Records Management Guide

– A. Vijay Krishna

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.

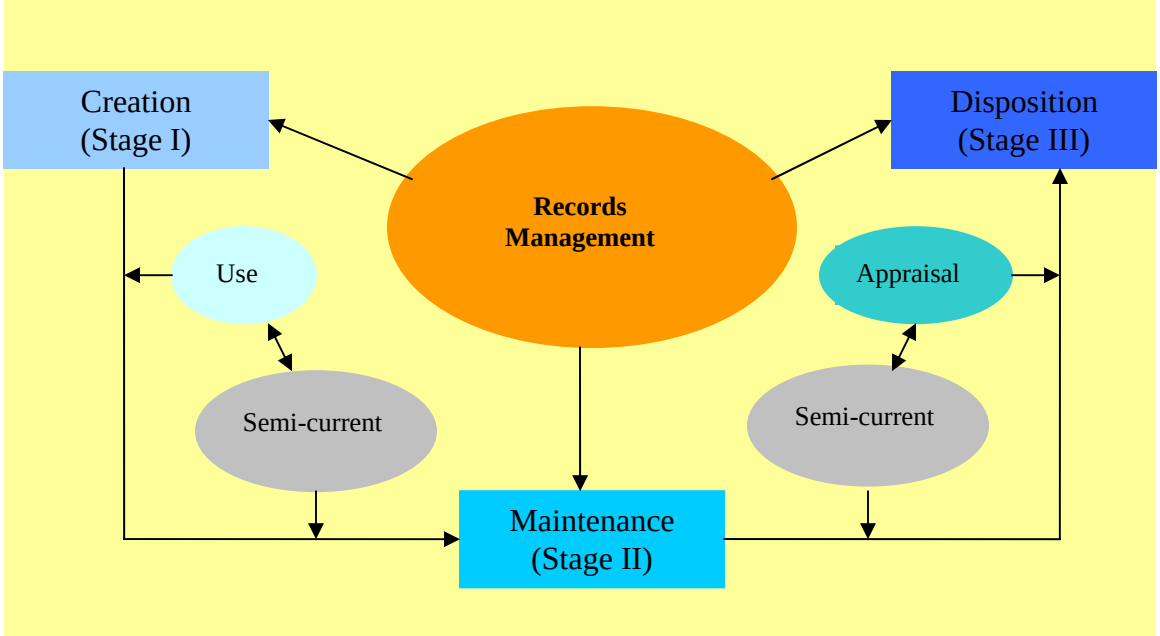
What are records?

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

- Provides protection and support in litigation
- Allows quicker retrieval of documents and information from files
- Improves office efficiency and productivity
- Supports and documents historical and other research

Records management vis-à-vis Information Act

To achieve the goal of having an effective records management system it is necessary to enact and implement comprehensive legislation to regulate the life-cycle, management of records and archives, irrespective of medium and format, designating a single authority to oversee the process and assigning clear responsibility for actions at each stage. Government of India enacted the "Public Records Act, 1993" and "Information Act, 2002", both these Acts lay down the principles for managing, maintaining and monitoring records in Government departments.

The "Information Act, 2002" among other things lays emphasis on the following points:

- By providing freedom to every citizen to secure access to information under the control of public authorities, in order to promote openness, transparency and accountability in administration and in relation to matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, the bill underlines the importance of having an effective records management program in every Government office.
- Every public authority shall- maintain all its records, in such manner and form consistent with its operational requirements duly catalogued and indexed.
- A person desirous of obtaining information shall make a request in writing or through electronic means, to the concerned Public Information Officer specifying the particulars of the information sought by him. Provided that where such request cannot be made in writing, the Public Information Officer shall render all reasonable assistance to the person making the request orally to reduce it in writing.
- Where a request for access to information is rejected or the concerned applicant is aggrieved, the citizen has a right to appeal.

The "Public Records Act, 1993" assigns a range of responsibilities to the records officer in relation to proper arrangement, maintenance and preservation of public records under his charge. The records officer must undertake:

- Periodical review of all public records and weeding out public records of ephemeral value;
- Appraisal of public records which are more than twenty-five years old in consultation with the National Archives of India or, as the case may be, the Archives of the Union territory with a view to retaining public records of permanent value;
- Destruction of public records in such manner and subject to such conditions as may be prescribed under sub-section (1) of section 8;
- Compilation of a schedule of retention for public records in consultation with the National Archives of India or, as the case may be, the Archives of the Union Territory;
- Periodical review for downgrading of classified public records in such manner as may be prescribed;
- Adoption of such standards, procedures and techniques as may be recommended from time to time by the National Archives of India for improvement of record management system and maintenance of security of public records;
- Compilation of annual indices of public records;

- Compilation of organisational history and annual supplement thereto;
- Assisting the National Archives of India or, as the case may be, the Archives of the Union territory for public records management;
- Submission of annual report to the Director General or, as the case may be head of Archives in such manner as may be prescribed;
- Transferring of records of any defunct body to the National Archives of India or the Archives of the Union Territory, as the case may be, for preservation.

Apart from the above main responsibilities the Records Act details several other aspects of the role of the records manager. With the passing of the Information Act, the right to get information from the public authority is ensured by the Statute. This obligation to share information with the citizen adds additional responsibility on the public officers to manage, maintain and monitor records efficiently and effectively. The current systems are not geared to handle the function of records management effectively and efficiently and there is a need to revise the entire process of records management.

In Andhra Pradesh the Information Act and Records Act have not been passed by the legislative assembly. Although a draft Information Act is ready, not much work has been done on the Records Act. Realising the importance of a Records Act in the face of the eminent passage of the Information Act in future, Centre for Good Governance has taken the initiative and come out with a draft Records Act for Andhra Pradesh. Along with the Records Act, Government offices will also need to have a guide for records management that will enable them to handle the task of managing Government records more efficiently.

Record Keeping – Current Reality

Record keeping is a fundamental activity of public administration. Without records there can be no rule of law and accountability. Public servants must have information to carry out their work and records represent a crucial source of information. Records are vital to virtually every aspect of the governance process. The effectiveness and efficiency of the public service across the range of government functions depends upon the availability of and access to information held in records. The following sample case studies illustrate the state of the record rooms in Andhra Pradesh.

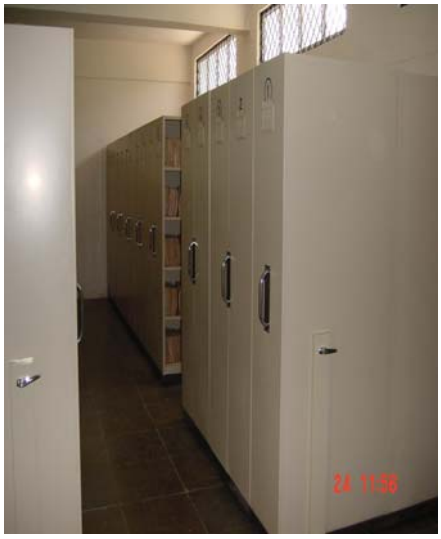
Nalgonda

The record room at the Nalgonda collectorate is a welcome improvement over the old style record rooms present in most other government offices. The record room is clean and the record registrars are maintained in a very orderly fashion. The collectorate has replaced outdated wooden racks with new Godrej compactors, which occupy less space and are more user friendly.

Currently the records are being delivered to the concerned officials as and when they are being asked for (being requisitioned on time). Although the time taken to retrieve a record is efficient, the team felt that slight modifications can be made to the existing rack indexing to enable even quicker retrieval and convenience of retrieval.

DDIS files have been updated or destroyed till 1988. LDIS files have been updated till 1999. A sample RDIS file 22774 – 95, where the subject was “State Republic Day Celebration” and with ate 14/12/95 was studied. The file was made a RDIS 11/12/97. The immediate question which came to the project team’s mind is whether the file needed to be classified as R-DIS, especially when it has no historical or accountability value. The administrative officer agreed that the file can be classified as D-DIS and there was no need to classify it as R-DIS. The problem faced by

officials for classifying a particular file is that no norms are laud out in any government circular or manual. Although the DOM specifies the various categories and the number of years each of those categories needs to be retained, it does not specify which type of file should be put in a particular category. There was consensus among the collectorate officials and the project team that it would be helpful to have some guidelines which can help in classifying the files better. Unnecessary wrong classification of files leads to a lot of paper work and wastage of precious storage space.



The above figures show the new Godrej compactors being used at the Nalgonda collectorate. The compactors enable the records to be stored safely and also enable better space management.

The above figure show the current indexing system being used at the Nalgonda collectorate record room

The above figure shows the record registers being maintained in an orderly manner at the Nalgonda collectorate

Medak – Collectorate

The record room at the Medak collectorate is an old style record room. The infrastructure in the record room is ageing and the wooden racks need replacement. However the collectorate is making a concerted effort to improve the record room along with updating the records by destroying ageing records. Due to the interest taken at the collectorate the process of retrieving registers is quite efficient and record registers are maintained in an orderly fashion.

The time taken for the records assistant to retrieve a randomly selected record was approximately 2.5 minutes seconds. Currently the records are being delivered to the concerned officials as and when they are being asked for (being requisitioned on time). Although the time taken to retrieve a record is efficient, the team felt that slight modifications can be made to the existing rack indexing to enable even quicker retrieval and convenience of retrieval.

The project team felt that despite the lack of new infrastructure facilities the records room could have been better ventilated and cleaned. Currently ventilation is poor and there is immense dust which has accumulated on the records. Open style wooden and steel racks are being used to keep records. Certain records which have historical value such as certain land records from the Nizam period are in a very bad shape. These records are being stored in a disorderly manner without any proper classification and the officials at the collectorate are not sure of the contents of the records as they are written in Urdu language. It will help to classify these records with the help of a person well versed in Urdu and also place them in racks for better preservation. Where it is deemed that the record has archival value it should be transferred from the record room to the archives, which will free valuable space in the record room.

D-DIS records have been destroyed till 1985. Where retention of a particular record was considered a must it was converted into a R-disposal. L-DIS files have been updated/destroyed till 1996. Currently files of the years 1998 and 1999 are being considered. Although the DOM specifies the various categories and the number of years each of those categories needs to be

retained, it does not specify which type of file should be put in a particular category. There was consensus among the collectorate officials and the project team that it would be helpful to have some record retention schedules/guidelines which can help in classifying the files better. Unnecessary wrong classification of files leads to a lot of paper work and wastage of precious storage space. Most of the categorization presently is being done subjectively by the concerned administrative officer in the absence of specific record retention schedules.

The above figures show the records being stored in open wooden and metal racks at the Medak collectorate. The second picture shows the presence of indexing system. However this can be further improved and refined. The third picture shows that there is no indexing on some of the shelves.

Medak – Zilla Parishad

The records room at the Zilla Parishad in Sanga Reddy is an old style record room, which is nearly in shambles. The infrastructure in the record room is ageing and the wooden racks need replacement. There is no interest to either renovate the record room or ensure that it functions efficiently. Record registers are not being maintained properly and it is virtually impossible to requisition records on time. The records assistant found it nearly impossible to retrieve a randomly selected record, as there is complete lack of indexing or classification.

Apart from the lack of new infrastructure facilities, the record room lacks proper ventilation or lights! Most of the records have been wrapped in bundles of cloth and dumped on shelves for years. The state of the record room is highly unhygienic for anyone to work in. One could not rule out the possibility of rats and even snakes being present in the record room along with the record assistant.

D-DIS records have not been destroyed or updated to the knowledge of the record assistant. In essence most of the D-DIS records have acquired the status of R-DIS, de facto. The last time L-DIS files have been updated or destroyed was in 1991. Over the last twelve years no effort has been made to destroy any unwanted records or at least retain the basic requirements for a good records room.

The project team also visited individual sections at the Zilla Parishad. Most of the sections were dumping files and records around the desks and other places without any proper classification or

review of the necessary or unnecessary records. Some of the important records were not being sent to the records room for fear of misplacement. There were so many records around tables in the accounts and finance section that over a period of time they had begun to act as cabin walls for individual tables.

Most of the records are dumped in bundles without any classification or indexing making it virtually impossible for the records to be retrieved efficiently. There is also lack of proper ventilation at this Zilla Parishad record room.

King George Hospital, Vishakapatnam

Often pictures convey more than words. This is absolutely true in the case of King George Hospital medical record room. Even Shakespeare would have found it difficult to describe the pitiful state of the records room. There is water leakage in the record room not because of the rains but because of water over flowing from the over head tank! Some of the medical records have become wet due to the seepage of water. Patient records are being dumped in piles at one corner of the record room without any classification or even in proper bundles. They are not even being kept on racks. One being asked to show the case register the record assistant showed the case register which looked very similar to an accounts register. When quizzed by the team leader as to how the case register was looking similar to an account register, the record assistant admitted that they were forced to use accounts registers due to the non-availability of case registers! The record assistant was not aware of the ICD (International Classification of Diseases) coding. The team was later informed that several circulars were sent to the record room regarding the ICD coding. The record assistant claimed that it takes between fifteen to thirty minutes to retrieve a particular file of death case. However looking at the state of affairs in the record room it is difficult to believe that even a death case record can be retrieved in a day. As per Law it is mandatory for a hospital to supply medical records within 3 days as and when asked by the courts. But the situation is such that none of the hospitals in Andhra Pradesh are aware of the legal requirements of maintaining medical records.

The figure on the left shows the medical records getting damp due to leakages in the ceiling of the record room. The figure on the right shows medical records being dumped in a corner of the room without any classification or proper schedule of destruction. Can anyone retrieve a particular medical record from the dump?

In all the above record rooms the three basic M's of record keeping, i.e., monitoring, maintenance and management, are either lacking or are not adequate. The project team found that the record rooms in district collectorates were comparatively better administered than the record rooms in Zilla Parishads and hospitals. Although Nalgonda was the best record room visited, still some changed can be brought about which can further improve the condition of the record room. In general a lot of work needs to be done in improving record keeping systems in government offices. To be more precise the concept of records management has completely been forgotten in most government offices.

Record Rooms in many Government offices are typical dust bins, seen as garbage outlets by the men in authority and all and sundry items are dumped in these rooms. Record keeping systems are weak or have actually not been effectively put into use by the departments. Though classification of records and their management in record room in the paper mode form is laid down in District Office Manual, over a period the system collapsed to the point where they barely function. Informal practices supplanted formal rules, and efficient public administration was of secondary importance to providing employment. While the civil service expanded steadily, bringing with it a corresponding increase in the flow of paper, more formal ways of working gradually collapsed, often replaced by ad hoc work methods. In many cases, the administrators got used to making decisions without referring to records. There was little incentive to maintain effective record keeping systems or to allocate adequate resources for records storage and staff. In some cases, the failure to create and maintain records systems was motivated by the desire to conceal financial and other irregularities. Eventually, the registries stopped acting as the point of entry for able recruits and became dumping ground for staff without career prospects. The staff had limited training or experience with record keeping work, and record keeping was allowed to deteriorate. File classification and indexing systems originally designed to meet the record keeping requirements of the British administration could not meet the needs of complex needs of development oriented modern governments.

Despite the low usage of records, there was an extreme reluctance to destroy records, even after they ceased to have any value to the institution. In the absence of rules and guidelines for what should be kept and for how long, staff were reluctant to authorize destruction. Over time, registries became severely congested with older records. Ultimately, many records systems collapsed under their own weight. Even as record keeping has declined, there have been important advances in the field of records management in Europe, USA, and Australia.

Recordkeeping has deteriorated so gradually that it has gone largely unnoticed as a development activity. Administrators did not recognize the need and necessity to establish a good record management system and the connection between the breakdown of record systems and the problem of public administration. Development planners tend to assume that the problem is so prevalent, ingrained, and thankless that little can be done to improve the system. On the contrary there is an assumption that computers will resolve record keeping problems. As a result, record system reforms rarely crop up for discussion and find a place in reforms agenda.

In today's information age the management of Government information and the records that contain it, should be recognized as a fundamental Government process—not a Government program. Unfortunately during the last 55 years after independence a tendency to view the management of public records as a functional activity apart from routine daily responsibilities began to proliferate. This phenomena led to one of two results. The first caused less active agency records to be put out of sight and ignored—often until storage place was used up and more space was acquired. The second resulted in a type of institutional lethargy. A program or position was created to come in (when necessary) to take care of an agency's older records. This resulted in a kind of when needed reaction compared to needed action which was necessary.

The neglect of public records and the quantity of storage space and equipment used for housing them increased at nearly identical rates. This trend continued unabated for years and continues as of now, irrespective of the value of information in the records and of the physical conditions of the storage areas. Till today in countries around the world Government managers have not recognized that neglect of records is counter-productive and inherently wasteful. However recently some developed nations like UK, USA, Canada, etc, have taken the initiative in putting together new records management programs. In India and in Andhra Pradesh the standard way of doing things created major obstacles to efficiency and dis-incentives to participation in records management activity for Government administrators at all levels. The time has come to put an end to it! In order to help bring about change it is very important to have a Records Act in AP along with a Guide to Records Management. The Records Act along with the Information Act will go a long way in changing the very way Government institutions function. Undoubtedly records management which has been neglected for years will gain centre stage and every Government employee's responsibilities and rights will increase manifold.

The Guide for Managing Government Records

About the guide

Keeping in mind the state of the record rooms in Andhra Pradesh there is an urgent need to take up the process of revamping Government records management programs before the system deteriorates further. The Records Act, Record Management Report and this guide will aim to help departments in improving the state of record rooms and record management practices in the state. This guide can be used in several ways:

1. Vehicle for understanding and communicating several basic concepts that will aid in the management of Government records and information contained in them.
2. As guidance on how best to establish and/or improve 'life-cycle' records management activities.
3. Make it a tool for use in the identification of areas in which training or management attention is needed, such as in the use and preservation of records that contain essential government information.

Apart from the various aspects of the guide described in detail below, additional parts to the guide will be added as necessary to meet the training and programming needs of state and local Government administrators.

About your responsibilities

Refer to the main responsibilities of the records officer mentioned above as per the Records Act, 1993 of Government of India. Also refer to the draft Record Act of CGG.

Your role in Government of Andhra Pradesh

As Georgia Records Guide points out, "facts on the first and last days of individuals, the start and finish of Government activities, and poignant details about the most heart-warming and heart-rendering aspects of human nature are found among the records. They offer great insight on the state's past, present and future", (A Guide to Managing Public Records in Georgia, 2003). Records contain important ideas and principles to hold onto and to build on. Although records are just records, their real value is in what their contents can tell us about the ideas that inspired their creation and use. Hence it is very important to establish a process to preserve, maintain and access the information present in these records that might be useful for the future and which might act as a source of inspiration as well. In essence it is very important for every Government employee to realise that records contain the most precious public resource, i.e., its 'information'. This information offers a 'usable past' (past from which lessons can be learnt) that help the state make its way to a better future. All Government employees of Andhra Pradesh must protect, preserve and defend the records in their control, considering the value of records as precious public resource. Every Government employee must ask, "is it possible to imagine a challenge and responsibility of greater fundamental importance, or a richer legacy of democracy?" than that of performing the role of a records manager.

About your rights – you are empowered to manage records

Your role is to accomplish a very fundamental and important function of Government that is to maintain 'public trust' by adhering to the ethical requirements of Government information management. This role is only likely to increase in the future with the passage of Information Act and Records Act. The time has come to gear up our existing systems to meet the new and demanding requirements of the future.

It is the record managers right to make decisions on how to utilize the agency's expertise and resources to complete the record management duties. Identification and selection of the best tools, methods and techniques must be accomplished with the needs of your agency in mind. Restrictions on budget and time always place outside limits on choice. But this need not restrict you from considering and adopting an innovative blend that best suits you're agency's specific needs. Variety increases the chances of success. Just because a system or approach has not been tried, does not mean that it may not work. The solutions that permit the best combination and application of your resources are going to yield the best results. Records managers can, "take full advantage of the possibilities to reduce information and records management costs through cooperative efforts", (A Guide to Managing Public Records in Georgia, 2003, pp 50). Attention must be paid to in house agencies which are often under utilized and under appreciated source of cooperative support. External opportunities must also be considered.

Issues in classifying and indexing files

For any office to run efficiently a well organised filing arrangement is a must. Each individual office should decide on the required filing system and equipment that best suits the specific needs of the office. "Finding the information needed, being able to extract that information from records in existence and being sure the information is in a useable format depends on an efficient universal filing system", (Public Health Works Orientation Manual for Public Health Leaders, 2001). Regardless of the filing system chosen one must know exactly where the files are located when they are needed. People might face several constraints in using modern equipment and supplies relating to records management due to constraints in budget. However this cannot be an excuse to have an adequate, workable system which will serve the record managers needs and the needs of the office. One such example is the Medak collectorate described above. Although the collectorate did not have modern equipment or buildings a system of records management is in place and it is a workable system. A lot more improvement can be done to the record room but at least the system is performing unlike some offices like the Medak Zilla Parishad where the record management system has completely collapsed.

The Public Health Works Orientation Manual for Public Health Leaders of Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services discusses certain key filing procedures that can be followed for effective file management. These are discussed below:

1. Avoid unnecessary filing – filing unnecessary papers is a waste of manpower and equipment.
2. Arrange folders, guides and labels correctly – folders are necessary to keep the papers together and in order. Guides serve as 'sign posts' to help speed up the filing and finding operation. The incorrect use of these two tools will retard the concerned operations.
    - Guide cards – Guide cards make it easier to search and help folders stand erect. Using too many guide cards is a wasteful and defeats the purpose of guides. As a general rule, place a first position guide card in front of each record series to identify and isolate it from other series in the same drawer.

- Folders – the contents of each file should be carefully kept in a folder of reasonable quality. Each folder should contain a folder label. The folder label should show the file name, number, subject and date. The year of inclusive dates should also be included. The label should be on the folder cover. Record keepers should consider the use of color-coded folder labels to facilitate filing and disposition. Color codes can be used for distinguishing one file series from another, identifying vital records and helping identifying the life of a cycle (e.g., L, D or R disposal).

3. Receiving and preparing papers for filing. The following steps should be taken while preparing documents for filing:
    - Remove rubber bands, paper clips, pins and other temporary fasteners
    - Determine if the file is complete and all necessary enclosures and attachments are accounted for.
    - Remove all unnecessary forms and paper such as cover sheets and routing slips, except those which contain remarks of a significant record value.
    - Ensure that parts of another file are not attached
    - Ensure that the document has been authorized for filing. The initials of the person forwarding the communication for filing and the date should be mentioned on the lower right hand corner of the folder cover. This will show that the proper official has seen the document and 'certified' the need for filing it.

4. Filing loose vs. fastening.

5. Use Cross references where appropriate – if a document being classified involves more than one subject or case transaction and there is a possibility that it might be asked for by either, a cross reference should be prepared as a finding aid. Cross referencing can also be used to show that a record has been moved from one place in the file to another, such as brining forward a piece of correspondence from a cutoff or closed file for attachment to a document in the current file. However it is important to avoid making and filing unnecessary cross references, as they take up valuable space and time.

6. Safeguards are a must while filing confidential records. Confidential records need to be placed separately in equipment affording security. A cross reference can be placed in the non-confidential folder of the subject or case indicating that the material is filed in security equipment. The cross reference should not reveal the content of the confidential material. When an entire folder needs to be placed in the security equipment, a tracer card can be used to show the location.

Types of numbering/indexing systems for files

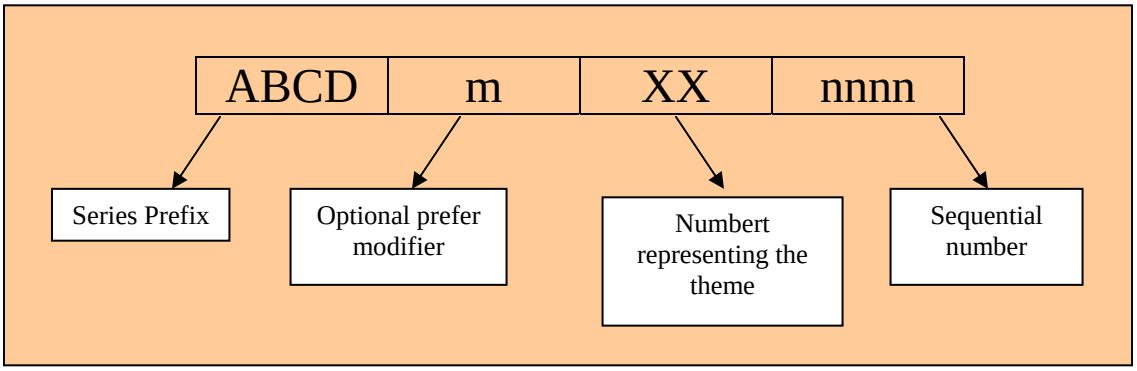
A file is an organized collection of documentary items, usually kept within a file cover, that relate to the same business activity or transaction and are kept together. A file performs a number of functions:

- To facilitate retrieval of information it contains;
- To preserve the context in which the documents were created;
- To provide a degree of physical protection to the documents.

Registered files are given a unique number/identifier when they are captured into the record keeping system. This identifier usually consists of the file series prefise and a sequential number. The three popular numbering systems which can be used for a file series are discussed below.

Themed – the files within the series are sub-divided using 'themes'. A number represents each theme. The file reference format is: **ABCD/m/XX/nnnn,**

This is illustrated below.



Example:

- ABCD is used for records relating to government quarters

Modifiers:

A single letter represents a modifier. Modifiers are used to classify records by type rather than by function, activity or subject. A few examples of modifiers are given below

P – policy document. This includes the records documenting the development, modification formal acceptance and dissemination of new policies or procedures.

C – is used for a variety of records broadly concerned with implementation of policy or action based on existing policy.

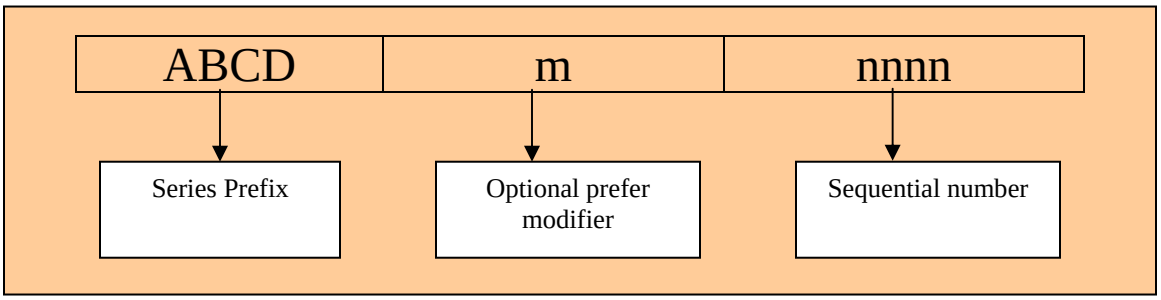
Q – Parliamentary Questions

In a themed file series, a 'theme' is used to further sub-divide the documents into more closely related groups of records. Each theme normally represents one of the main types of activity carried out as part of the business function. The list of themes for prefix ABCD is based on issues relating to Government quarters:

1. Allotment
2. Eviction
3. Recovery of rent
4. Rent free accommodation
5. Construction

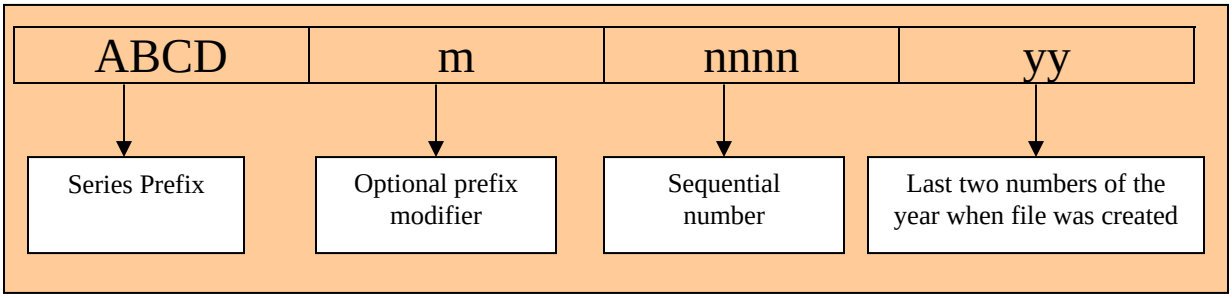
Example: a policy document regarding allotment of govt. quarters will have the following classification: **ABCD / P / 1 / 0001**

Sequential – files within the series are not subdivided. File reference format can be described as follows:



Sequential systems are usually used when subject area is narrow and there is as annual cycle of records creation.

Annual – is this case the sequence of numbers starts from / each year. File reference format is as follows:



Annual systems should be used where there is an annual cycle to file creation (eg some file series holding accounting records)

Note: A given file series may use only one of the above numbering systems. The numbering system must never be changed.

A radically new approach to classification can be adopted in a record room. The entire government of files can be brought into 6 categories. Any file in the Government can be put in these 6 categories. The six categories are:

1. Assets
2. Communications
3. Finance
4. Personnel
5. Planning
6. Process

Classifying the record room based on the above 6 categories will radically change the way records are being kept in record rooms. It will also greatly simplify the process of records management. It is very important to note that one must never have a category with the title “miscellaneous” records. No file should be classified as miscellaneous as there is every scope that such as category if prone to misuse and over a time due to negligence there is a danger that every record is put in the miscellaneous category.

Records Survey methodology

A records survey is a complete inventory of an agency's records holdings. It identifies all records, where they are located, and in what quantity. The survey includes all types of records with an agency. Having a records survey is an essential first step in any records management program, at a later stage the survey will prove to be a vital document in identifying vital records, formulating disaster management plans and above all it acts as a working document for preparing a records retention and disposition schedule. After completing a records survey, agencies usually discover that many records can be destroyed or moved to inactive storage. Empirical studies of record surveys have shown that approximately 30% of the total volume of records can be destroyed, 30% can be moved to inactive storage and the balance can be retained as active files.

The Kansas State Records Management Manual discusses the main steps in a records survey below:

1. Obtaining management support – management support is critical to the success of the survey project and to the entire records management program. A directive should be sent to entire staff describing the objectives and importance of the survey and requesting the participation of everyone concerned. Management support legitimises and establishes priority for records management program ensuring the cooperation of all the concerned staff.
2. Forming a core group (team) – records officers for small agencies may choose to perform the records survey themselves. However in most Government offices in Andhra Pradesh the record assistant does not have the required skills to carry out a records survey without the supervision of a middle ranking official. The head of the organisation must entrust the job of carrying out the survey to an official who is well versed in office procedures, this in most cases is likely to be the administrative officer. The supervisor must have a team working under him comprising of at least four people depending on the size of the record room and volume of records. It is a must to have a data entry operator to capture the data on records on to a database. The supervisor also needs people to help fetch records and organise them in piles for an effective survey. A key element in the success of thee survey is adequate training for the records surveyors. To ensure that complete data is gathered in a uniform way, survey staff should receive detailed instructions on survey techniques as well as background information on records management terminology. The State archives or National Archives will be in a position to provide valuable advice and training on records management practices.
3. Designing the ***survey form*** – a survey form should be used by an agency to capture vital information on the type of records and record series in a record room. An agency may design its own form to carry out a records survey. However the survey worksheet should be able to capture vital information such as:
    - Type of file
    - Record series title
    - Description of the record series
    - Inclusive dates
    - Number of records in the series
    - Public access restrictions
    - Recommended retention period

    A sample records survey form is given in Appendix – 1. Along with the records survey form a sample record series summary form is given in Appendix – 2. Each space for information on the form is called a field. The fields are numbered for ease of

identification. A brief description of the information that should be recorded in the records survey form is given below.

1-3 Agency/Sub-Agency/Other Organisational Unit: List the agency maintaining the records subdividing the agency by appropriate division, section, etc.

4 Location of records: Mention the building and room in which the records are stored. If there is no name, number or letter for a room, provide a subjective description. Where possible indicate the location of a particular record series/record within a room. For example an existing number of the rack in which the record is placed, etc.

5-6 Person responsible for maintaining records/Contact details: in most cases this will be the record assistant and his or her title. Include the telephone number or other contact details of the records custodian.

7 Record series title: enter a title that accurately describes the record series. A record series is a group of records normally used and filed as a unit and which permit evaluation as a unit for retention scheduling purposes. For example files pertaining to casual leave will come under the series title 'Leave'. It is easier to fill this field once other information on the file is collected.

8 File Name/Number: enter the file name or type of file in this field. Along with the file name enter file number. Where the file name/type is common for several files then the same survey form can be used and individual numbers can be entered overleaf.

9 Inclusive dates: enter the date on which a particular file was created and the date on which it was closed.

10 Arrangement: in this field describe the kind of classification and indexing system used. Records are often found in no particular order and if that is the case, write 'none' in the space provided.

11 Total number: in this field enter the total number of records or files in that particular category. This figure can be arrived at after calculating the total number of files, which can be arrived at by adding the serial numbers on the rear side of the form.

12 Usage of record: in this section note whether the record is active i.e. should be stored in office for reference and usage or inactive/semi-current that is whether it has to be moved offsite and stored in a record room or sent to the archives after storing it for the required number of years in the record room.

13 Status: in some cases there is often duplication of documents. In order to prepare an accurate retention and disposition schedule, it is essential to identify where the official copy (original) of a document is placed. It is also important to determine if information from the document or series is duplicated or summarized in another location or in another record series. These questions will often be easier to answer after the survey has been completed and after consulting with the records custodian or the concerned people who use and maintain records in the office.

14 Public access restrictions: indicate whether any public access restrictions apply to a particular record. This field will become very important in the future when the

information Act comes into effect. Where available provide citations for specific state or central statutes and regulations that limit public access to records.

15 Recommended retention period: in this field indicate how long the record should be stored in the office. While indicating the retention period it is important to follow retention schedules to avoid unnecessary arbitrary classification of records. Where available the general retention schedule formulated by the Central or State archives can be used. In case of office specific records every office is required to draft its own retention schedule based on the record survey form. The schedule will be signed by the concerned head of department and changes to it have to be approved by the concerned head of department in consultation with other officials in the department.

16 Relevant statutes/regulations: note any laws or regulations which may affect the management of a record series (for example mandate the creation of a series; require the retention of the series for a specific period of time, etc).

17 Recommended final disposition: note whether the record custodian recommends the destruction of a series or its transfer to the state archives. A particular record might be retained for some additional time provided sufficient reasons are given for it.

18 Vital record: Check 'yes' if the record series is considered to be vital. Vital records are records that contain information required by an agency to continue functioning or to re-establish operation in the event of a disaster. This section will help in preparation of a disaster management and mitigation plan in which all the vital records of an organisation need to be identified and additional protective and security measures need to be adopted for them.

19 Additional remarks: add any significant information or comments which do not seem to fit elsewhere in the form.

20-22 Name/ Telephone/Date: enter the full name of the person who filled out the survey form. Include the telephone number or other contact details and record the date the surveyor completed the record form.

Along with the records survey form it is also important to have a record series summary form. The record series summary form is based on the records survey form. A brief description of the information that should be recorded in the records series summary form is given below.

1 Record series title: enter a tile that accurately describes the record series. A record series is a group of records normally used and filed as a unit and which permit evaluation as a unit for retention scheduling purposes. For example files pertaining to casual leave will come under the series title 'Leave'. After completing the baseline survey using the records survey form several vital pieces of information will be available which can be used to complete the records series form. The probable questions to ask in identifying particular records series includes:

- Are individual records interfiled?
- Do the records have a common function?
- Do the records have the same retention and disposition requirements?

If the answer to the above questions is 'yes', then the records should probably be placed in one coherent, comprehensive records series. As the Kansas State Records Management Manual states, identifying separate records series is one of the most important aspects of the records survey. It shows how record series can be managed when there may be distinct record series overlapping within individual records. In this case it is necessary to treat different types of documents as a single series. For example, an agency staff member may have several responsibilities and might interfile information relating to his/her various activities. It would be time consuming to document each file folder as a series, therefore grouping the records in a series called 'working files' or 'subject files' could be the most appropriate survey method.

2 Record series description: in this field mention the nature and purpose of a records series and the types of information or documents which form a part of the series. Avoid repeating the previously recorded series title. In most cases the series title is too brief to provide a clear indication of the nature and purpose of the records. Explain why a particular series is created and its function. Very importantly the various types of records which form part of the series should be clearly mentioned. Series description should contain enough detail so that anyone can understand the record series.

3 Inclusive dates: enter the earliest and most recent year in which the records were created. Where precise dates are not known enter an approximate figure clearly indicating that it is an approximation. This column will help in identifying records of historical importance while devising the retention schedule.

4 Annual accumulation: in this field indicate whether a particular series is still being created. Where a series is still being created, check the 'yes' box and attempt to estimate the annual accumulation.

5 Recommended retention: in this section note the record custodian's recommendations regarding an appropriate retention period for the series. This column is vital to draw up general and office specific retention schedules for individual records.

6 Recommended final disposition: after a series stops being generated note whether the record custodian recommends its destruction after its stipulated time period is completed or its transfer to the archives.

7 Vital records series: these are records that contain information required by an agency to continue functioning or to reestablish operations in the event of a disaster. This section is very important while developing a disaster management and mitigation plan for the record room. Vital records also need to have certain security measures in place to prevent unauthorized persons from tampering with them.

8 Additional remarks: in this field enter any significant comments or remarks which do not seem to fit anywhere else in the form.

9-11 Surveyor's Name/ Telephone/Email/Date

Records survey forms the backbone for having an effective and efficient records management system. The record survey forms shown above are only an illustrative example. Individual offices can devise their own record survey forms based on individual needs and requirements. However most of the important information which needs to be included in a survey is captured by the model forms discussed above. The records survey helps in almost every aspect of records management right from the record creation stage to its maintenance and destruction. While a record is being created having a proper survey will enable one to determine the degree of space required for a particular series and the frequency with which it is us4ed in day to day activities. Record survey also helps in devising effective classification and numbering systems. Most importantly record surveys help in drawing up detailed retention schedules (both general and office specific) which are the key for an effective records management system. Having proper retention schedules will prevent wastage of valuable space and will help in retaining records as per relevant statutes and regulations. Even while formulating a disaster management and mitigation plan records survey plays a critical role by helping record custodians to identify vital records. The success of a records management program is related directly to the accuracy and completeness of the record survey. The time you spend on the records survey is time well spent.

Record Retention Schedules

"A records retention and disposition schedule is a timetable that identifies the minimum length of time a record series must be retained before it is destroyed or transferred to the Archives" (Kansas State Records Management Manual, RS-1). The retention and disposition schedule is developed directly from the records survey and it lists by record series title every record series created and maintained by the agency. Record series titles remain the same throughout the life cycle of the record series, from creation to disposition.

There are two types of record retention schedules that apply to an agency's records. The first is a 'general schedule' which includes guidelines for record series maintained by most state agencies. That is this schedule contains records which are common to most Government offices. Examples of records described in the General Schedule are employee personal records, audit reports, budget preparation records, etc. The second type of schedule is an 'office specific schedule' which contains retention and disposition requirements for record series that are unique to the organisation. 'Office specific schedules deal with records not listed in the 'general schedule'.

Records should only be destroyed systematically and under an approved records retention program. Organizations should avoid selective destruction and selective retention. As far as possible the element of subjectivity and discretion must be reduced while retaining or destroying records. When determining minimum retention periods and final disposition requirements, the value of records can be broken down into four categories:

- Administrative value
- Fiscal value
- Legal value
- Historical value

Administrative value relates to how long an agency needs to retain a record series to meet its own business needs. Administrative value pertains to the need for records in performing current work as well as in performing future work. Records with administrative value can be policy records that document how an organisation functions and how it is organized. Policy records which normally have long term or permanent value include:

- Policy and procedural manuals
- Directives
- Organisational charts
- Annual reports
- Legal opinions

Most records with administrative value are not policy records. The majority are operational records that document the implementation of an agency's policies. For example, a records disposition form is an operational record because it implements the policy established by the retention schedule. Determining retention schedules for administrative records especially – operational records is not always easy. In most cases the primary administrative value of records will be exhausted when the transactions to which they relate are completed. As a general rule file activity can be used to guide retention requirements for operational records. When office staff no longer need to refer to a particular record series, the administrative value diminishes and the records are probably ready for final disposition.

Records with fiscal value document an agency's financial transactions. Budgets, payrolls, etc are examples of records that have fiscal value. Retention periods f0opr records with fiscal value are most often determined by audit requirements.

The legal value of records can take two forms. Some records have intrinsic legal value because they contain evidence of legally enforceable rights or obligations of the Government. Among records having intrinsic legal value are:

- Documents showing the basis for action (legal decision, opinions)
- Legal agreements (contracts, titles, leases)
- Records of actions taken in particular cases (claims, etc).

Records with intrinsic legal value particularly those that document the legal rights of citizens, often have enduring value and should be considered for transfer to the State Archives. Legal value can also take the form of statutes and regulations that set legal retention periods for some records. Statutory or regulatory requirements for specific records retention periods are infrequent. Usually statutes and regulations relate to actions rather than records. Records retention can be inferred, however, by the need to provide evidence of a particular action. It is imperative to consider the legal retention requirements of records. It makes retention scheduling easier and more effective, and it will protect an agency from litigation resulting from improperly retained records.

Along with administrative, legal and fiscal value of records the final record value or historical value should also be considered before determining the final disposition of a record series. Even though records might have lost their legal, fiscal or administrative value it might be possible that they still have historical value and for this reason should be retained. Records that contain authentic evidence of an agency's organisation, function, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities have some historical value. These records usually show an agency's origin, its administrative development and its present oganisational structure. The records that are identified as historical records and which are not used in the agency's daily operations should be transferred to the State Archives

Record retention and disposition schedules can be developed in various formats. The National Archives of India has developed a general record schedule. However the format can be further improved. A model format for developing retention and disposition schedule is shown below. The

following key pieces of information should be included in a records retention and disposition schedule:

- Record series title and description
- Minimum retention period
- Final disposition requirements
- Access requirements
- Vital record identification

The above retention and disposition schedule elements are developed through an analysis of the data gathered during the comprehensive records survey. Ale the above elements need to be captured in a record retention and disposition schedule to have an effective and a comprehensive record management system in place. An example of a record retention and disposition schedule relating to leave application series is shown below.

Leave Request

- Minimum retention: L disposal (One year); see comments
- Disposition: destroy
- Comments: note the type of leave application whether casual, medical, earned, etc. Destroy upon completion of action
- Restrictions: None
- Date of Entry: enter the year from which the series has been created

An agency can use retention schedules developed elsewhere as long as they meet an agency's requirements. But make sure you acknowledge the source from where the retention schedules are obtained.

Note: retention and disposition schedules should never contain any record series with the title 'miscellaneous'. Miscellaneous is not an acceptable title as it will be prone to misuse and the end result will be many records being stored under this category without proper thought being given to their usefulness or the exact series under which they come.

Conclusion

There is a common misconception among record managers and government officials that computerizing records or microfilming them will solve the problem of records management. However this is far from the truth. Simply computerizing or microfilming existing records without carrying out a records survey or developing retention schedules will only ensure that a lot of the existing unnecessary records will be retained in an electronic format. This will result in a lot of existing paper garbage being transformed into electronic garbage. As the process of microfilming or computerisation is expensive it is very important to have a successful operating records management program in place before thinking about digitizing records. One must also consider the various alternatives available to store records along with carrying out a complete cost benefit analysis before embarking upon the process of digitalizing records. One must also understand the various laws and regulations for microfilming records.

We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge. It is generally recognized that information is not knowledge, and knowledge is not wisdom. The wisdom of government, or the lack thereof, is demonstrated through the ways in which it applies its acquired knowledge. Your acquired knowledge of the rewards available though proper maintenance of your agency information, and the appropriate use of record-keeping technology, should encourage you to demonstrate the wisdom of your ways. The ways of wisdom gained in offering the public more cost-effective records administration, efficient technical management, and timely delivery of information services. The Guide has already indicated to you that the purpose for Andhra Pradesh government records management program, is to reduce the cost of creating and maintaining public information. Simultaneously, its aim is to increase its information's accessibility, security, and viability as a public resource and asset. This is accomplished through the use of appropriate techniques and technologies. A clear cut mission like this can clearly result in rewards. This guide was written created of a belief that many agencies have considered neither these rewards nor the benefits from their accrual.

Actively managed agency records can produce both direct and indirect cost savings and cost avoidance. Traditional studies and measurements of such government activities have documented that the reduction of stored records volume can directly reduce labor, space, and equipment costs. Three cost areas still at the top of the list of any budget reduction list. Of the total volume of records on hand in any government agency that has not been practicing records management, statistics have shown that one third of the total are active records and need to remain in the office. Another third are inactively used and can be stored at less cost in other locations or in other formats. And remaining third are obsolete and disposable, no longer having any value to the agency or government. If, for example, you can eliminate the need for an agency to lease a self-storage unit for housing records, you have reduced government costs. The key to success in this is the elimination of both the need for the leased space, by removal of the records in it (through schedule disposal, reformatting, or consolidation at another site), and by modification of practices throughout the record life-cycle. This will prevent space from being similarly leased in the future.

Less easily quantified, but still readily apparent, are benefits resulting from better control of the creation, duplication, and distribution of your agency records. Better control will reduce record maintenance costs. Savings like this have permitted some agencies to re-allocate scare resources for use in document management technology such as imaging, computer, tele-communications, and other systems.

By using the Internet, you can make contact with sources of records management assistance within minutes. It does not even require use of an office computer. A trip to the local public or college library can put any records officer in touch with a wealth of information resources-another reward! Bench Marking is an extremely useful management technique in the field of government information and records management. It requires a review of existing systems and programs in outside organizations which have a mission and operations similar yours. Record managers can pattern their programs after the best models available. Why go to the time, effort, and expense of reinventing an existing system or administrative mechanism? Why not profit from the experiences (both good and bad) of other agencies? Find the best and the brightest, and borrow the techniques and technologies that are good. Work to apply them in a way that makes them work even better! Take advantage of existing programs, materials, and systems. Reach out to leaders in your areas of interest. More often that not, you will be surprised how much they have to offer, and how willingly they offer it. This is particularly true of other government programs and agencies. Most of their publications, training materials, and other resource material is in the public domain and non-proprietary.

Appendix 1

RECORDS SURVEY FORM

1. AGENCY	2. SUB-AGENCY
3. OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT (section, bureau)	4. LOCATION OF RECORDS
5. PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR MAINTAINING RECORDS	6. TELEPHONE
7. RECORDS SERIES TITLE	
8. **FILE TYPE / NAME** ---------- NUMBER (Continue overleaf)	9. INCLUSIVE DATES FROM ---------- THRU ----------
10. ARRANGEMENT (Describe if any)	11. TOTAL NUMBER ---------- NOTES:
12. USAGE OF RECORD ACTIVE / CURRENT ---------- SEMICURRENT ----------	
13. STATUS RECORD COPY? CONVENIENCE COPY? IS INFORMATION DUPLICATED ELSEWHERE? ---------- ----------	14. PUBLIC ACCESS RESTRICTIONS? Yes No LEGAL AUTHORITY ----------

15. RECOMMENDED RETENTION L (one year) ---------- D (ten years)---------- R (fifty years)----------	16. RELEVANT STATUTES / REGULATIONS 1. ---------- 2. ---------- OTHER ----------	17. RECOMMENDED FINAL DISPOSITION DESTROY RETAIN ARCHIVES

18. VITAL RECORD? Yes No	19. ADDITIONAL REMARKS:

20. SURVEYOR'S NAME	21. TELEPHONE / EMAIL	22. DATE

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Appendix 2

RECORDS SERIES SUMMARY FORM

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">1. RECORDS SERIES TITLE</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">2. RECORDS SERIES DESCRIPTION (Nature and purpose, types of information or documents, Continue on reverse if necessary)</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. INCLUSIVE DATES
FROM ----------
THRU ----------</td><td colspan="2">4. ANNUAL ACCUMULATION
SERIES STILL CREATED? Yes No
ANNUAL ACCUMULATION (Number)
----------</td></tr>
<tr><td>5. RECOMMENDED RETENTION
L (one year) ----------
D (ten years)----------
R (fifty years)----------</td><td colspan="2">6. RECOMMENDED FINAL DISPOSITION
DESTROY RETAIN
ARCHIVES</td></tr>
<tr><td>7. VITAL RECORDS SERIES?
Yes No</td><td colspan="2">8. ADDITIONAL REMARKS :</td></tr>
<tr><td>9. SURVEYOR’S NAME</td><td>10. TELEPHONE / EMAIL</td><td>11. DATE</td></tr>
</table>