



# Records Management Bulletin

Records management advice prepared for GNWT employees  
by the Records Management Unit of Public Works and Services



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## The Life Cycle of Records

### What is the Life Cycle of Records?

The life cycle of records is an important concept in records management. It is a way of looking at how records are created and used.

The life cycle is based on the idea that records become less important as time passes. 90 percent of the use of a record takes place during the first 90 days after it is created. This short period of high use is followed by a longer period of low use. The records only need to be looked up occasionally during this second phase. Eventually, even this limited use will end and the records will have no further value to their creator.

This process is known as the life cycle of a record. In other words, records have a life similar to that of a biological organism.:

- It is born (creation phase)
- It lives (maintenance and use phase)
- It dies (disposition phase)

### Why is the life cycle of records important for records management?

The life cycle is the starting point for creating a records management program. Without it, records management programs would not be as cost effective or well run. Tools, systems, and procedures are developed to manage each phase of the life cycle. For example, file plans and tracking systems help manage active and semi-active records. A retention schedule is a tool that manages the movement of records from one phase to the next. Future bulletins will discuss the different components of the records management program.

### What are the phases of the life cycle of records?

There are four phases to the life cycle of records.

**Creation:** Records begin the life cycle when they are created or received.

**Active Records:** Active records are needed frequently. They are retrieved at least once per month, so they are stored in readily accessible office spaces.

**Semi-Active/Inactive Records:** Semi-active records are not needed for day-to-day business. Organizations need to keep them for reference, for legal reasons, or for financial reasons. They are not used often enough to justify their being stored in prime office space and equipment. Semi-active records are often stored at a lower cost in a records centre. Semi-active records are sometimes called “inactive records.”



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**Final Disposition:** Final disposition is the action that takes place when records have no more value to an organization. In the GNWT, final disposition can involve:

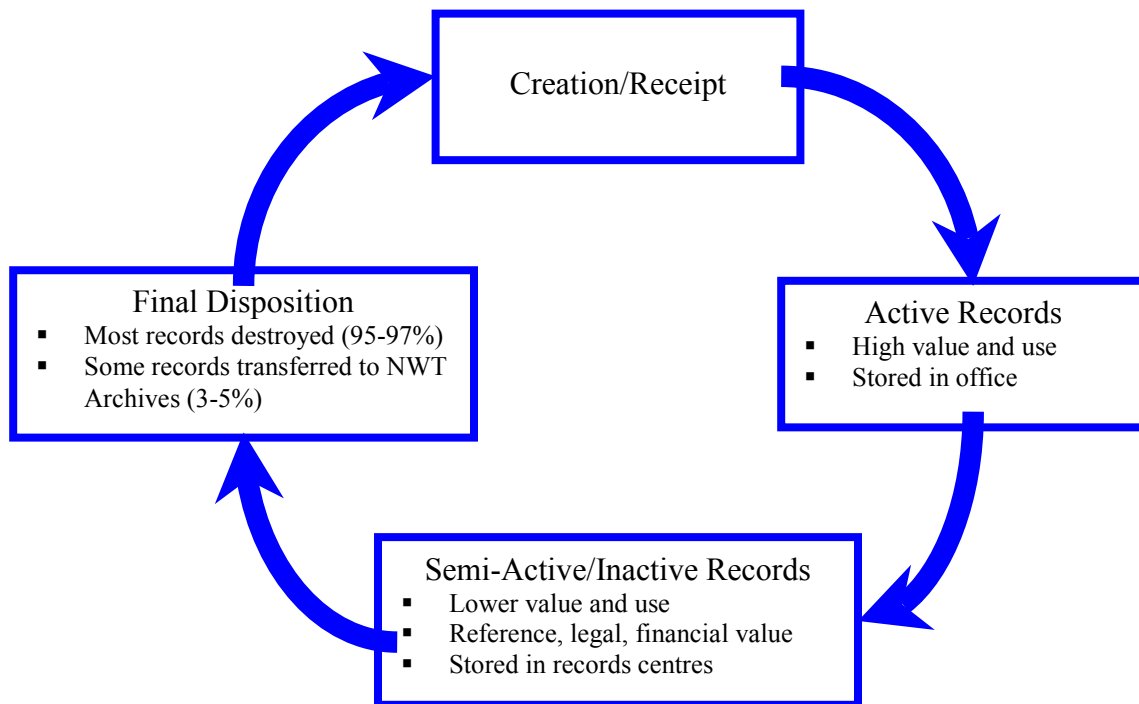
- Physical destruction of the records.
- Transfer of the records to the custody of the NWT Archives.
- Transfer to another department or organization.

The NWT Archives takes only three to five percent of government records. It takes the records that have historical value to the Territory's government and people. These records are kept permanently. The remaining 95 to 97 percent of records are eventually destroyed. The *Archives Act* governs the final disposition of government records.

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### Life Cycle Diagram

The following diagram gives an outline of the life cycle concept.



For more information about the life cycle of records, contact your department's Records Coordinator, or contact the Records Management Unit at 920-3009 or 873-7627.

