Records Management - Important Definitions

Last Modified:

Federal Record

They are made or received by APHIS under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business; and

They are preserved or are appropriate for preservation 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.

Federal records include:

- Traditional documentation: meeting minutes, directives, forms, correspondence, case and subject files
- Memorandum for the record summarizing informal meetings, discussions, and telephone calls
- Record set of agency publications
- Audiovisual records, including posters, dealing with agency functions and activities
- Cartographic, architectural, and engineering records produced by an agency and indexes

It also includes:

- Individual personnel folders
- Working papers/files that contain unique information on an agency’s policies or decisions
- Final plans and “as built” drawings
- Databases that contain information on socioeconomic topics such as trade, education, health, or behavior
- E-mail and attachments transmitted in conducting agency business

Legal Definition of a Federal Record

44 U.S.C. 3301:

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 Stated Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate 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.

Nonrecord Materials

U.S. Government-owned documentary materials excluded from the legal definition of a record, either by failing to meet the general conditions of record status or falling under one of the following categories:

- Extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience of reference.
- Stocks of publications and of processed documents; however, a record set must be maintained.
- Library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference or exhibition purposes.

Materials that are received by the government, but are not considered a record include:

- Trade journals, books, magazines, etc.
- Supply catelogs, brochures, and ads

Nonrecord materials should be destroyed/deleted once they're no longer needed.

Personal Materials

Personal papers are documentary materials that belong to an individual that are not used to conduct agency business. They relate solely to an individual's personal and private affairs or are used exclusively for that individual's convenience. They may refer or comment on the subject matter of agency business, provided they are not used to conduct that business.

Examples include:

- Religious or community organizations, political associations, or family matters
- Workplace e-mail and phone messages that's personal in nature such as to discuss lunch plans
- E-mail from non-government sources such as news feeds, mailing lists and listservs, solicitations, and spam
- Literature and other communications from professional organizations, manuscripts and drafts of books and articles

Items that fall under this category should be destroyed/deleted once they're no longer needed.

Records Management

44 U.S.C. 2901:

The planning, controlling, directing, organizing, training, promoting, and other managerial activities involved with respect to records creation, records maintenance and use, and records disposition in order to achieve adequate and proper documentation of the policies and transactions of the Federal Government and effective and economical management of agency operations.

Records Disposition

44 U.S.C. 2901:

The term "records disposition" means any activity with respect to:

- disposal of temporary records no longer necessary for the conduct of business by destruction or donation;
- transfer of records to Federal agency storage facilities or records centers;
- transfer to the National Archives of the United States of records determined to have sufficient historical or other value to warrant continued preservation; or
- transfer of records from one Federal agency to any other Federal agency.

Record Series

A series is the basic unit for organizing and controlling your files. Series are those file units or documents kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, maintenance, or use.

The series concept is a flexible one, and programs should be careful to create series by organizing their documents in ways that facilitate management of the records throughout their life cycle.

Each record series should be located separately from all other records.

Each record series must be covered by a records disposition schedule.

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