



Records Management Bulletin

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

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Managing Backlogs

Backlogs! Don't even talk to me about backlogs! I don't want to think about it!

There is no getting around it – backlogs of records are a fact of life in government. You will have a hard time finding a government department that does not have a closet, a basement, or a shed somewhere, where boxes of files and other records have been stashed away so that someone else can deal with them.

Some of these records have outlived their usefulness; others continue to have value to your department. Who knows, somewhere in that pile you may find that information that you have been looking for since last October – you know, the report that you think you saw about three years ago that you really need, but you can't remember what you did with it.

Anyway, the point is that we all have backlogs of records, and they are not going to go away by themselves (unless the mice start to use them to make nests). So you may as well just take a deep breath and jump in. Gesundheit. It's dusty in here.

Why bother? They're just sitting there and we don't use them

That is exactly the point. You cannot make use of the records that are sitting in your backlog because you do not know what is there. You may be losing valuable information because it has not been managed. Without good information, we cannot make good decisions.

And if you don't need them, why are you keeping them around?

We are paying a price for those backlog records in one way or another.

- They are taking up office space that could be put to better use (like that meeting room that can't be used for meetings because it is full of boxes).
- They are taking up storage space that could be put to better use.
- They are taking up warehouse space that could be put to better use or that we no longer need to rent.
- They may contain information that we need for legal, financial, audit, or administrative purposes. There are costs associated with recreating information that may exist elsewhere.



So, what do we do with them?

Well, as much as you may want to, you cannot take the records to the garbage dump or throw them into the bottom of a deep pit. They are government records, and they cannot be legally disposed of unless the Public Records Committee approves the disposal.

This means that you have to find out what the records are.

Library and Archives Canada has developed a very detailed set of procedures on how to handle backlogs. They call them **legacy business records**. The complete plan is on their website at http://www.collectionscanada.ca/information-management/0627_e.html.

Aside from differences in terminology and scale, the **Legacy Business Records Toolkit** provides a good overview of the steps needed to manage backlogs of records.

I don't want to do a lot of reading. Can you just tell me what to do here?

Okay. Here is the short version of how to clean up backlogs.

1. Put together a project plan, and create a project team. This team should include your department's Records Coordinator and a few people who work with the records. You may want to hire a casual employee to help with listing and packing boxes.
2. Your Records Coordinator should train the project team on how to inventory files, pack boxes, and provide the information that your Records Coordinator may need to develop a Records Disposition Authority.
3. Find out if there is an approved Records Disposition Authority for these records, such as the Administrative Records Classification System (ARCS), or an Operational Records Classification System (ORCS).
4. Using your file lists, ARCS, and ORCS, classify as many files as you can. Note the new classification number on the file lists. Re-label any files that are going to be incorporated into your active file system.
5. Use the retention schedules in ARCS and ORCS to help you organize the files into boxes. Do not mix scheduled and unscheduled records in the same box. Also, do not mix records that have a final disposition of Destroy (D), with records that have a final disposition of Archival Selection (AS/D). In some cases it may be necessary to re-pack boxes.
6. Organize the scheduled records into transfers. Your Records Coordinator will send them to the Records Management Section for storage or disposition.
7. Your Records Coordinator should develop a One-Time Records Schedule or an ORCS for any files that cannot be classified by ARCS or an existing ORCS. A One-Time Records Schedule is a retention schedule that applies to a specific number of files, and can be used

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once only to schedule the files. The Records Management Section can provide assistance in developing the One-Time Records Schedule.

Final thoughts!

Addressing your backlogs is a scary project. It is also a necessary one. We lose money, time, and energy by letting backlogs pile up. Backlogs will not go away by themselves. The good thing is that once you deal with the backlog, you will never have to look at it again.



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