

On screen: The National Archives logo, an eagle with a wing outstretched, appears on screen with the words, "Word of the Week: File Plan."

Narrator: Our word of the week is file plan. A file plan is a helpful records management tool that makes it easier for you and others in your office to find and manage records.

On screen: A split screen shows a vintage road map on top, with a file plan on the bottom. The file plan is a set of rows and columns listing a file number, a records series title and description, filing and disposition instructions, and records location information. As the narrator speaks, small file cabinets and computers appear on the road map.

Narrator: You could think of a file plan as a road map to your records. A file plan lists the different types of records maintained by an office, along with information about where and how those records are stored, and how long they are to be kept. It doesn't take long to prepare a file plan, and there are several good reasons to create one.

On screen: A black and white photograph showing a web of highways with cars driving on them. Next to the image are the words "File plans make it easier to know where to go for the information you need."

Narrator: File plans make it easier for everyone to know what kinds of records your office has, and where those records are stored. File plans are especially useful for new employees, staff who are cross-training or helping in another department, and others who might not work with your records on a daily basis.

On screen: A black and white image of a curving highway with vintage advertising billboards along the side of the road.

Narrator: A good file plan can help your legal counsel and Freedom of Information Act staff locate needed records more quickly. It also makes it much easier for you and your colleagues to know what information to keep, and for how long.

On screen: A 1970s color photograph of men in suits standing around a red sports car. Instead of having regular car doors, the car opens at a hinge along the top. The roof is tilted up, and a man is sitting in the car. On the screen are the words, "File plans make the transition to new electronic systems easier, too."

Narrator: A file plan can even make the transition to electronic recordkeeping easier by helping you build more effective organization and records retention practices into new electronic information systems.

On screen: A vintage map labeled "Forest Camps of the Naches Highway, Rainier National Forest" is accompanied by the words "A file plan covers one specific department, area, or file station."

Narrator: It doesn't take long to create a file plan for your office. Unlike a records schedule, which usually covers all the records for an entire agency or a major program, a file plan lists only those types of records held in a particular office, department, or file station. It's a road map to one small part of your organization's information world.

On screen: A file plan appears on screen. It has five columns of information. The far left column holds file code numbers. The second column lists a series title and description. For example, line one has file number 105 for file series Travel Files, which is described as "Travel orders and related records." The third column has filing and disposition instructions. For example, "file by fiscal year, then by last name. Cut off at end of fiscal year. Destroy or delete 6 years after cutoff." The fourth column has location information for the files. For example, "Environmental Research Main File Station, Cabinet 2." The fifth column has a space for notes.

Narrator: Let's take a look at an example. You can customize the structure and arrangement of your file plan to suit your organization. In this plan for the Environmental Research department, they've listed only the types of records that department creates and maintains. This office has several different series, or types, of records. They have taken the descriptions and retention instructions for just those series of records and they have used them to build their file plan.

On screen: As the narrator speaks, a marker labels each column. The marker points to column one and says "File code from records schedule."

Narrator: The first column in this file plan lists the file number, or file code. This number ties the file plan back to the organization's approved records schedule.

On screen: The marker points to column two and says "Records series title and description from records schedule."

Narrator: They have also included the records series title – that's the name the office uses to refer to this type of records – and a short description of the records so others will be able to understand what the files are and how they are used. This information is usually taken directly from the records schedule, but the office could add more detail if needed.

On screen: The marker points to column three and says "Filing instructions and disposition (retention) information."

Narrator: The third column describes how the records are filed. This can be especially helpful when someone is trying to retrieve records or when someone new is helping you get caught up on your filing. The file plan also lists the official, approved retention time for the records. If you have records that do not yet have a schedule, or records that are "frozen" (that is, records that have had their schedule suspended because of an audit or lawsuit), you would list that information on the file plan, too.

On screen: The marker points to the fourth column and says, "Location of the records in the office and online."

Narrator: The file plan tells the location of the records in your office. You can include both paper and electronic records in your file plan. This example points to records in the department's central files area, and it also identifies records that are stored on a shared drive and in an information system.

On screen: The marker points to the last column and says, "Other notes – records needed for continuity of operations, records with special handling requirements."

Narrator: Your file plan can help your office identify special types of records. If records require special handling because they contain personal or confidential information, you can note that on the file plan. You can also identify vital records – the essential records your office will need when responding to or recovering from a disaster.

On screen: A black and white 1940s picture of a large flat-bed tow truck. On the back of the truck is perched a small 1940s truck.

Remember: A file plan is really a smaller, office-specific version of your agency's records schedule that includes information on how and where the records are kept. You'll customize your file plan to fit your office and your records. Here's how to get started.

On screen: A black and white 1940s photograph of a man sitting at a desk. There are filing cabinets behind him and in-boxes of papers in front of him. He is reading a document. The words "Step one: Identify the types of records in your office" appear on screen.

Narrator: First, you need to identify the series – the different types – of records your office creates and maintains. You'll note what they are, and where they are stored. You'll want to check out any central filing areas for paper records and your shared drives and online information systems for electronic files. Be sure to talk to others in your office, too. You want to identify all the different types of records and their storage locations.

On screen: A black and white picture of two men sitting at a desk. They are looking at a stack of papers. On screen are the words "Step two: Match the records to our records schedule."

Narrator: Next, you'll match the different types of records you identified with your organization's records schedule. If you don't know how to find your records schedule, be sure to ask your records manager or Records Officer.

On screen: A black and white photograph of three men with drafting tools writing on a map. On screen are the words, "Step three: Build your file plan."

Narrator: Using the information from your records schedule, you'll put together a file plan listing just the types of records in your office, along with their filing and retention instructions and information on where to file and find the records.

On screen: Black and white photograph of three men in uniform looking at a pile of papers on a counter. On screen are the words, "Step four: Review and approve the plan."

Narrator: You'll want to make sure that everyone in your office understands the file plan and can use it. Now is the time to review the plan and make sure it is accurate and complete. You may want to have management approve the plan, and in some organizations, the records manager or Records Officer also reviews and approves each department's file plan.

On screen: A black and white photograph of two men examining a map. On screen are the words, "Make the file plan accessible. Review it annually."

Narrator: Once you have completed your file plan, you'll want to post a copy on your Intranet or at your designated file stations so it's easy for people to find. Plan to review and update your file plan each year, or whenever you make changes to your office, your records schedule, or your information systems.

On screen: The same black and white picture of a curving highway we saw earlier.

Narrator: If you take these few simple steps to create an office file plan, you'll be on the road to faster, easier, more efficient retrieval and management of your department's records.

On screen: The National Archives logo appears again, with the words, "For more information about the U. S. National Archives and records management, visit www.archives.gov."

Narrator: If you'd like more information about file plans, records schedules, and other records management tools and techniques, visit us online at archives.gov.

On screen: A black screen with the National Archives and Records Management Training Program logo.