



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 NWT Archives: Government Records Appraisal - What to keep?

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) creates lots of records. Some of the sources of records include:

- Policies.
- Letters.
- Reports.
- Operational files.
- Financial records and contracts.
- Surveys and statistical data.
- Architectural drawings and maps.

Departments also produce audio-visual material like photos, moving images, and sound recordings. All of these records may be found in electronic formats as well as more traditional paper, tape, and film formats.

Records show what the government does and how it operates. Well-managed records help ensure that the GNWT is accountable to the people of the Northwest Territories (NWT) for its decisions and actions.

Decisions, Decisions....

The GNWT creates thousands of documents every year. While it would be nice to be able to preserve all of these documents in the NWT Archives for posterity, this is not possible. In fact, it would not be in the best interest of NWT residents if the NWT Archives kept everything forever. Many of these records have little long-term value.

On the other hand, there are many important records that should be kept permanently or for long periods of time. These records provide valuable information about government activities. The NWT Archives acquires and preserves these records.

This bulletin was prepared by the staff of the
Northwest Territories Archives.

How do we decide what to keep?

How do the archivists who manage the NWT Archives decide which records to keep? They use a **records appraisal strategy** to identify and preserve important government records produced by the GNWT. They call this strategy **macroappraisal**.

The NWT Archives tries to preserve selected archival and historic records. Archivists look for records that protect the rights of the public and document:

- Decisions, actions, and policies concerning the GNWT's functions, programs, and activities.
- The effect of government decision-making upon residents of the NWT.
- Information unique to government that will add to understanding about the history, society, culture, and people of the NWT.

The NWT Archives selects between three and five percent of the records produced by the GNWT.

The Records Appraisal Process

The First Step (Administrative History)

Research is the first step in doing a records appraisal for a GNWT department. This is usually done on a division-by-division basis. An archivist will review relevant laws and publications in order to understand what each division does. The research helps the archivist understand the environment where the records are created. It also gives the archivist the background knowledge that he or she needs to meet with employees and complete the process.

The Second Step (Functional Review)

The next step is called the **functional review**. During this step, the archivist meets with the departmental records coordinator, program managers, directors, and other staff. Some of the interview questions include:

- What does this division do?
- What are its functions?
- What is the division responsible for?
- Describe the programs and projects that are run from the division.
- How does the division fulfill its mandate?
- Who are the direct and indirect clientele?
- What other agencies does the division work with?
- How does the interaction with other departments or agencies take place?

For more information, contact your department's records coordinator, or contact the Records Management Unit at 920-3009 or 873-7446

The functional review is the most important step of the appraisal process. The archivist will use it to decide which records will be chosen for permanent preservation. It provides the basis and foundation for the archivist's decisions.

The Third Step (The Records)

After the archivist finishes the functional analysis, he or she will start to look at the records themselves. The archivist will study the types of records that each division creates. The goal is to find the records, files, computer systems, or databases that best document and support the division's functions and formal mandate.

The archivist needs to understand why and how the division created and used its records. He or she also needs to know what functions the records support. The archivist uses this information to choose the records that will be transferred to the NWT Archives and sort out the records that the Archives will not require.

The Fourth Step (Appraisal and Recommendations)

The final step of the process is the **appraisal** of the records. The archivist uses the functional review to identify the division's significant records. The archivist will target these records for preservation. Then the archivist makes **recommendations** as to which records should be kept in the NWT Archives. Keep in mind that the records are not sent to the NWT Archives until the division no longer needs them in order to fulfill operational requirements.

Departments that are developing Operational Records Classifications Systems (ORCS) will find the records appraisal useful. It lets the archivist and the records coordinator work together to identify records for archival selection in a proactive way. This takes away the guesswork for a department that wants to know which records it should send to the NWT Archives.

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