year retention period. NARA's dossier (N1-GRS-87-16) for this item gave no justification for this time frame; external stakeholder opinion ranged from 3 to 7 years. A 6-year retention period is justified for Information Collection Budget files because it is in keeping with similar reports also covered in this item and with financial reporting in GRS 1.1, item 010.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO ITEM 060

8. Why do you exclude records created and held by the Merit Systems Protection Board and the Office of Special Counsel from this item?

Handling cases described by this item is the mission of the Merit Systems Protection Board and the Office of Special Counsel. Agencies must schedule mission records independently. GRS 5.7, item 060, covers only case files created at other agencies, where they are administrative records.

9. Why do you exclude from this item records of whistleblowing cases handled internally within an agency?

The administrative and historical value of allegations of illegality, waste, corruption, or other misconduct reported to authorities within an agency varies from one agency to another, so cannot be defined by a single universal retention period. For example, honesty and good behavior of staff is expected in all agencies, but is mission-critical in law-enforcement and investigative agencies. Agencies must therefore individually schedule records documenting internal handling of misconduct allegations.