



Records Management Bulletins

Records management advice prepared for GNWT
employees by Records Management

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Introducing ARCS and ORCS

What are ARCS and ORCS?

ARCS and ORCS are acronyms for Administrative Records Classification System and Operational Records Classification System. Each of these is a records management tool which combines a block numeric numbering scheme with a set of records schedules. This combination allows you to efficiently file and retrieve records and also informs you of the length of time groups of records must be kept and whether they should be destroyed or sent to the NWT Archives when they are no longer needed. This allows for consistency in filing, a reduction in the requirements for costly storage space and equipment, and ensures that records of lasting value will be secured for permanent preservation. In short, documents are more effectively filed, active files are more easily located, and inactive files are moved to off-site storage according to a clear timetable. All of this translates in cost savings for the Government of the Northwest Territories.

What are Operational records and Administrative records?

To understand the structure and purpose of ARCS and ORCS, it is first necessary to know the difference between administrative records and operational records.

Administrative records are documents which provide "housekeeping support" to a department. They are the common, generic records that are found in all government departments. Operational records, in contrast, are directly related to the specific mandate or program delivery of a department and are therefore unique to each department. In the department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development for example, a purchase order is an administrative record (it provides administrative support) whereas a hunting permit book is an operational record (it is related to the specific mandate of the department). Every department will have a combination of administrative and operational records, but it is important to recognize that one department's administrative records may be another department's operational records. For example, records documenting the land claim negotiation process are operational for the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs but are administrative records for all other departments.

What is the difference between ARCS and ORCS?

Because administrative records are standard across government it was possible to develop a standardized classification system which can accommodate these records for all departments. This is the GNWT ARCS. Because operational records are unique to individual departments, a complementary classification system must be developed from an analysis of each department's unique functions and the records which are created as a result. This will be the department or division specific ORCS.

What are records schedules?

A records schedule is the legal authority that allows you to transfer and dispose of records. It is also a timetable defining the retention periods of records. Any comprehensive government records classification system (ARCS/ORCS) must include retention periods and final disposition action. Retention periods define the length of time that series of records are kept at the work site for consultation, and when they will be moved to off-site storage for occasional consultation. Final disposition defines the action at the end of the records' life cycle: destruction, microfilming, or transfer to the NWT Archives.

Records schedules already are part of the GNWT ARCS; they must also be associated with any newly developed ORCS. ORCS schedules should be developed through consultations with the persons in your department who actually use the records.

When complete, your ORCS with its associated records schedule(s) is reviewed by the Records Management Unit for consistency and completeness. The next step is to submit your department's ORCS to the Public Records Committee for approval of records retention and final disposition actions.

Each department can implement ARCS and develop a tailor-made ORCS; together they will constitute a comprehensive records management plan for the department's records.

How do I begin to implement ARCS and ORCS?

Before converting your filing system to ARCS and ORCS, consider "purging" and scheduling records which won't be converted to the new system. Before embarking on ARCS or ORCS implementation, prepare a detailed project plan, ensure senior management commitment and support, and provide for the human and physical resources necessary to carry out the project.

Once these steps have been followed you can implement ARCS and ORCS at your own pace.

What help is available to assist me with implementing ARCS and ORCS?

PWS - Records Management Unit will be publishing further Records Management Bulletins on specific aspects of ARCS and ORCS. ARCS can be obtained from the Records Management Unit and advice is available to help you begin to implement the system. The Records Management Unit is also developing a standard ORCS model which will assist you in developing an ORCS for your specific department. It will be made available as soon as it is completed.

For more information on ARCS and ORCS please contact the Records Management Unit at: 920-3009 or 873-7627