

CHAPTER 3

DEFINITIONS

ACCESSION. The transfer of the legal and physical custody of records from an agency to an archival agency or a records center. The agency retains legal custody of the records when transferred for temporary storage at a records center.

ACCESSION NUMBER. A number assigned to identify shipments of records in the records center.

ADEQUACY OF DOCUMENTATION. A standard of sufficiently and properly recorded actions and/or decisions. Derives from the legal requirement that agency heads "make and preserve records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organizations, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency and designed to furnish the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities" (U.S.C. 3101).

ALPHABETIC-SUBJECT FILING SYSTEM. A classification system in which subjects are arranged in alphabetical order regardless of their relationship to one another. For example, the subjects "abode houses" and "adrenaline" might immediately precede and follow "administration."

APPRAISAL. The process of determining the value and thus the final disposition of records, making them either temporary or permanent.

ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING RECORDS. Drawings and related records depicting the concepts and precise measurements needed to plan and build static structures, such as buildings, bridges, and canals, as well as those needed to complete other public works projects and produce such objects as weapons and machines. Includes design and construction drawings and related records. Also includes computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) system records that relate to architecture and engineering which are managed like other electronics.

ARCHIVES. The noncurrent records of an organization, preserved because of their continuing or enduring value.

AUDIOVISUAL RECORDS. Records in pictorial or aural form, regardless of format. Includes still photographs (or still pictures), graphic arts (posters and original art), motion pictures, video recordings, audio (or sound) recordings, and related records.

BLOCK. A chronological grouping of records consisting of one or more segments of cutoff records that belong to the same series and are dealt with as a unit for purposes of their sufficient

transfer, especially the transfer of permanent records to the National Archives (NA) (For example, a transfer of records in 5-year blocks.) In electronic recordkeeping, a grouping of data stored as a unit on an external storage medium and dealt with as a unit by the computer for input or output.

CARTOGRAPHIC RECORDS. Graphic representations at reduced scale of selected physical and cultural features of the surface of the earth and other planets. Includes maps, charts (hydrographic/nautical, weather, and aeronautical), photo maps, atlases, cartograms, globes, relief models, and related records, such as field survey notes, map history case files, and finding aids. Also includes geographic information system records, or digital cartographic records, which are managed like other electronic records.

CENTRAL FILES. Files accumulated by several offices or organizational units and maintained and supervised in one location. Also called centralized files. This arrangement is most effective in small organizations.

CHARGE OUT. The act and result of recording the removal and loan of a document or a file to indicate its location. Usually involves the use of a form, such as OF-23, Charge Out Record.

CLASSIFICATION. The process of determining the sequence or order in which to arrange documents.

CLASSIFIED INFORMATION. Records or information requiring, for national security reasons, safeguards against unauthorized disclosure.

CLOSED FILE. A file unit or series containing documents on which action has been completed and to which more documents are not likely to be added. A file unit or series to which access is limited or denied.

CONTINGENT RECORDS. Records scheduled for final disposition after the occurrence of an event at some unspecified future time, such as the decommissioning of a vessel.

CONTINUITY REFERENCE. A reference form used to replace material withdrawn for consolidation with later material.

CURRENT RECORDS. (Also referred to as "active records.") Records that are necessary for conducting the current business of an office and must be maintained in office space and equipment.

CUTOFF. Breaking or ending files at regular intervals, usually at the close of a fiscal or calendar year, to permit their disposal or transfer in complete blocks and to permit the establishment of new files. Also called file cutoff or file break.

DECENTRALIZED FILES. Each principal element of an agency maintains its own files at the point of reference.

DISPOSAL. The actions taken regarding temporary or nonpermanent records after their retention periods expire and including either destruction or, in rare instances, donation. Also, when so specified, the actions taken regarding nonrecord materials when no longer needed, especially their destruction.

DISPOSAL AUTHORITY. Legal approval empowering an agency to transfer permanent records to the NARA or carry out the disposal of temporary records. Must be obtained from National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and also, for certain records proposed as temporary, from the General Accounting Office (GAO). The agency's approval of disposition instructions for nonrecord material.

DISPOSE. To carry out disposal, which includes either the destruction or the donation of temporary records, but not the transfer of permanent records to the NA.

DISPOSITION SCHEDULE. A document providing authority for the final disposition of recurring or nonrecurring records. Also called records disposition schedule, records control schedule, records retention schedule, or schedule. Includes the SF-115, Requests for Records Disposition Authority, the General Records Schedules (GRS), and the agency records schedule, which, when completed, becomes a comprehensive records schedule that also contains Agency disposition instructions for nonrecord materials.

FEDERAL RECORDS CENTER (FRC). A storage facility operated by NARA.

FILES. A collective term usually applied to all records and nonrecord materials of an office or agency.

FILES CUSTODIAN. The individual or office in charge of Agency files. Often used interchangeably with records custodian.

FILING SYSTEM. A set of policies and procedures for organizing and identifying files or documents to speed their retrieval, use, and disposition. Sometimes called recordkeeping system.

FINDING AIDS. Indexes or other lists, whether manual or automated, that are designed to make it easier to locate relevant files.

FISCAL VALUE. The usefulness of records in documenting an agency's financial transactions and obligations.

FROZEN RECORDS. In records disposition, those temporary records that cannot be destroyed on schedule because special circumstances, such as a court order, require a temporary extension of the approved retention period.

GENERAL RECORDS SCHEDULE. A NARA-issued schedule governing the disposition of specified records common to several or all agencies.

INACTIVE OR NONCURRENT RECORDS. Records no longer required to conduct agency business and ready for final disposition.

INFORMATION SYSTEM. The organized collection, processing, transmission, and dissemination of information in accordance with defined procedures. Normally refers to a system containing electronic records. Sometimes called a record system.

INTRINSIC VALUE. In archives administration, the value of those permanent records that should be preserved in their original form rather than as copies.

INVENTORY. A survey of agency records and non record materials taken before developing schedules.

ITEM. A separately numbered entry describing records on an SF-115, Request for Records Disposition Authority. Usually consists of a record series or part of an information system. A document.

LEGAL CUSTODY. Guardianship or control of records, including both physical possession (physical custody) and legal responsibility (legal custody), unless one or the other is specified.

LEGAL VALUE. The usefulness of records in documenting legally enforceable rights or obligations, both those of the Federal Government and those of persons directly affected by the agency's activities.

LIFE CYCLE OF RECORDS. The concept that records pass through three stages: creation, maintenance and use, and disposition.

MNEMONIC FILING SYSTEM. A classification system in which records are coded by symbols that remind the user of the subjects; for example, ADM for administration and PER for personnel. These symbols usually are arranged alphabetically.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES (NA). The organization or agency responsible for appraising, accessioning, preserving, and making available permanent records.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION (NARA). The agency having overall responsibility for the records management program throughout the Federal Government. When permanent records are transferred to the NA, they are placed in the custody of NARA's Office of the National Archives.

NONRECORD. U.S. Government-owned informational materials excluded from the legal definition of records. Consists of extra copies of documents kept only for convenience of reference, stocks of publications and of processed documents, and library or museum material intended solely for reference or exhibition.

NUMERIC-ALPHABETIC FILING SYSTEM. A classification system in which numbers are assigned to main divisions and letters and numbers to succeeding subdivisions and the records

are arranged accordingly. For example, "ADM" might stand for "Administrative Management," and "ADM-1" for the subdivision "Policy." "ADM 2" might stand for "Reports and Statistics," and further subdivided under this subject may be "ADM 2-1, Activity Reports."

OFFICE OF PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY (OPR). The office delegated responsibility for a specific function. This office normally maintains the official agency record, including the yellow copy and related incoming correspondence. The OPR may designate other offices to maintain the official agency record copy for that function.

OFFICIAL FILE STATION. Any location in an organization where records are maintained for current use.

OFFICIAL RECORD COPY. The yellow file or otherwise designated copy maintained by the office that created it. Also includes incoming correspondence used to document a specific function.

PERMANENT RECORDS. Records appraised by NARA as having sufficient historical or other value to warrant continued preservation by the Federal Government beyond the time they are needed for administrative, legal, or fiscal purposes. Sometimes called archival records.

PERSONAL PAPERS. Non official, or private, papers relating solely to an individual's own affairs. Must be clearly designated as such and kept separate from the agency's records. Also called personal files or personal records.

PROGRAM RECORDS. Records documenting the unique, substantive functions for which an agency is responsible, in contrast to administrative records.

PUBLIC RECORDS. In general usage, records accumulated by Government agencies. Records open to public inspection by law or custom.

READING FILES. Outgoing correspondence records arranged chronologically, in contrast to those arranged by subject. Sometimes called chronological (chron) or day files.

RECORD GROUP. A body of organizationally related records established by an archival agency after considering the organization's administrative history and complexity and the volume of its records. NARA uses record group numbers to keep track of agency records during and after the scheduling process, including those transferred to an FRC and/or the NA.

RECORDS. According to 44 U.S.C. 3301, the term "includes all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriated for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the

Government or because of the informational value of data in them. Library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference or exhibition purposes, extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience of reference, and stocks of publications and of processed documents are not included."

RECORD SERIES. File units or documents arranged according to a filing system or kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific kind of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use, such as restrictions on access and use.

RECORDS MAINTENANCE AND USE. Any action involving the location of Federal agency records, or the storage, retrieval, and handling of records kept at office file locations by, or for, a Federal agency. This is the second stage of the records life cycle.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT. The planning, controlling, directing, organizing, training, promoting, and other managerial activities related to the creation, maintenance and use, and disposition of records to achieve adequate and proper documentation of Federal policies and transactions and effective and economical management of agency operations.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM. A planned, coordinated set of policies, procedures, and activities needed to manage an agency's recorded information. Encompasses the creation, maintenance and use, and disposition of records, regardless of media. Essential elements include issuing up-to-date administrative and program directives, properly training those responsible for implementation, and carefully evaluating the results to ensure adequacy, effectiveness, and efficiency.

RECORDS OFFICER. The person assigned responsibility by the agency head for overseeing an agency wide records management program.

RETENTION PERIOD. The length of time that records are to be kept.

RETIREMENT. The sending of inactive records to an FRC or to the NA either for permanent retention or for storage until time for disposal (destruction).

SCREENING. The review of files to apply access restrictions. Examining files to identify and remove documents of short-term value, especially those eligible for immediate destruction. Also called weeding or purging.

SPECIAL RECORDS. Types of records maintained separately from textual/paper records because their physical form or characteristics require unusual care and/or because they have nonstandard sizes. Includes electronic, audiovisual, microform, cartographic and remote-sensing imagery, architectural and engineering, printed, and card records.

STANDARD FORM 115, REQUEST FOR RECORDS DISPOSITION AUTHORITY. The form used by Federal agencies to obtain disposition authority from NARA for records to which the GRS are inapplicable. **STANDARD FORM 135, RECORDS TRANSMITTAL AND**

RECEIPT. The form to be submitted by Federal agencies before transferring records to an FRC. Sometimes referred to as shelf lists.

SUBJECT FILES. Records arranged and filed according to their general informational or subject content. Mainly letters and memorandums; but also forms, reports, and other material; all relating to program and administrative functions, not to specific cases.

SUBJECT-NUMERIC FILING SYSTEM. A subject classification system in which the main topics are arranged alphabetically and the subdivisions, i.e., secondary (second) and tertiary (third) are coded numerically. For example, "Personnel 8" might stand for "Hours of Duty." This system may be modified by combining it with the mnemonic filing system so that, for example, "Personnel 8" would become "PER 8."

Primary Subjects are the prime or major subject designations that identify and describe groups of related records.

Secondary Subjects are one or more related subjects that have been created or established by the division of a primary subject.

Tertiary Subjects are one or more related subjects that have been created or established by the division of a secondary subject.

TECHNICAL REFERENCE FILES. Nonrecord copies of articles, periodicals, reports, studies, vendor catalogs, and similar materials that are needed for reference and information but are not properly part of the office's records.

TEMPORARY RECORDS. Records approved by NARA for disposal, either immediately or after a specified retention period.

UNSCHEDULED RECORDS. Records for which no ultimate disposition has been determined.

WASHINGTON NATIONAL RECORDS CENTER. The FRC for the inactive permanent records (except those located in the NA) and temporary Federal records for offices located in the Washington metropolitan area.