Managing Government Records - Module 2

Classifying Records

This module helps you to:

- Streamline your efforts to organize your work.
- Make the right decisions about numbering and naming files.
- Act confidently in deciding what is a record.

Introduction

So, you have a piece of paper with your notes on it and you need to know what to do with it.

Knowing these three things will put you on the right road:

1. What needs to be kept as a record and filed.
2. Whether this is something new or part of an existing file.
3. How to classify it.

You will save time right from the start by knowing whether you have to keep something or not, so that is where we will start.

1. What is a record?

Does your piece of paper with handwritten notes even need to be filed? Is it a record that must be kept? To help you decide, you need to know what counts as a record in the BC Government:

Definition of a Record

A record is essentially anything that contains information that needs to be kept as evidence of a decision or action. It includes "books, documents, maps, drawings, photographs, letters, vouchers, papers and any other thing on which information is recorded or stored by any means whether graphic, electronic, mechanical or otherwise".

(Summary of *Interpretation Act*, RSBC 1979, c. 206, s.29)

Let us look at the main purposes for keeping records.

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2. Purposes for keeping records

You will keep a record for one or more of these four purposes:

1. Legal (e.g., freedom of information, potential litigation)
2. Evidential (e.g., record that certain steps were taken)
3. Historical (e.g., indication of how a process has changed over time)
4. Financial (e.g., to document financial transactions)

In other words, a record should be "substantive" to be kept. Examples would be records that:

- Reflect decision-making (e.g., minutes from a meeting where policy was defined)
- Contain policy or procedures (e.g,. memo on policy)
- Call for a reply or action (e.g., notes on a grievance case)
- Document ministry business (e.g., audit notes)

You now have the main concepts to help you decide if your document is a record that needs to be kept.

Now let's talk about records that do not have to kept for legal, evidential, historical, or financial purposes. We call these types of records "transitory". Their use is short lived and when you no longer require the records you have the legal authority to dispose of them under the special schedule for Transitory Records (schedule 102901). Transitory records include working materials and drafts, copies kept for reference, emails such as alerts, ministry-wide broadcasts, facility updates, pamphlets, etc. Formal approval from the Ministry Records Management team is **not** required when destroying transitory records; however you should ensure that confidential, sensitive or personal information is shredded. The transitory records schedule is one of the "Special Schedules" discussed at the end of Module 1.

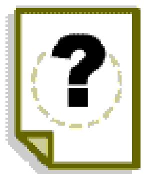
Click on the icon to learn all about the transitory records schedule.

So you now know what records you can dispose of (transitory) and what records you need to keep. For the records you are keeping, your next question is where?

3. Determining if this is a new file

Ask yourself the following question:

Is it something old or new?



Basically, you need to know whether to place your document in an existing file or create a new one. At this point you will find it is one of two possibilities:

1. An open file is a match: Great! Put it into that file.
2. No file open that matches: You will need a primary number, secondary number, and possibly a file code or acronym. These are the components that make up a file. *(Not to worry, we will learn all about these components as we move on.)*

How do you determine if there is an existing file:

Check the existing local "**file list**". Your branch records coordinator can tell you where to find the local file list in your program area.

Scan down the file list to locate the appropriate classification.

Transcribe the number and coding onto your document if you find a match.

Click here

In most cases, people only deal with 15-20 different file classifications for all their work. Here's a checklist to help you decide if there's a match. If, after all this, you are sure it is something new, you will classify it.

4. OPR or non-OPR?

Okay, so your document is a not a transitory record. And it needs a new file created for it. Before you set up the file number, you will find it helpful to have some background on who is responsible for this set of files.

There are two levels of responsibility for records. *ARCS* always lists two different retention periods for the same classification, one for the Office of Primary Responsibility (OPR) and one for the non-OPR.

The OPR office would have the most complete record and would retain the record for a longer period of time than all other ministry offices. It is the OPR record that is retained for long-term legal and historic value.

If you ever see the designation "non-OPR" - the non-OPR offices keep the records for active or daily use. Once the immediate need for the records has diminished the records are scheduled for immediate destruction. The standard non-OPR retention is SO nil DE.

An example is approved agreements for Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which has an OPR retention and final disposition of SO 6y SR. The OPR retains the agreement six years beyond its expiry after which it may retained by the government archives. The non-OPR office retains it only for current use until its expiry and then destroys it.

Now on to how you are going to identify this file so you and others can find it easily!

5. Assigning primary and secondary numbers

You will need to assign a primary and secondary number to every record and in many instances you will also assigned a unique code, sometimes referred to as a tertiary code.

Let us look at all the components that make up a file name.

Primary Number and Title - relates to the main subject (e.g., ACCOUNTS – PAYABLE)

- To assign a primary number you must first read the scope note, which is a description of the content, and any cross-reference notes for that primary. Ask yourself; is the material you are trying to classify described in the scope note? If not, try one of the other cross-references (the “for … see ..” notes).
- If you are having trouble coming up with the classification, consult your co-workers.
- Often the best person to help with the classification is the one who created or received the document. They will often be the most familiar with the document’s purpose.

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Note: we are all responsible for managing information.

- After you find a primary number that looks appropriate, it is time to choose the right secondary number.

Secondary Number and Title	Relates to specific files covered by the primary (e.g., -30 Statements of account). See below to learn about the different types of secondaries. You cannot make up your own secondary numbers.

Secondary -**00** is always reserved for a **Policy and procedures** file within the primary.

Secondary **-01** is always reserved for a **General file** Classify records here only when the records relate to the primary but do not belong in any of the existing secondaries, and are needed only for reference purposes. Although it is very tempting to put 'stuff' in the general file try to avoid doing that, unless it truly does not fit anywhere else.

Secondaries -**02 to -19** are for **Subject files**. This means the records under here relate to one topic.

Secondaries -**20** and above are for **Case files**. Case files relate to a common function or activity. Each case file contains records pertaining to a specific time-limited entity, such as a person, event, project, transaction, product, organization, etc. The component records within each file in a case file series are generally consistent; that is, a file may contain a variety of documents (such as forms, correspondence, reports, and photographs), but this variety will be consistent with other files in the same series.

- Read the secondaries to see where the record best fits.
- Look at the retention schedule indicated for the secondary and ensure that the schedule reflects the length of time the material should be retained. For example, if you have an invoice and you are trying to code it and the retention says to keep it for 15 years, you should try again. Common sense would say that's way too long! That said, sometimes documents are retained for longer than necessary for the sake of keeping them with related documents in the appropriate file.
- You will learn all about retention periods in Module 3: Life Cycles of Records.

The hardest part is over! Now we will learn all about the tertiary or coded series.

6. Assigning codes

Coded Series (or tertiary)

Case files are usually subdivided through the use of codes. A code identifies the specific person, project, contract or other entity covered by the file. Codes can take the form of proper names, acronyms, or alphanumeric codes. For example you could have many different contracts files in your office. The primary and secondary would be 1070-20 with a code based on the contractor name to identify each individual contract.

e.g., 1070-20/BBIR

1070-20/DOME

Explanatory Notes

Explanatory notes are used in *ARCS* to provide information critical to understanding the records, to explain office procedures and practices, and to summarize provisions governing the creation, processing, accessing and disposition of documents. There are two types of explanatory notes:

- "Includes" qualifier - this lists forms or types of records covered by the secondary (e.g., "includes standing and temporary travel advances"_.
- "Arrange" qualifier - this gives the method of arrangement (e.g., "arranged by name of supplier or individual").

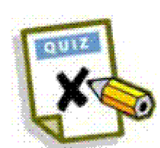
Other Notes

SO note - this note explains when a file designated SO should be closed.

SR/FR/DE - these notes explain why records are being selectively or fully retained, or (if not self-evident) why they are being destroyed.

FOI note- this note explains issues of confidentiality relating to the records.

Test your knowledge with a short quiz. Just click on the quiz icon to get started. Once you are finished with the quiz, check how well you did by clicking on the answers icon.



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Continue on to Module 3: Life Cycles of Records.

Answers