



# Records Management Tip

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

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**Active Filing Series**

## File Charge-Out Systems

### What is a File Charge-Out System?

A file charge-out system is a set of procedures for keeping track of active files and documents. It is used to keep track of files that users have removed from their **filing stations**.

The Active Filing series gives you tips on how to manage active records in your department.

Every file folder should have a filing cabinet that it can call “home.” These **filing stations** should be in central areas that are convenient to employees. Some departments may have a single Central Registry or central filing room instead of many filing stations. Filing stations and Central Registries should have a **records custodian** who looks after the files.

When you have a file charge-out system in place, a charge-out record will be made every time a file is removed from its filing station. The charge-out record will be used to keep track of:

- The file that was taken.
- The person who took it.
- The date on which it was removed.
- The location in the filing station where the file belongs.

The charge-out record should be updated as the file moves from person to person. This way, you will know who currently has the file.

### Why do we need a File Charge-Out System?

If you have a file charge-out system, you will know where all of the files in your system are at all times. This makes it easy to respond if another user needs the file, for an Access to Information Request, for filing, or for retention scheduling. Charge-out systems will also help you monitor how active your files are. This information can be used for space planning or developing records disposition authorities.

### Different Types of File Charge-Out System

There are several different ways to set up a file charge-out system. The best system is the one that your co-workers will use. A few of the most common systems will be discussed below.

#### 1. Charge-Out Cards

This system uses charge-out cards to keep track of files. Each file folder in the filing station has a card in it that lists the file number, volume number, file title, and date range. The card also contains a space for the user’s name and the date that the file was removed from the filing station. When a person removes a file from the filing station, the charge-out card can be put in a bring-forward or tickler file that will help the records custodian keep track of how long the file has been borrowed.

## 2. Charge-Out Guides

Charge-out guides are similar to charge-out cards, except that with this system, a guide is **always** placed in the filing station to hold the spot for the file. Some charge-out guides let you write the charge out information directly on the guide, while others operate with a multi-part charge-out form. One copy of the form is put in a pocket in the charge-out guide. A second copy is used in a bring-forward or tickler file to track how long the file has been out or how many files a particular user has. Some charge-out guides have a pocket for documents that need to be filed when the file is returned.



Charge-out guides and charge-out cards can be purchased in different colours. The different colours could be used to improve file tracking:

- The different colours could represent different weeks or months. A quick glance in the filing station will tell you which files have been out longer.
- The different colours could be used to represent different users. If only a few different people use a filing station, it may be effective to use a different colour for each user. A quick glance at the filing station will tell you who has a certain file.

## 3. Automated Charge-Out Systems

Electronic Records Management Systems, such as iRIMS, have the ability to charge-out files. These systems usually use barcodes to identify individual file folders. When a user charges out a file, the barcode is scanned into a computer to link the file with the user. Electronic Records Management Systems may be used with charge-out guides.

### Common Procedures

Every department should have its own procedures on how to handle file charge-outs. There are a few common issues that departments should address:

- When do users have to charge out a file? A common rule is that you have to charge out a file if you move more than two or three steps away from the filing station.
- Who is responsible for the file after it has been charged out? Usually the person who charged-out the file is responsible for it until it comes back. If the file is passed to someone else, then the person who had it first is responsible for making sure that the charge-out record has been updated.
- How long can a user have a file? It is a good idea to set limits on how long a person can charge-out a file. Files that are removed for a long time often do not come back. The records custodian can use a bring-forward or tickler file to track how long files have been out. Overdue notices can be sent to employees who do not return their files before the due date.