



# BEST PRACTICES FOR WRITING DESCRIPTIONS

One of the keys to a successful records schedule is good descriptive information. Records schedules must clearly identify the records they cover, how those records are created or received, and how they are used. It is helpful to describe the functions and activities related to the records.

## Writing a Good “Additional Schedule Information” Section

This optional field allows you to enter information relevant to the overall schedule, such as:

- Descriptions of the functions and activities related to the records
- Information about the program or office that creates the records
- The context for why records are being rescheduled; for example, a change in business processes or reorganization of the agency
- Information about related records scheduled elsewhere

This is not where you should describe the records themselves, or schedules being superseded.

## Additional Schedule Information Examples

[DAA-0370-2021-0001](#) - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

In 1990, Congress passed the Breaux Act (Public Law 101-646, Title III CWPPRA); it is authorized until 2019. The purpose of the Coastal Wetlands, Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) is to plan, design, construct, maintain, and monitor coastal wetlands restoration projects that provide for the long-term conservation of wetlands & their dependent fish & wildlife populations in coastal Louisiana.

CWPPRA is managed by a Task Force composed of the state of Louisiana (Governor’s Office of Coastal Activities) & 5 Federal agencies: the Environmental Protection Agency, Fish & Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, & the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Each Federal agency partners with the state to design & build coastal restoration projects developed from the parish level up. The Corps chairs the Task Force, the Technical Committee, & various other subcommittees & workgroups that include restoration professionals such as engineers, scientists, & academic representatives. The National Marine Fisheries, Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) is NOAA’s voting member of CWPPRA’s oversight committee that selects projects for three phases of funding: Engineering and Design, Construction, and Operations and Maintenance. When nominating a project, Division staff gathers data, prepare designs, and perform cost-to-benefit

analyses. HCD-sponsored projects are in competition against other projects to win Engineering & Design funds, and again later to win Construction, Operations, Maintenance and Monitoring funds.

Projects are born through CWPPRA's annual planning process called the "Priority Project List" or "PPL." The process begins in January each year; CWPPRA Regional Planning Teams meet with parish residents to brainstorm & develop restoration projects for their areas - this local interaction is a fundamental concept of CWPPRA & the key first step to getting projects off the ground. As the year progresses, proposed projects are evaluated based on several factors and certain ones are selected for more review. Each parish has a voting representative & opportunity to work intimately with CWPPRA agencies & voice comments during CWPPRA's public meetings. Proposed projects compete for limited annual funds. The Task Force makes the ultimate selection of projects for each PPL. Selections move to engineering & design (Phase 1) & later, if selected for Phase 2, advance to construction. Approved CWPPRA projects are operated, maintained and managed for 20 years and then closed out.

[DAA-0060-2021-0003](#) - Department of Justice, Department-wide

The role and function of a Department of Justice (DOJ) Organizational Ombuds is to provide a neutral, impartial, fair, and confidential avenue for employees to informally explore resolving workplace conflicts. An Ombuds's functions are governed by the International Ombuds Association Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

An Ombuds provides informal and confidential assistance geared toward empowering employees and managers to constructively resolve work-related issues related to policy concerns, interpersonal problems, leadership issues, career development, human resources, organizational change, efficiencies of operations concerns, or any other area that has a correlation to the DOJ mission.

An Ombuds advocates for fair and equitably administered processes and does not advocate on behalf of any individual within the DOJ. Ombuds do not make binding decisions, mandate policies, or formally adjudicate issues for the DOJ. Using an Ombuds supplements, but does not replace, any formal channels. Use of the service is voluntary, and is not a required step in any grievance process or DOJ organizational policy. An Ombuds does not participate in any formal investigative or adjudicative procedures. Formal investigations are conducted by other DOJ offices. When a formal investigation is requested, an Ombuds refers individuals to the appropriate DOJ office or individual.

## Writing Good Item Descriptions

Clear record descriptions make for easier to use schedules. It also makes it easier for NARA to appraise the schedule. Adequate, clear, and accurate descriptions aid in implementing an approved schedule.

### Why are item descriptions important?

It is important to describe each item listed on the records schedule clearly and accurately. ***This task is much easier if the agency has properly inventoried its record holdings.***

The following guidelines are useful in describing items:

- Item descriptions should identify records so that a member of the public can understand the item. This can include limiting the use of jargon and spelling out acronyms.
- Item descriptions should include the type of records covered by the series and their informational content. Record types in this context include, for example, data, reports, audio, or maps.
- For large aggregate/open items, describe and title the item by the subject or function to which it relates. For example, if the item is to cover all records related to a specific activity, such as inspections, title the item “Inspections” and describe the activity and the types of records it involves.
- Identify reports as statistical or narrative and state their frequency.
- Don’t use form numbers by themselves. Use “forms relating to” and describe the function or activity. If you must include the form numbers, describe the content and purpose of the form and use "such as" before the form number. Otherwise, changing form numbers can void disposition authorizations.

## Describing Items

Item descriptions can have many, hierarchical components on the schedule. In most cases, you only need an item title and description. However, sometimes it is useful to group items under common descriptions.

### Titles

- Titles should be brief, using only a few words to identify the records or function.
- Titles should be understandable. Use plain language that someone from outside your agency will understand.
- Spell out acronyms and avoid abbreviations.
- Do not include agency file codes or similar identifiers. There is a separate field to capture this information.

### Descriptions

- Describe the content, function, and purpose of the records or activity.
- Include examples of the types of records covered by the item, although it is not necessary to list out every possible record type.
- The description should be clear and understandable. Anyone should be able to tell if a record would fall under the item description or not.

### Groups

Use a “group” when there are many disposition items that have a common, overarching description. Use groups only when necessary.

- Do not create groups that have only one item.
- Do not create groups where all the items on the schedule are in the group. In this instance the schedule itself is the group.

## Examples:

- There are different versions of the same record with different retention needs. For example, the agency uses the same record for different activities that each have a different retention need.
- Retention of a record is dependent on what is done with the records. For example, approved cases have one retention and disapproved cases have another.

Groups must have a title, but the description is optional. Do not repeat information in the description that will appear in the item. Only include information that applies to all items in the group.

## Describing Items Examples

### Items

[DAA-0307-2020-0002](#) - National Science Foundation, Directorate for Geosciences (GEO)

**Item:** Antarctica Deployment Training Records Disposition

**Description:** Records of mission-related training specific to NSF's operations in Antarctica, including course content training materials, and trainee tracking and completion information. Training courses includes station orientation, environmental compliance, field safety, vehicle operation, environmental compliance, field safety, vehicle operation, and related topics.

[DAA-0103-2018-0001](#) - Farm Credit Administration, Office of Inspector General

**Item:** Audit, Inspection, Evaluation, and Other Review Workpapers

**Description:** Records created or acquired that are used to develop final reports of audits, inspections, evaluations, and other non-investigative reviews conducted or supervised by the Office of Inspector General. Workpapers include documentation used to support report findings, conclusions, and recommendations--including, but not limited to, interview notes, pre-review findings, planning materials, correspondence, memoranda and draft reports. Also included are follow-up files, which are created after a report is issued and are used by the OIG to monitor and document actions taken in response to OIG reports.

**Item:** Peer Review Files

**Description:** Records summarizing the results of external peer reviews of OIG audit, inspection and evaluation, or investigative functions. Includes final reports and associated attachments for reviews conducted by or of the FCA OIG. Also includes documentation used to support FCA OIG findings, conclusions, and recommendations--including, but not limited to, interview notes, pre-review findings, planning materials, correspondence, memoranda and draft reports.

## Groups with Items

[DAA-0370-2021-0001](#) - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

**Group:** Programmatic and Financial Records

**Group description:** This series documents that NOAA is the committee lead or the sole Federal lead on a produced document or activity, such as the design, Work in Kind sheets, deauthorizations on transfers.

**Item 0001:** Unfunded Proposals for Funding (i.e, nominations and candidates) Disposition Authority

**Item description:** This series documents proposals, which were not funded for the year. The proposal file consists of the proposal description, drawings, public presentations, and funding requirements. These records contain a number supporting background data related to restoration planning as well.

**Item 0002:** All Other Non-Project Specific Information

**Item description:** This series documents, policies, statutes and other guidance referenced in reviewing the proposal.