



# Records Management Tip

Records management advice prepared for GNWT records professionals by the Records Management Unit, PWS

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**Records  
Disposition  
Authorities Series**

## Developing Retention and Disposition Schedules

### What is a Retention and Disposition Schedule?

A retention and disposition schedule is a timetable that sets out how long each phase in a records' life cycle will last. The schedules will also identify the method of final disposition for each series of records.

### Retention Schedules in an ORCS

In the GNWT system, retention and disposition schedules are directly tied to the classification system in ARCS or ORCS. Each secondary in ORCS has a schedule assigned to it. The schedules identify how long records will be kept in active, on-site, storage after they have closed; how long the records will be kept in semi-active storage; and the final disposition of the records. The schedules may also identify criteria for closing a record. Adding the active and semi-active periods together gives you the total retention period after file closure.

### Why We Keep Records

Records are kept because they have value to an organization. Four main values influence how long the government retains records:

- **Administrative Value.** Sometimes called operational value. This refers to an organization's need to keep records in order to meet its business and reference needs.
- **Legal Value.** Legal value refers to the need to keep records in order to comply with laws and regulations, or to protect the organization from risk.
- **Financial Value.** Financial value refers to the need to keep records to be financially accountable.
- **Historical Value.** Sometimes referred to as archival value. This refers to the need to keep records that document the history of the organization.

Government departments may want to consider the public's expectations in their decisions about how long to keep records. Some records series may have a value to the public that outlasts the value that the records have for the department that created them. This public interest may influence decisions about how long to keep records.

### Researching Retention Periods

Information about records values and retention requirements can be gathered during the research phase in the ORCS development project.

The Records Disposition Authority series gives you tips on how to develop a records disposition authority.

- **Policies and Procedures** may provide information on how long records are needed to meet administrative, legal, and financial requirements.
- **Laws and Regulations** may provide information on how long records are needed to meet legal requirements. Laws and regulations do not normally spell out specific retention periods. Rather, they may identify records that should be kept. Limitation periods in the **Limitation on Actions Act** and other legislation set out the period during which a legal action may be brought against another party. Organizations do not have to keep records for the duration of the limitation period, but disposing of records before the limitation period expires may pose a risk.
- **Financial Requirements** for government departments are set out in the **Financial Administration Act** and the **Financial Administration Manual**. They may also be found in other department-specific laws.
- **Professional Associations** may provide guidance on how long to keep certain groups of records.
- **Interviews with records creators and users** are the most important source of information about records values and retention periods. The creators and users of the information are able to explain when and how they use records. They can also explain why and how far back they need to refer to records. Interviews are the main source of information on administrative values and the public's expectation.

### **Developing the Retention Schedule**

For each secondary in ORCS, you will need to determine:

- The date or event that closes the record. Event triggers are usually identified with the abbreviation S/O (superseded/obsolete). A description should be included in the schedule to explain the event.
- The total length of time that the records are required to meet the department's administrative, legal, audit, and historical requirements, after they have closed.
- The point in time when records cease to be active and become semi-active. As a rule, files are considered active if you are retrieving more than 2 files a month from a drawer in a filing cabinet.

### **Determining the Final Disposition**

When you start to develop a schedule, assume that all records will be destroyed (D). The Territorial Archivist collects records that have long-term historical value to the Northwest Territories for the Northwest Territories Archives. The Archivist will tell you which records will have final disposition of Archival Selection (AS/D).

Identify those records that will need to be transferred to another medium at some point during their life cycle. The schedule should describe the conversion procedures, and explain what will happen to the original records.