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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Using GRS 20 to Schedule Electronic Systems

August 21, 2012

1. What are input/source records?

Input records are the source of the information in an electronic system. They are records used to create, update, or modify master files when the master files are retained to meet recordkeeping requirements and are covered by a NARA-approved schedule. Input records may be electronic files or hard copy (non-electronic) documents. They may include records such as upload files staged for ingest into a system or hard copy forms scanned or otherwise entered into the system.

Not all input processes create separate records. Those that do not include:

- Structured data entered from online forms, structured data manually input directly into the system by user (no hard copy form), and unstructured (textual) data that is born digital (i.e., not scanned from paper).
- Data moved automatically from another system with no associated data file. Thus, the data is copied from one system to the other without creating an intermediary data file. (For example, data are pulled from one system to populate another, and fields from System X are used to populate System Y.) This does not cover data migrated from a legacy system to a new system.

2. How do you apply GRS 20 to input records?

TABLE 2.a: If the input records are in hard copy format:

DESCRIPTION OF INPUT RECORD	EXAMPLES	IS THE SOURCE RECORD ALREADY SCHEDULED?	LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY GRS	INSTRUCTION	GRS CITATION
Hard copy records entered or scanned into the system where the electronic version captures <i>all</i> information on the hard copy.	– Data entered into system from a paper form – Scanned images/PDFs of hard copy records	Yes; scheduled as permanent	Schedule states that records must be transferred in hard copy.	Apply existing disposition authority for source record.	GRS 20, item 2a1
			Electronic version does not meet NARA transfer standards.	Apply existing disposition authority for source record.	GRS 20, item 2a2

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DESCRIPTION OF INPUT RECORD	EXAMPLES	IS THE SOURCE RECORD ALREADY SCHEDULED?	LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY GRS	INSTRUCTION	GRS CITATION
			Schedule does not require hard copy transfer or is silent on format of records to be transferred to NARA and electronic format meets transfer standards.	Destroy 60 days after notifying NARA that e-system is replacing hard-copy records already scheduled as permanent and after the information has been converted and verified, when no longer needed for legal or audit purposes or to support the reconstruction of or serve as a backup to the electronic records.	GRS 20, item 2a4
		Yes; scheduled as temporary		Destroy after the information has been converted and verified, when no longer needed for legal or audit purposes or to support the reconstruction of or serve as a backup to the electronic records.	GRS 20, item 2a4
		No		GRS 20, item 2a4, may be applied to the source record once the electronic version is scheduled.	GRS 20, 2a (electronic version must be scheduled)
Hard copy records converted to electronic format but containing information not captured in electronic version.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Records with handwritten annotations – Records with layered attached notes – Color-dependent documents captured electronically only in black-and-white 	Yes		Apply existing disposition authority for source record.	GRS 20, item 2a3
		No		Input record must be scheduled because it is unique.	These records are not scheduled in the GRS

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DESCRIPTION OF INPUT RECORD	EXAMPLES	IS THE SOURCE RECORD ALREADY SCHEDULED?	LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY GRS	INSTRUCTION	GRS CITATION
Hard copy records where the electronic version does not replace the source record.	A case tracking system in which users input information from source documents, but the documents themselves remain a distinct entity outside the system	Yes		Apply existing disposition authority for source record.	These records are not scheduled in the GRS
		No		Input record must be scheduled because it is unique.	These records are not scheduled in the GRS

TABLE 2.b: If the input records are in electronic format:

Any electronic files created specifically from one system as an input to another system must either be covered by the GRS or separately scheduled, even if the originating system is scheduled.

DESCRIPTION OF INPUT RECORD	EXAMPLES	LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY GRS	INSTRUCTION	GRS CITATION
Electronic records used to create or update a master file.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work files – Valid transaction files – Intermediate input/output records 		Delete after information has been transferred to master file and verified.	GRS 20, item 1b
Electronic records entered into system during an update process.	Copies of data files or records from another system maintained by the agency	Required for legal or audit purposes.	Schedule input records.	GRS 20, item 2b
		Not required for legal or audit purposes.	Delete after electronic version is verified, or when no longer needed as a backup, whichever is latest.	
Electronic records received from another	Copies of data files or records from a system	Produced under an interagency agreement.	Schedule input records.	GRS 20, item 2c

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DESCRIPTION OF INPUT RECORD	EXAMPLES	LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY GRS	INSTRUCTION	GRS CITATION
agency and used as input/source records.	in another agency	Created for specific information needs of receiving agency.		GRS 20, item 2c
		Neither produced under an interagency agreement nor created for specific information needs of receiving agency.	Destroy after electronic version is verified, or when no longer needed for legal or audit purposes or as a backup, whichever is latest.	
Uncalibrated and unvalidated data collected in observation or measurement activities or research and development programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Scientific observational data from satellites – Research experimental test data 		Delete after the necessary data have been incorporated into a master file.	GRS 20, item 2d
Electronic records scheduled elsewhere and the system does not replace the source record.	A case tracking system in which users input information from source records, but the records themselves remain a distinct entity outside the system		Apply source system's existing authority or schedule source system if unscheduled.	These records are not scheduled in the GRS

3. What are electronic records/system master files?

Master files are the actual content of the electronic records series 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.

4. How does GRS 20 apply to electronic system master files?

The GRS only addresses whether or not existing NARA-approved records schedules may be applied to electronic master files that replace the hard copy records. GRS 20, item 3 applies to electronic records that replace temporary hard copy records. GRS 20, item 3.1 applies to electronic records that replace permanent hard copy records. If an electronic system replaces hard copy records that

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were never scheduled, both versions (hard copy and electronic records) must be retained until the electronic records are scheduled. New electronic systems that do not replace already scheduled hard copy records must also be scheduled of course.

TABLE 4.a: Master files replacing hard copy / analog records where the original hard copy/analog records are scheduled as media neutral

NOTE: Does not apply to electronic versions of records maintained on an agency website. For copies of agency records on websites, see Table 5 below.

DISPOSITION OF ORIGINAL	DESCRIPTION OF RECORD	CONDITIONS	IS A NEW SCHEDULE REQUIRED?	GRS/CFR CITATION
Temporary	Electronic records that replace temporary hard copy records.	Schedule is media neutral and does not explicitly exclude electronic records.	No	GRS 20, item 3b4; 36 CFR 1225.24(d)(2)
Permanent	Electronic records that replace permanent hard copy records.	Electronic records must meet NARA technical standards for permanent records.	No, but agencies must provide notification to NARA within 90 days of when electronic recordkeeping system becomes operational. Exception: Notification is not needed if the records are already being transferred to the National Archives as electronic records or were maintained electronically when the media neutral schedule item they fall under was approved by NARA.	GRS 20, item 3.1; 36 CFR 1225.24(a)
		Records that do not meet the conditions above.	Yes	GRS 20, item 3.1

TABLE 4.b: Master files replacing hard copy/analog records where the original hard copy/analog records are scheduled but not as media neutral

NOTE: A schedule is only media neutral if (1) it specifically states that it is media neutral or applies to records in all formats or (2) it was submitted after December 17, 2007, and is not explicitly limited to a single medium.

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NOTE: Does not apply to electronic versions of records maintained on an agency website. For copies of agency records on websites, see Table 5 below.

DISPOSITION OF ORIGINAL	DESCRIPTION OF RECORD	CONDITIONS	IS A NEW SCHEDULE REQUIRED?	GRS/CFR CITATION
Permanent	Any digital record previously scheduled in hard copy/analog format as permanent.	Electronic records must meet NARA standards for permanent records.	No, but agencies must provide notification to NARA within 90 days of when electronic recordkeeping system becomes operational.	GRS 20, item 3.1; 36 CFR 1225.24(a)
		Records that do not meet the conditions above.	Yes	GRS 20, item 3.1;
Temporary	Scanned Images	None.	No	GRS 20, item 3a; 36 CFR 1225.24(c)
	Audio/Visual Records	None.	No	GRS 20, item 3b3; 36 CFR 1225.24(b)
	Data relating to administrative housekeeping records covered by the GRS or an agency schedule.	Records covered by: Excepted are records covered by: GRS 1, item 21 (Employee Medical Folders); GRS 1, item 22 (Statistical Summaries); GRS 1, item 25f (Equal Employment Opportunity Statistics Files); GRS 12, item 3 (Telecommunications Operational Files); and GRS 18, item 5 (Top Secret Accounting and Control Files)	Yes	GRS 20, item 3b2; 36 CFR 1225.24(d)(1)
		All other records	No	GRS 20, item 3b1; 36 CFR 1225.24(d)(1)
	Program Records		Yes	GRS 20, item 3b5; 36 CFR 1225.22(h)(4)
	Records containing information from both administrative housekeeping and program records in a single data record.		Yes	GRS 20, item 3b5; 36 CFR 1225.22(h)(4); inferred from GRS 20, item 3 Note (1)

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5. How does GRS 20 apply to electronic copies of previously scheduled hard copy/analog records on agency web sites?

Electronic copies of previously scheduled hard copy/analog records on agency websites are not subject to the same media neutrality rules as non-website records. The rules below apply regardless of how the records were previously scheduled.

TABLE 5: Electronic copies of previously scheduled hard copy/analog records on agency web sites

DESCRIPTION OF RECORD	IS A NEW SCHEDULE REQUIRED?	GRS/CFR CITATION
Electronic copies on an agency web site of administrative housekeeping records.	No. Apply existing disposition instruction/authority.	GRS 20, Note after items 3 and 3.1; 36 CFR 1225.22(h)(3)
Electronic copies on an agency web site of program records.	Yes	GRS 20, Note after items 3 and 3.1; 36 CFR 1225.22(h)(3)

6. What are output records?

Output records are records derived directly from the system master file. An example is a report that agency staff print from the system by clicking on a field or radio button in the system. By contrast, reports created using system information but not created directly from the system itself are not system output records. An example is an annual report that agency staff prepares based on reviewing information in the system.

7. How does GRS 20 apply to output records?

How GRS 20 may be applied depends on whether the output records are in electronic or hard copy format. If your output record does not fit under one of the descriptions in the below Tables, then it will need to be separately scheduled.

The following output records are not covered by the GRS:

- Query results or electronic reports created for a specific business need such as an established reporting requirement or a response to a formal request from a higher-level office of the agency or an entity external to the agency: File with appropriate related series, when applicable. If not applicable, these records must be scheduled.
- Query results, electronic reports, or other data extracts/summaries published on the web from program-related systems: These outputs must be scheduled. NOTE: This instruction only applies to outputs that are specifically published to the

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agency's website. It does not apply to electronic queries or reports that appear via the web when the system itself is web-based.

- Any hard copy records printed directly from the electronic systems that are not described below: File with appropriate related series, when applicable. If not applicable, these records must be scheduled.

TABLE 7.a: Electronic output records

DESCRIPTION OF RECORDS	EXAMPLES	DISPOSITION INSTRUCTION	RECORDS EXCLUDED FROM COVERAGE	GRS CITATION
Data files created by summarizing or aggregating information from a single master file or database that is scheduled as temporary on a NARA-approved schedule or is disposable under a GRS item.	– Data pulled from queries to produce a report	TEMPORARY. Delete when the agency determines the data files are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.	1. The originating master file was scheduled prior to January 1, 1988; 2. The outputs were created as disclosure-free files to allow public access to the information; 3. The originating master file was scheduled as permanent, but is no longer accessible or no longer exists.	GRS 20, item 4
Data files created by extracting records from a single master file or database that is scheduled as temporary on a NARA-approved schedule or a GRS item.		TEMPORARY. Delete when the agency determines the data files are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.	1. The outputs were created as disclosure-free files to allow public access to the information; 2. If the extraction process changes the informational content of the originating master file; 3. If the originating master file was scheduled as permanent, but is no longer accessible.	GRS 20, item 5
Data files extracted from a master file or database without changing it and used solely to produce hard copy publications and/or printouts of tabulations, ledgers, registers, and statistical reports. (These files were created in prior years in the	– Print File	TEMPORARY. Delete when the agency determines the files are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.		GRS 20, item 6

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DESCRIPTION OF RECORDS	EXAMPLES	DISPOSITION INSTRUCTION	RECORDS EXCLUDED FROM COVERAGE	GRS CITATION
mainframe environment, but generally are not created in the current desktop environment.)				
Electronic queries or ad hoc reports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Routine system queries that are not printed out. – Routine reports generated and viewed in electronic format within the system – Electronic queries or reports used for one-time review or in lieu of hard copy reports – Routine electronic queries or reports from web-based systems 	TEMPORARY. Delete when the agency determines the files are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.		GRS 20, item 12a and/or GRS 20, item 12b
Electronic queries or reports published on the web from administrative housekeeping systems.		TEMPORARY. Delete when the agency determines the files are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.		GRS 20, item 12a and/or GRS 20, item 12b

Table 7.b: Hard copy output records

DESCRIPTION OF RECORDS	EXAMPLES	DISPOSITION INSTRUCTION	RECORDS EXCLUDED FROM COVERAGE	GRS CITATION
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DESCRIPTION OF RECORDS	EXAMPLES	DISPOSITION INSTRUCTION	RECORDS EXCLUDED FROM COVERAGE	GRS CITATION
Queries or reports that are printed out to meet ad hoc business needs.		<p>TEMPORARY. Destroy when the agency determines the printouts are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.</p> <p>These printouts may also be filed with appropriate related series, when applicable, and disposed of in accordance with the approved schedule for that series.</p>	Printouts containing substantive information, such as substantive annotations, that is not included in the electronic record.	GRS 20, item 16

8. What other system-related records are covered by the GRS 20?

TABLE 8.a: System Documentation

The GRS also addresses system documentation, which includes data systems specifications, file specifications, codebooks, record layouts, user guides, output specifications, and final reports (regardless of medium) relating to a master file, database, or other electronic records.

DESCRIPTION OF RECORDS	GRS CITATION/DISPOSITION INSTRUCTION
System documentation for temporary systems.	GRS 20, item 11a1: TEMPORARY. Destroy or delete upon authorized deletion of the related electronic records or upon the destruction of the output of the system if the output is needed to protect legal rights, whichever is later.
System documentation for permanent systems.	GRS 20, item 11a2: PERMANENT. Transfer to the National Archives with the permanent electronic records to which the documentation relates. If the records are being transferred via the Electronic Records Archives, do not use this GRS item to transfer the documentation, but instead use the disposition authority for the master files.

TABLE 8.b: Records relating to system maintenance

DESCRIPTION OF RECORDS	GRS CITATION/DISPOSITION INSTRUCTION
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Records Relating to System Performance Testing Electronic files or records created solely to test system performance, as well as hard copy printouts and related documentation for the electronic files/records.	GRS 20, item 1a: TEMPORARY. Delete/destroy when the agency determines that they are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.
Records Relating to System Usage Electronic files and hard copy printouts created to monitor system usage, including, but not limited to, log-in files, password files, audit trail files, system usage files, and cost-back files used to assess charges for system use.	GRS 20, item 1c: TEMPORARY. Delete/destroy when the agency determines they are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.
Backup Files of Permanent Electronic Records Electronic copy, considered by the agency to be a Federal record, of the master copy of an electronic record or file and retained in case the master file or database is damaged or inadvertently erased that are identical to records scheduled for transfer to the National Archives.	GRS 20, item 8a: TEMPORARY. Delete when the identical records have been captured in a subsequent backup file or when the identical records have been transferred to the National Archives and successfully copied.
Backup Files of Temporary Electronic Records Electronic copy, considered by the agency to be a Federal record, of the master copy of an electronic record or file and retained in case the master file or database is damaged or inadvertently erased that are identical to records authorized for disposal in a NARA-approved records schedule.	GRS 20, item 8b: TEMPORARY. Delete when the identical records have been deleted, or when replaced by a subsequent backup file.
Special Purpose Programs Application software necessary solely to use or maintain a master file or database authorized for disposal in a GRS item or a NARA-approved records schedule, EXCLUDING special purpose software necessary to use or maintain any unscheduled master file or database or any master file or database scheduled for transfer to the National Archives.	GRS 20, item 10: TEMPORARY. Delete when related master file or database has been deleted.
User Identification, Profiles, Authorizations, and Password Files Routine systems, i.e., those not covered by GRS 24, item 6a. EXCLUDING records relating to electronic signatures.	See GRS 20, item 1c: TEMPORARY. Delete/destroy when the agency determines they are no longer needed for administrative, legal, audit, or other operational purposes.

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