Transitory Information

Not all government information needs to be retained. This guide provides in-depth assistance to help you identify information that is transitory and understand the requirements of the Transitory Information Schedule. If all you need is the basics, see RM Quick Tips: Transitory Information.

Contents

How Can I Identify Transitory Information?

The Transitory Information Schedule defines and categorizes transitory information and establishes retention and disposition requirements for it. The Quick Tips Guide provides a discussion of what is and is not transitory information, as well as a summary of the categories. This guide provides an analysis of those categories and examples of each, finishing with a table of examples that are NOT transitory.

Individual employees do not need formal authorization to destroy transitory information, so long as the records are not needed for a FOIPPA or legal search and the destruction is secure. However, employees sometimes do need help determining whether information is transitory or not.

Most transitory information is easy to identify because it has not been filed and is not needed for any reason. Some information is harder to assess, especially after relevant actions are completed. Content and context determine whether information is transitory, not its format or medium. If an email, handwritten note, draft, or copy is essential to understanding government business (e.g. how a decision was reached or program delivered), then the record must be kept.
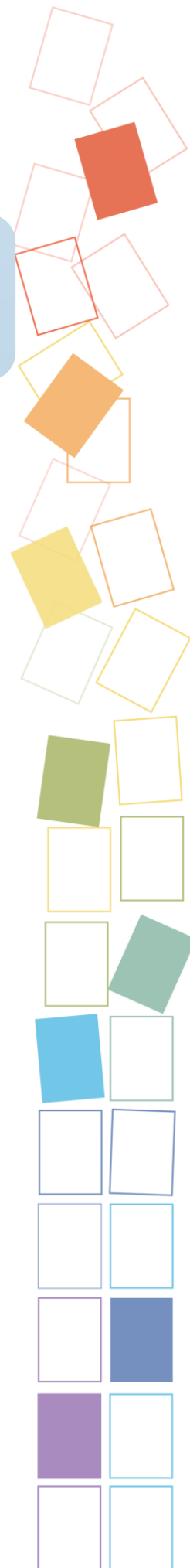
Records that are scheduled and classified in information schedules and/or filed in the office recordkeeping system are never transitory. They need to be managed appropriately and securely destroyed in accordance with government requirements (see the Managing Government Information Policy and the Recorded Information Management Manual).

What Are My Transitory Information Responsibilities?

Both the Transitory Information Schedule and the Appropriate Use Policy (AUP) require employees to:
- dispose of transitory information that they are responsible for when it is no longer needed,
- ensure that the information is not relevant to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request or request for legal discovery before proceeding with destruction, and
- always ensure that destruction occurs in a secure and confidential manner.

As a government employee, you need to be able to distinguish transitory information from records and data that document decisions and actions. Routinely deleting transitory information ensures that the information being stored and managed by your ministry is the information it needs to keep.

Documenting Government Decisions

For more information on the requirements to document government decisions, see the Chief Records Officer Guidelines on Documenting Government Decisions.

To comply with the *Information Management Act* government bodies must:
- ensure that an appropriate system is in place for maintaining government information
- create and maintain adequate records of their decisions

If your information contains evidence of actions or decisions, it must be managed as records in the appropriate recordkeeping system.

Common Categories of Transitory Information

Information determined to be transitory includes, but is not limited to, records that are identified and described in the following common categories.

1   Transitory Messages

Transitory messages are casual or non-substantive messages, in any format, including attachments, that are of only short-term use and are not needed to document an action or decision. They can take many forms (e.g. email, instant
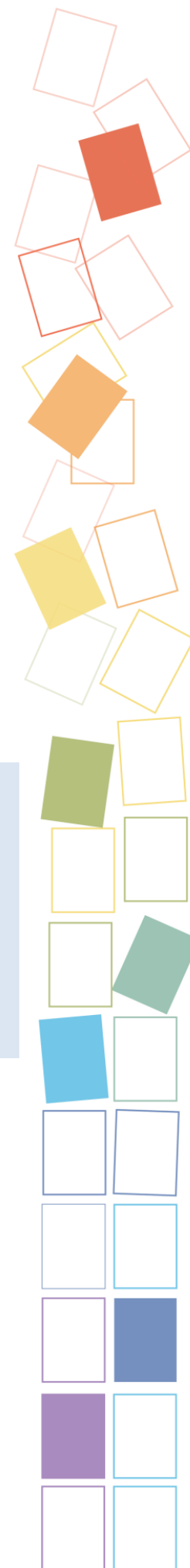
messages, chat messages in online collaboration tools, social media postings, facsimile [fax], voice/video message recordings).

Messages or attachments that are required for ongoing business needs are **not** transitory information. Due to their content or context, they must be retained (e.g. email documenting a policy decision, formal memo about government business, social media post that is the initial announcement of a government program). However, once these have been saved into an appropriate recordkeeping system, any additional copies of the messages may be considered transitory copies (see section 4).

Examples of Transitory Messages

- o announcements of social events
- o cc copies (unless you are the main staff member responsible for the matter)
- o emails conveying an attachment (if it doesn't add value to the attachment)
- o meeting arrangements
- o routine correspondence about drafts and revisions
- o requests to call someone

2 Transitory Drafts

Transitory drafts are preliminary or incomplete drafts that do not contain significant annotations, comments, approvals, or substantial changes providing insight into the evolution of the final version. Once a subsequent draft or finished record has been developed and filed, these drafts are no longer needed.

Is this draft transitory or not?

- ☐ Is it complete/final?
- ☐ Is this the latest version available (i.e. it hasn't been replaced by a new version)?
- ☐ Was this draft used for formal consultation and review?
- ☐ Does it document a decision or approval?
- ☐ Does it represent a substantial revision?
- ☐ Is this draft subject to legislative, policy, or information schedule requirements?

If you answer "YES" to any of these questions, keep the draft, it is NOT transitory.

Examples of Transitory Drafts

- o preliminary drafts that were never reviewed
- o interim drafts that reflect minor editorial changes
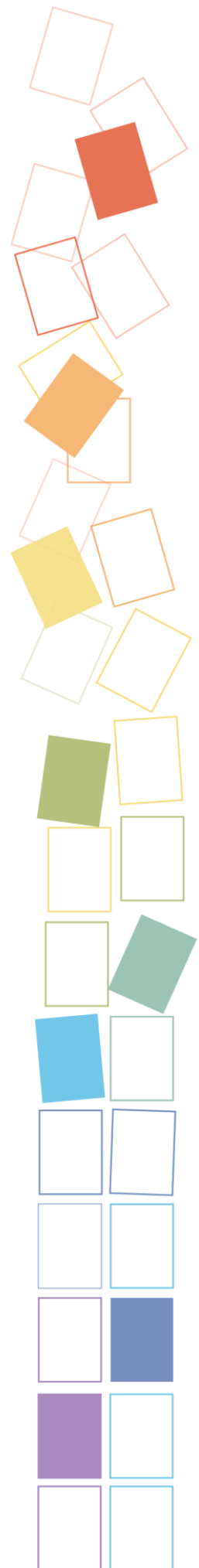
3   Rough Notes and Working Materials

Rough notes and working materials consist of preliminary, incomplete, or unused information recorded or gathered for the purposes of creating other documents, aiding memory, facilitating a routine action, or recording exploratory thoughts. They include documentation used to support projects and develop official records, often generated during brainstorming and collaboration activities.

Context and content affect the value of these records. If rough notes or other working materials are needed to understand a key decision-making process, particularly if the decision affected an individual, it is necessary to file and retain them (see CRO Directive 01-2019: Documenting Government decisions). Where subsequent or final records exist, however, the rough notes do not need to be kept, unless there is some other reason for doing so.

Examples of Transitory Rough Notes and Working Materials

- o   outlines, calculations, summaries, flipcharts and other rough notes not needed to support projects
- o   preliminary notes and working materials used to prepare a final record
- o   failed job output records resulting from abnormally ended jobs, programming errors, improper selection criteria, or unsuccessful data input

4   Transitory Copies

Transitory copies are duplicates of existing records made for convenience or reference. These copies are not authoritative copies needed to replace originals as evidence of actions, decisions, or consultation (see the Redundant Source Information Schedule Guide for more information about authoritative copies). The following types of copies are transitory information:

a) **Extra copies of records where the authoritative copy has already been saved** in an appropriate recordkeeping system. These include:
- • convenience copies
- • partial copies/extracts
- • copies made to support computer processing functions
- • copies used to support the development of other documents

b) **Output** from electronic systems created for reference purposes

c) **Supplies** of BC Government publications and forms/templates (not including the official file copy of the publication/form/template or completed forms)

Copies retained for reference purposes may be classified under *ARCS* 358-20 Library/topical reference materials.
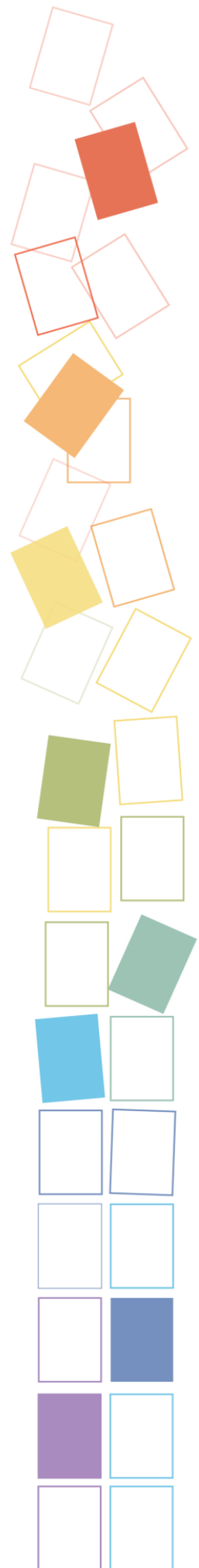
Examples of Transitory Copies

- o copies created for convenience (e.g. agendas printed for use at a meeting)
- o automatically generated copies of a master file that are no longer needed (e.g. processing/transmittal copies, user views that can be reconstituted)
- o supplies not distributed (e.g. forms, pamphlets, newsletters, reports)

5   Transitory Systems Information

Transitory systems documentation consists of information of temporary usefulness generated for, or resulting from, computer systems operations (also known as transitory electronic data processing [EDP] records). It includes:

a)   **Input source documents** used to enter information into a digital system (e.g. data entry forms), after which it is no longer needed

b)   **Automatically gathered/generated data processing information**, including:
- Data processing information generated in the process of transferring data between systems, obsolete after transfer is completed and validated
- System output/reports generated for reference or for a client, not needed as part of a file or for system maintenance
- Internet browsing documentation (e.g. browsing history, cookies, cache/temporary files)

c)   **Unneeded documentation of systems and internet usage**.

Transitory systems documentation excludes data in the systems. Data that has been migrated or converted and thereby rendered redundant is covered by the Redundant Source Information Schedule, section 3.

NOTE: Systems documentation that is needed for operational purposes, ongoing maintenance, or for purposes of an investigation, is **not transitory** and should be retained in accordance with *ARCS* (see primaries 6450 Information System Development and Changes and 470 Security Management) or the appropriate *ORCS*.

Examples of Transitory Systems Information

- o data entry forms and EDP records not needed after the information is entered into a system
- o internet browsing information (e.g. cookies, temporary internet files)
- o data from connected devices that is not used, or is duplicated/ summarized in reports)
- o empty folders and zero-byte files that have no further use
- o notes, forms, and other input source documents used for data entry
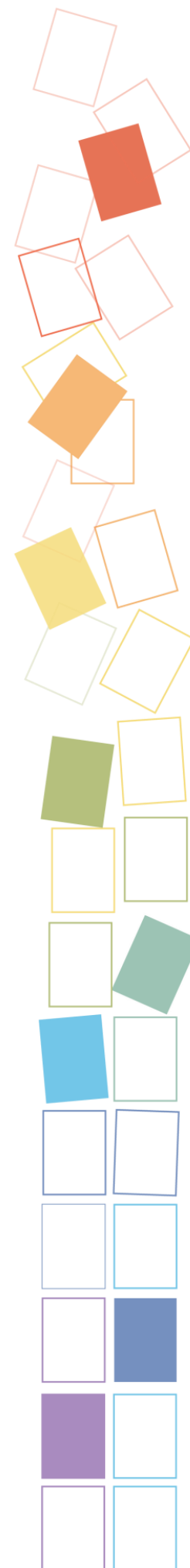
6   Transitory Information from External Sources

Transitory information from external sources includes solicited and unsolicited information from external sources that has been used solely for short-term reference purposes or not at all, including:

a) **Extracts or copies** of publications, promotional material, and other material from external sources.
b) **Unsolicited information** that is not used by the receiving office but may be redirected to the appropriate government body.
c) **Solicited and unsolicited information that is confidential in nature and is not needed to document a government action or decision.**

NOTE: It is important to promptly and securely destroy or return any transitory information that contains personal or other confidential information that is not used by the receiving office, including:

- information identified as confidential in legislation or policy, as well as
- information that may not normally be recognized as confidential, except in relation to specific groups such as Indigenous communities.

The provision to securely return information to the sender has been included in the Transitory Information Schedule and in this guide to allow for this to happen when it is necessary and appropriate, in accordance with relevant legislation, policy, or the needs of the sender. (Please note that it is not the action of returning the information to the sender that renders it transitory. If a copy is needed for government to take an action or make a decision, that copy should be retained in the appropriate recordkeeping system, even after the original is returned to the sender.)

Published items that are used as part of a procurement process or other transaction are **not** transitory.

Examples of Transitory Information from External Sources

- advertising and promotional material not used for procurement or other transactions (e.g. spam, junk mail, catalogues, promotional DVDs, course announcements)
- newspapers or magazines used to compile news clippings relevant to a program area (the actual news clippings are filed under ARCS 295-04)
- unsolicited correspondence from the private sector that is not used for any actions or decisions
- information provided in confidence that is forwarded to the appropriate government body or returned to the sender, and not used by the ministry
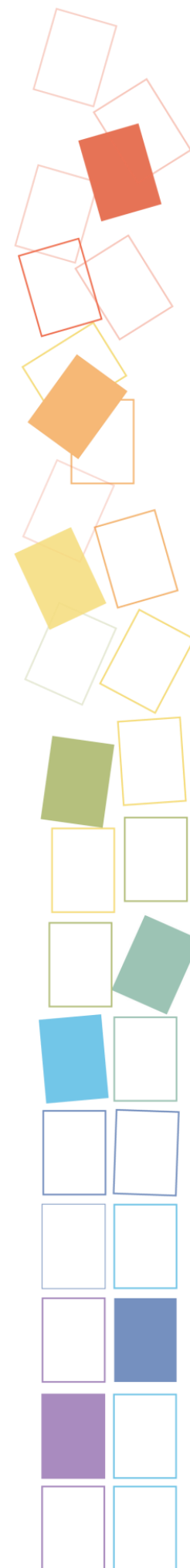
Examples of Records that are NOT Transitory

Evidence

- drafts or revisions with information that is not documented elsewhere (e.g. directions to change a proposal or a course of action)
- draft legislation (file under ARCS 140-20)
- draft audit reports kept to comply with policy
- legal advice and agreements
- unread emails that are evidence of attempted consultation

Documenting Decisions & Actions

- business transactions documentation (initiation, authorization, or completion)
- records that include instructions, approvals and advice
- emails that document a policy decision, significant action, or how a case was managed
- records that help explain the history of a relationship, decision or project

Operational Needs

- data that is needed for ongoing business
- information that is integral to a file about one event, client, or issue (i.e. a case file)
- reference material with ongoing value to the office
- work unit activities documentation (e.g. work schedules, assignments)

Official Communications

- formal communication about government business
- social media post officially announcing a new government program

Official/Final Records

- final reports and recommendations
- official copies of agendas and minutes
- official copies of policies, directives, procedures, standards, guides
- signed briefing notes

DO NOT destroy any transitory information that:
- may be relevant to a current/anticipated *FOIPPA* request or legal discovery, or
- is stored in backup systems, which are an essential part of protecting government's information assets (i.e. "triple deleting" is not allowed).

Additional Information

Contact your Records Officer and check out the other RM Guides.