



Records Management Bulletin

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

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Office of Primary Responsibility

Taking Control of Records

Records Coordinators are often asked to explain what should be done with records that are copied in several locations. The usual question is, “Do I have to keep this or not? So-and-so also has a copy of it.” You can answer this question by finding out where the **Office of Primary Responsibility** for that record is.

Office of Primary Responsibility! That sounds scary.

Office of Primary Responsibility (OPR) is an important-sounding title for something that is really quite simple.

An OPR is a division, section, or work unit in a government department that is responsible for keeping the department’s master record. The idea is that one office in each department will keep a complete copy of a certain type of record. All of the other offices will be able to consult the OPR’s records when they need them.

Departments can reduce duplication and improve their decision making by identifying the OPRs for their records. People usually keep extra copies because they do not think that the record will be there when they need it. If employees know that they can go to the OPR for the record, then they are less likely to keep extra copies.

If everyone consults the OPR’s record, then everyone is using the most recent and complete information to make decisions.

How do I know who the Office of Primary Responsibility is?

People have a hard time figuring out who the OPR is. In order to find the OPR, you first have to understand how information is used and passed around your division, your department, and the government.

You can identify the OPR by looking at where the work is done and where the accountability for the activity lies. You can also identify the OPR by looking for the most complete record and for the final version of the record.

Remember: the OPR’s record is the most complete record in the department. It is the one that can be relied upon to make decisions or to find out what happened.

In some departments, responsibility for a function may be split between several divisions. When this happens, you may have more than one OPR for the same group of records.

You know you are the OPR when...

- Your division, section, or work unit is the only one in your department that has a particular group of records.
- Your division, section, or work unit is the only one in your department that looks after the activity that the records support.
- You share information with another division in your department, but your division takes the lead role in the activity.
- You share information with another division in your department, but your division has the most complete record.
- Your division created the final signed version of the record.

My division is the OPR, but we have many copies of the same records.

If your division has many copies of the same record, then you have to decide which of those copies will be the master record. Once you have confirmed that the master copy is complete, you can schedule and dispose of the other copies.

Assign one person in your office with responsibility to look after the records. This person makes sure that the master record is complete and that the copies are disposed of.

My division is not the OPR, but we have records.

If your division is not the OPR, then you probably have a copy of the master file. Your records will follow the copy file retention periods that are in the Administrative Records Classification System (ARCS) and Operational Records Classification Systems (ORCS).

The OPR's Responsibilities

As the name suggests, the OPR has a number of responsibilities with respect to records.

- Keeps the department's master record.
- Makes sure that the master record is complete and accurate.
- Classifies, schedules, and disposes of the records according to the Master File retention in ARCS and ORCS.

Non-OPR Responsibilities

Even if your office is not the OPR, you still have responsibilities.

- Make sure that the OPR's record is complete.
- Manage copies according to the copy file retention in ARCS and ORCS.

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

Department OPR vs. Government OPR

Up until now, we have talked about one level of OPR, the Department OPR. There are actually two levels of OPRs:

- The **Department OPR** is the office in your department that is responsible for keeping your department's master record.
- The **Government OPR** is a department that is responsible for keeping a master record on behalf of the government. The Government OPR has a legislative or executive mandate to keep the records.

For example, the Financial Management Board Secretariat is the Government OPR for government accounting and budgeting. The Government OPR's records cover the government as a whole. In every other department there is a Department OPR for these functions, usually the finance section. The Department OPR looks after accounting and budgeting in only one department.

With operational records, the Government OPR and the Department OPR are usually one and the same.

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