



Records Management Tip

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

No. 18 – August 2004

**Records
Disposition
Authorities Series**

Developing an ORCS – Part 3

Designing the Classification System

Once you have completed your research, you can begin to develop the classification system.

Review Your Information

Look at the information that you have gathered. Can you identify groups, or series, of related records? Can you identify different series that are related to one another? Can you identify the records that are used in the division's different programs, services, or procedures?

Make a list of all of the different series or groups of records that you found out about while you were doing your research. Some people like to use a white board for this step. A note pad and a pencil will work for others. Some people will make a list on their computer, using word processing software or a database. Still other people will put sticky-notes or index cards on the wall and re-arrange them until they have a structure that they like. Your method will depend on your working style.

Organizing the List

Once you have listed the records series, begin to organize them into some sort of logical arrangement. Your goal is to find a way to organize the information that makes sense to the users as well as to you.

The basic principle of a hierarchical classification system, like the block-numeric system that we use for ORCS, is that like is kept together with like. This means that similar information is kept together. For example, if you have two series of records that contain related information, bring them together under the same category. The idea behind it is that it is easier to find records if all of the records on a single topic are kept together. There are two main approaches to organizing records: **subject-based systems** and **function-based systems**.

Subject-Based Classification Systems

In a subject-based system, the basic organizing principle is that similar subjects should be kept together. The idea behind it is that when a person looks for information, they will think of a topic and go looking for information about that topic. So, when organizing information into a subject based system, look for similar topics or subjects, and bring all of that information together. When records are classified in a subject-based system, the subject matter of the record decides how it will be classified.

Function-Based Classification Systems

In a function-based classification system, the basic organizing principle is that information about a single business function or activity should be kept together. A

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

function is a major responsibility that is managed by the division in order to fulfill its goals and mandate. An activity is a major task that is performed in order to perform a function. Several activities may be done in support of a function.

When organizing a classification system using a function-based approach, first identify the division's major functions. Next, identify the major activities that support the function. Finally, identify the records series that are used in support of those activities. When records are classified in a function-based system, the function that the record supports determines how it will be classified. The advantage to a function-based system is that the arrangement of the records reflects how work is performed.

Arrangement of the Classification System

Once you have grouped your records into various subjects or functions, you have to decide how the categories will be put in order. Keep in mind that you eventually want to end up with a list of primaries and their related secondaries.

In a traditional, subject-based, block-numeric system, the first primary in the ORCS is a General primary. The remaining primaries are arranged alphabetically after the General primary. The same principle applies to secondaries. In the block-numeric system, the first secondary is reserved for Policies and Procedures and the second secondary is used for General files. Other secondaries are arranged alphabetically after the General secondary. A quick look at GNWT ARCS and ORCS will tell you that the alphabetical approach is not often used. More often, primaries and secondaries are arranged in a way that follows the order in which work is done in a division, or the priority that a division places on certain records series.

Remember, each primary should reflect a single subject or function. If you have more than 10 secondaries in a primary, take a second look at the primary. You may have put more than one subject or function in the primary, or you may have included individual records rather than a series of records.

Numbering the Classification System

Once you have completed the overall structure of the classification system, you can assign numbers to the primaries and secondaries. ORCS primaries can be assigned numbers ranging from 0000-0999 and from 7000 and up. Leave gaps of 10 numbers between each primary so that new primaries can be inserted into the system easily. Leave gaps of at least 5 numbers between secondaries.

Review the Classification System with Users

You should review the classification system with your users two or three times during the development process. This usually means reviewing the system with the managers. You may want to consult some of the support staff as well. Show them your first complete draft to find out if the basic structure makes sense to them and to find out if you missed anything. Review the second and third draft with them for completeness.

For more information about block-numeric systems, see **Records Management Tip #2**.