

Records Management Guide

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Introduction

Why should you bother about records management? Have you ever lost or looked for an important document for a long time? Do you need space in your filing cabinets? Without a well coordinated records management system you could be buried under mounds of paper. No perfect formula for efficiently managing large volumes of paper exists; each system requires time and perseverance. Unfortunately, in spite of the Information Act and Records Act being passed by Government of India there has been no concerted effort to move towards more effective government records management practices. Both the centre as well as the state governments do not even have a basic records management guide. This guide is an attempt to provide guidance by which records can be managed effectively.

Without you records are unmanageable. Proactive management of your records puts you in control. Reactive management puts your records in control. It is the duty of every government employee to manage the records within his/her purview. Each day public servants create, compile index, access, maintain, and /or transmit government information irrespective of the job title and department they work for. The personal responsibility for records management will not end until public employment of the employee ends. In today's information age the management of Government information and the records that contain it, must be recognised as a fundamental government process (day to day activity) and not a Government program.

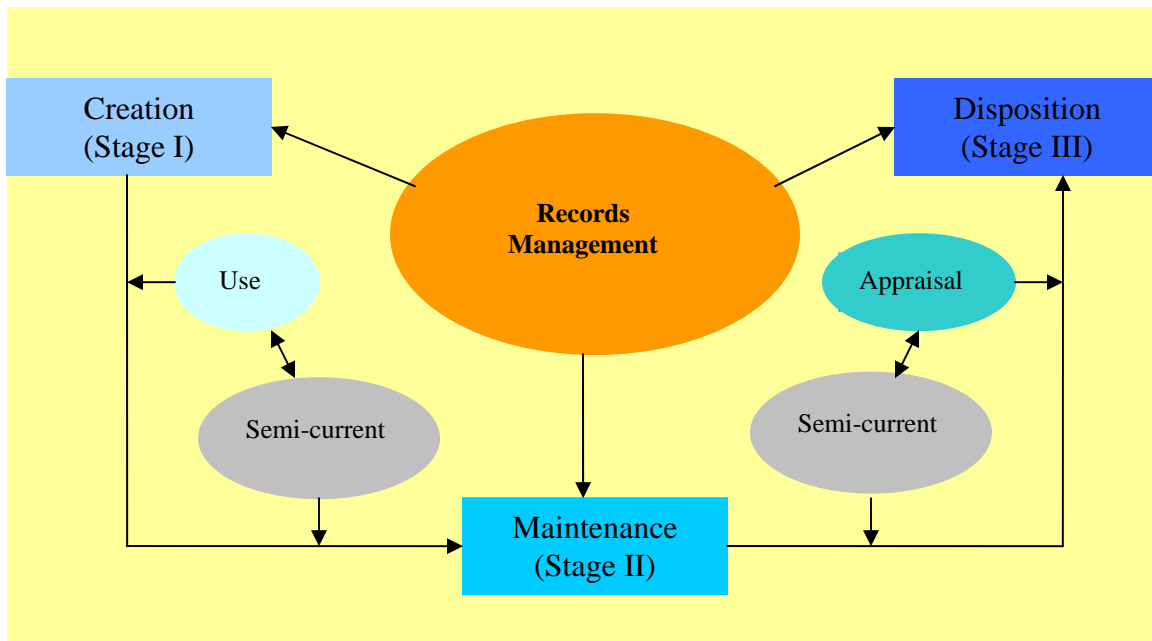
What are records?

There is sometimes a lack of clarity about what is meant by 'record' in relation to the more general term 'information'. There are many definitions of the term 'record'. A 'record' can be defined as *information generated in the course of an organisation's official transactions and which is documented to act as a source of reference and a tool by which an organisation is governed*. The records themselves form a part of or provide evidence of such transactions. As evidence, they are subsequently maintained by or on behalf of those responsible for the transactions. While all records convey information, not all sources of information are necessarily records. For example, a published book or an externally provided database (on- or offline) will not be a record, although information selected from it and reused in a new context may itself become a record.

Records arise from actual happenings; they are a 'snapshot' of an action or event. They offer a picture of something that happened. To serve their purpose in providing reliable evidence for greater accountability, records in both paper and electronic form must be accurate, complete, and comprehensive.

What is records management?

Records management is "the field of management responsible for the systematic control of the creation, maintenance, use and disposition of records", (NARA, 2003). Records management addresses the life cycle of records, i.e., the period of time that records are in the custody of the Government agencies. The life cycle usually consists of the three stages given below:



The table below describes the various phases shown above in the diagram including the degree of records management activity involved.

Phase	Activity Level	Comments
Creation/Receipt	-	Records are created or received and captured into a record-keeping system
Maintenance and Use	High	Records are being used for the business purpose for which they were created
Semi-current	Medium	Records are stored and maintained for reference purposes
Appraisal	Low	Survey methods and retention schedules are used to appraise records for their value
Disposal	Very Low/Nil	Records are destroyed or sent to Archives

(Source: Based on Records Management manual, DTI, 2000)

Records management is concerned with the effective management of records throughout their life cycle. There are several benefits of having an effective records management programme. These are listed below:

- Facilitates effective performance of activities throughout an agency
- Protects the rights of the agency, its employees and its customers
- Provides continuity in the event of a disaster
- Meets statutory and regulatory requirements including archival, audit and oversight activities

