



Records Management Bulletins

Records management advice prepared for GNWT employees by Records Management

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What is a Record?

The Definition of a Record

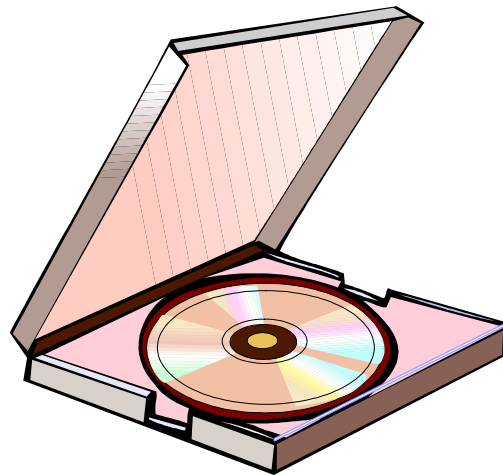
Every records management program must have a very specific definition of what constitutes a “record.” This allows the program to specify its scope and to outline its objectives. In most governments such a definition is included in legislation, whether this be a Public Records Act, an Archives Act, an Access to Information Act, etc. This gives the definition of record the force of law and grants authority to the records management program.

In the Government of the Northwest Territories, record is defined in the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act. According to this legislation, record means...

“a record of information in any form and includes information that is written, photographed, recorded or stored in any manner, but does not include a computer program or other mechanism that produces records”

This definition is compatible with the definition of “public record” included in the Archives Act - the difference is that the latter is also applicable to records of municipalities since the mandate of NWT Archives is to acquire the records of these organizations.

What is important to recognize is that both the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and Archives Act definitions cover information stored in all media and recorded by all processes. This includes, for example, letters, journals, drawings (graphic); photographs, films, video-tapes, microfilm (mechanical); and digital information recorded on CD-ROMs, optical discs, diskettes, or in your e-mail account or on hard drive (electronic).

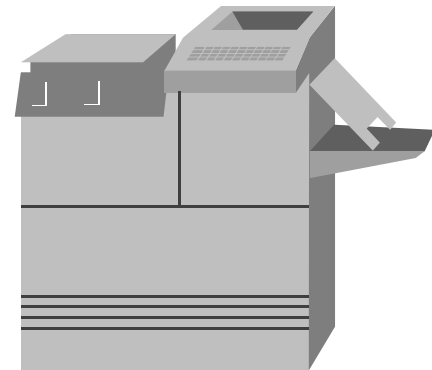


Records in all of these formats need to be incorporated into your departmental records management program.

It is also important to realize that all records received or created by employees of the Government of the Northwest Territories are government property and, consequently, are subject to the Government's legislation, policies, and standards for records management. In other words, records do not "belong" to individuals and individuals cannot absolve themselves and their records from inclusion in their department's records management program.

The Definition of a Non-Record

Non-record material includes duplicate copies of reports, obsolete administrative manuals, informational brochures, catalogues, pricelists, drafts, blank copies of forms, reference material not relating to specific projects, and any other documentation that does not serve as the basis for official action. Any recorded information which is original and unique is a record - if these qualities are absent, it is probably a non-record.



Examples of Records and Non-Records

In many cases the distinction between a record and a non-record is not an easy one to make. A few examples may help to clarify the differences.

- An unsolicited brochure filed for reference by the receiving department is not a record. In some cases, however, a Request for Proposal may result in a vendor submitting a brochure along with the requested information. In this case, the brochure is an integral support for the proposal and thus the entire package constitutes a record.
- Minutes of meetings usually exist in multiple copies. In most circumstances, only the original copy is a record. If, however, the other copies are annotated or modified in any way, they too become records.
- A printed report from the Financial Information System (FIS) is a convenience copy of electronic data. It is the database itself which constitutes the record rather than the printout. The printed report would become a record only when it is annotated or when it is used and filed as supporting documentation for decision-making.

For more information on the definition of records please contact the Records Management Unit at 920-3009 or 873-7627.