Information Management Advice 28 Getting Started on the Development of Agency Functional Disposal Schedule

Introduction

The appraisal and disposal of records has a central place in the records management program of all Agencies. Every Agency needs to know how long to keep the records of its business.

It is important to make sound decisions about how long to retain records and when to dispose of them. Records, and the information contained in them, are key assets of any business and need to be retained and disposed of properly.

Where do I start

This advice provides some key steps to assist you to get started on the initial stages of the development of a disposal schedule, identifying the need for the schedule, scoping the task and some tips on the initial analysis stage of any disposal project.

Step 1 Identify the need to develop a functional Records Disposal Schedule

Consider the General Disposal Schedules before developing the functional disposal schedule. If a function is covered by the general disposal schedule and all legislative, regulatory and community expectations are covered then the need to develop a functional records disposal schedule is not required.

> **Tip:** *If the function is carried out by more than one organisation it is probably covered by a General Disposal Schedule.*

The following questions will assist in determining the requirement to develop a functional disposal schedule.

- Is there a close relationship between your organisation and another in respect to these functions?
- Is the organisation dependent on another organisation to complete work for this function?
- Is the organisation dependent on another organisation for approval to any processes for this function?
- Does the agency consult regularly with other organisations in relation to this function?
- Are there joint committees with other organisations in relation to this function?
- Are staff members seconded in relation to this function (either to or from the organisation)?
- Is there any joint funding in relation to this function with another organisation?
- Does another organisation or outside body hold records in relation to this function?
- Does the organisation have agreements with other organisations relating to this function?

- Do other organisations have responsibility in relation to legislation for the organisation?
- Does the organisation report to a governing body in relation to this function?
- Does any other organisation perform these functions?

If the answer to each of these questions is "NO", then it can be determined that the function is unique to the organisation.

If the answer to any of these questions is "YES" then it can be assumed that another organisation either performs this function in parallel, or that another organisation may contribute to the performance of this function in some capacity. In this case, the organisation in question will need to be consulted during the development of the schedule.

Step 2 Contact TAHO

Contact TAHO to discuss the development of your schedule, this will enable us to allocate a Government Information Strategy Unit staff member to work with you, let you know of any new tools, templates, guidelines and advice we have developed in this area as well and include you on schedule development working group.

Step 3 Identify the scope of your Schedule

Will the schedule cover all the functions of your Agency or just one discrete function?

> **TIP:** *If your agency is frequently restructured and services moved in and out of the agency then develop discrete schedules for these functions that stand alone so even in the event of structural change they are still relevant to the organisation.*

Define the scope of your organisation

To determine this you may need to define the scope of your organisation. It may be necessary in your preliminary investigation to determine the functional and administrative boundaries of your organisation. These boundaries can sometimes be hard to determine, particularly if your organisation carries out secretariat activities for and maintains records of advisory councils, committees or boards. Although these councils, committees or boards can be closely linked to your organisation and may have organisational staff members carrying out tasks for them, they may need to be regarded as separate bodies for recordkeeping purposes.

Determine your agency's relationship to other agencies.

Identify whether other agencies report to your organisation

- determine whether your organisation oversights the performance or operations of other public offices
- determine whether your organisation has a regulatory or compliance monitoring role in the non-government sector

Example: Developing a disposal schedule for a specific function of your organisation.

If your disposal project is focused on specific area of business your initial analysis will focus on:

- what laws/ legislation affect this activity?
- how is the business currently transacted?
- what are current recordkeeping practices and how are these helping or hindering business objectives?
- what systems are staff using?
- is this area of business subject to significant risk?

The case of shared or decentralised business

In assessing your business environment to scope your project, you may identify, or need to consider, whether your business shares any of its business functions with other organisations or if it conducts its activities in a decentralised way.

In devolved organisations or decentralised business structures, the same business function can be shared between a number of organisations or be undertaken in a variety of business locations. These types of arrangements should be noted in your preliminary analysis as they will affect the strategies you choose to use for consulting with stakeholders and implementing the disposal schedule.

Tip: Focus on business activities

If you want to develop a schedule for one business function of your agency then focus on business practices in the specific business units, it is important to keep your focus on the business activities performed by these units. Business functions frequently cross across sections or organisational structures. If you keep your focus on the work particular unit is doing, the activities it performs and the systems it uses, you will ensure that you consider all relevant areas in your assessment.

Step 4 Research similar schedules in other jurisdictions

A schedule for business function may already exist in one of the other Australian jurisdictions and this would give you a great place to start. See the TAHO website for links to all other jurisdictions' Government Recordkeeping areas.

Step 5 Use existing analysis tools

If your organisation has been analysed for other purposes it may be possible to draw on the results of such work. Projects which may involve an analysis of business activity include:

- business process re-engineering
- privacy management strategies
- imaging and work flow automation
- policy implementation projects for example the implementation of the Information Security Policy Manual project will result in creation of an information asset register that could be used as a source
- activity-based costing or management

- quality accreditation, and
- systems implementation.

Likewise, if these projects have not been undertaken yet, the results of your analysis can be a valuable source for future projects of this nature.

If the analysis arising from such projects is available, you will need to consider how, why and when the projects were undertaken to determine whether their findings are applicable for recordkeeping purposes.

Step 6 Review your agency's existing records holdings

In developing a comprehensive functional records disposal schedule, it is important to be aware of all record holdings of the Agency, regardless of age or format. This is done via a records survey.

Collect as much information as possible about the records identified, including:

- quantity
- date range (this is particularly relevant for legacy records)
- format/media
- the relationship between different recordkeeping systems, both paper and electronic. For example, do clients fill out paper forms that are entered on a database and placed on a file?
- how recordkeeping is undertaken
- critical factors affecting recordkeeping (this could include audits, court cases, new legislative requirements to keep records, introduction of new ways of doing business)
- critical weaknesses associated with recordkeeping (including business inefficiencies or losses brought about by poor recordkeeping)

Sources for Research

A number of written sources are useful in the research supporting the project. Some of these are identified below:

Type of Records	Relevant Content
Administrative arrangements orders	Set out the principal responsibilities of ministers and the acts that they administer
Annual reports	Identify business activities of the organisation.
	May identify various business systems that contain records, for example, by reporting on the implementation of new systems to manage business processes.
	Identify relevant legislation.
	Past annual reports are useful for historical analysis supporting the appraisal of legacy records
Authorised or draft disposal schedules of the Agency	Identify previous retention periods and classes of records created.
	Record class description forms may contain valuable research information.
	May still have valid disposal actions and can be included in the proposed new schedule with updated information.
	Identify records holdings, including legacy records.
Corporate internet/intranet sites	Identify activities and processes
	May identify business systems that contain records
Corporate plans and strategies	Identify functions of the organisation
Case histories	Litigation or legal disputes your organisation has been subject to the business, social and ethical standards the community expects y our organisation to meet
Information audits	If available, can be used to identify all formats used to create and retain information of the organisation
Interviews and consultation	Interviews, workshops and focus groups with relevant staff are a useful means of gathering information to confirm and obtain confirmation on other research.
Legislation	May set out the role and powers of the Agency
	May contain requirements to create records either implicitly or explicitly, for example, an application
	May set out processes that must be followed, with implicit requirements to create records, for example "applications must be assessed" implies that assessment documents will be created
	Rarely, but occasionally, contains explicit information on how long records must be kept
	Rarely, but occasionally, contains explicit information on how long records must be kept
	May contain implicit information to help identify retention periods, for example length of appeal period
Legacy records	Most Agencies have collections of older records that have not previously been appraised. Sometimes these records have been inherited from predecessor organisations and/or document functions and activities no longer performed by the Agency.
	Agencies are required to document any records created prior to 1960 which are in their custody and contact TAHO to have them appraised for permanent retention.

Legal and best practice requirements	The laws that govern or affect the operations of your organisation
	The business, social and ethical standards the community expects your organisation to meet
Ministerial Portfolio Statements	Useful for core government agencies
	Include information on outputs, key strategies and achievements for each agency within a portfolio
	May include information on legislation and relationships with other agencies
Organisational charts	Identify key parts of the organisation and provides overview of work
	Can be used as 'checklist' to identify areas for research and consultation
Policy and procedure documents for business areas	Identify activities and processes
	Identify requirements to create records, explicitly or implicitly
	May identify business systems that contain records
Standards and General Orders	Identify activities and process for compliance requirements

Step 7 Consult Widely

It is useful to identify key internal stakeholders at the commencement of the project.

Stakeholders might include business area managers, legal staff and internal auditors, and provide essential expertise on the value and uses of records in the organisation.

Information technology staff are also important stakeholders, especially in identifying the various business systems in which records might be held and developing an understanding of how these records are managed. These stakeholders may form a reference group to support the project, or be consulted on an individual basis.

The interests of external stakeholders, whether other government bodies, private organisations, client/customer groups or the wider community should also be taken into account during the evaluation process.

Example:

Are there records that are being created by combined organisations like child and family centres where more than one agency funds and operates the service? If so you need to consult with the other agency and determine who will manage the records.

Further Advice

For more detailed advice, please contact:

Government Information Strategy Unit
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State Archivist