# Records Management Tip

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

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***Getting Started Series***

The Getting Started series looks at how to start setting up a records management program.

## Conducting a Records Inventory

**What is a Records Inventory?**
An inventory is a process of collecting information about the records and information that a department has. It is not the same as a file list. An inventory looks at the functions that a department does, and the information that flows in and out of those functions.

**What are the uses of a Records Inventory?**
You can use an inventory as a starting point in many different projects. Some of the uses include:

- Writing Operational Records Classification Systems (ORCS)
- Converting to the GNWT ARCS
- Finding and clearing out backlogs of records
- Identifying requirements for new equipment
- Planning microfilming, imaging, and document management programs
- Planning vital records programs
- Evaluating records management programs

**Collecting the Information**
An inventory is an information-gathering exercise. There are many ways to collect the information. The main methods are:

- **Research**. Review organization charts, legislation and regulations, policies, procedures, business plans, annual reports, and other publications.
- **File lists**. File lists tell you how many active and semi-active records the department has. They also show you how records are named and organized.
- **Interviews with managers, program staff, and support staff**. Use interviews to find out what the department's functions are. Interviews will help you find out how records are created and used. They are the main source of information about retention needs. They will also help you find out about problems with the current system.
- **Site visits**. Use site visits to identify records series, media formats, and the volume of records that the department has. You can also use the site visit to find out what kind of equipment the department has and needs. Finally, you can find out if you need to take actions to preserve or protect any records.

**Designing the Inventory Form**
Many records management textbooks tell you to create a form for the site visits. You can use the form to collect:

- The titles of records series, or the groupings of related records
- A description of the contents of the records
- The date range covered by the records
- The linear measurement of the records
- A physical description of the records and the storage equipment
- The location of duplicates
- The retention and disposition requirements

**How do I Conduct a Records Inventory?**
Most textbooks tell you how to do a records inventory. The basic steps are given here:

1. **Decide on the purpose of the inventory**. This will help you decide how much and what kind of information you need to collect. You will need to collect different information if you are developing an ORCS than if you are clearing out backlogs.
2. **Decide which divisions or regional offices will be inventoried first.** Discuss the inventory with directors and managers. You will need their cooperation before you begin the inventory.
3. **Research the department's programs and functions.** Find out as much as you can about the department. Collect and read as much documentation about the department as you can find. You are looking for anything that helps you understand what the department does and how it uses its information.
4. **Set up interviews with employees and managers, and plan site visits.** Interview both employees and their managers. You want to interview people at all levels in the department in order to get a complete view of what the department does and how it uses its information.
5. **Conduct the inventory.** Make the site visits and conduct the interviews. Then use the information to identify records series. Do not list every file. The purpose of the inventory is to identify groups of related records and find out how they are used.
6. **Evaluate the information collected.** Once you have finished the inventory, check to see if there are any gaps in your information. Make follow-up phone calls or interviews if you need to.

You are now ready to put the inventory to use!