Information Management Advice 54 Records Management Toolkit for Local Government

FACT SHEET 2 - Basic Records Management - File Management

Introduction

This Fact Sheet is part of a sub-set of Advice 54, and focuses on the operational procedures of a records management program. Some templates are provided to assist agencies to establish and implement recordkeeping controls and procedures. Agencies with very small records operations, those who do not have dedicated RM resources, and those who have not yet implemented specialised EDRMS software, may find these Fact Sheets particularly beneficial.

Records program operations

Daily operations are the basis for the development of a procedure manual for the records team. This promotes consistency of process, and information sharing, in the event of new staff, volunteers or contractors. Procedure manuals should be regularly reviewed and updated as required to allow for organisational and procedural change. Whether paper or electronic recordkeeping systems are in place, key functions include:

- Record identification
- Record capture
- Registration
- Indexing
- Classification
- File creation and closure
- Distribution & tracking
- Search & retrieval
- Access
- Security
- Storage
- Scheduling, retention & disposal
- Records transfer
- e-discovery & Disposal Freezes
- Vital Records
- Disaster Management
- QA & Auditing
- Monitoring (program, processes and people) & reporting on activities, performance and compliance
- Resourcing

Tools you may need

If your system is paper-based consider:

- Folders and alpha/numeric stickers
- Tye-tights
- Bodkin
- Stationery (pencils, markers, paperclips, file ties etc)
- Labels
- File register (spreadsheet or book)

If your system is electronic or hybrid consider:

- Appropriate permissions for new file creation
- Stationery (pencils, markers, paperclips, file ties etc)
- Labels (for physical files)
- Folders and alpha/numeric stickers or similar (for physical files)

Classification

Classification is used to link related records to provide a history or flow of information about an activity. Classifying records consistently improves management of records throughout their lifecycle – from capture to eventual disposal – and particularly during the search and retrieval process.

In the past, it was common to classify records according to their subject content or the organisational structure. According to the Australian Standard for Records Management, AS ISO 15489, best practice in records management moves away from these traditional methods and bases classification on a rigorous analysis of business functions and activities. Functions and activities provide a more stable framework for classification than organisational structures that are often subject to change through amalgamation, devolution and decentralisation. The structure of an organisation may change many times, but the functions an organisation carries out usually remain much the same over time. Within the government sector, administrative change may periodically result in the loss or gain of functions between agencies. In these instances, functional classification makes it much easier for agencies to identify records that have to follow functions.

A function-based approach anchors information and records classification firmly in business processes. Classification by function is based on the *context* of a record's creation and use, rather than on the *content* of the record itself. This means the record will be classified according to **why** it exists, ie. its *function, purpose or intent*, rather than **what** it is about, ie. its *subject*. For example, a dog registration record for the dog residing at 1A Blackwood Lane, will not be filed on the property file of 1A Blackwood Lane, but depending on your classification scheme, may be filed under ANIMAL MANAGEMENT (Function) – Permits (Activity) – Dog Registration 2013-2014.

Classification is usually applied at the file level, where the title of the file reflects the Function, and Activity that is being documented. By including this information, staff can see at a glance what records are likely to be contained in the file. When records are created or received, they should be classified in order to identify the correct file to attach them to (or if a new file is required).

Generally, a controlled vocabulary should be designed and used across agency systems/processes for consistency and staff familiarity. In many cases, a fileplan or list of 'approved' file function and activity titles to select from may be sufficient. More complex filing systems may require the use of a thesaurus – which identifies

similar but 'non-preferred' terms, and guides the user to the 'preferred' terminology to use. Note the agency classification scheme can and should be reinforced across various systems from paper files, electronic systems, manual systems using file tabs and suspension files, network drive structures, etc.

File Creation

There are a number of steps to follow to create a new file for your agency. This may involve staff outside of the records section, as well as those staff with appropriate authorisation. A controlled approach should be implemented to minimise potential for duplication, and the utilisation of consistent terminology. For this reason, file creation should be managed centrally – or at the very least, performed by a limited number of administrators who are trained in appropriate protocols.

Staff should complete a new file request: a paper form, an automated workflow or web-based request, or an email to a central records inbox may suffice. A request should contain enough information about the required file for the creating officer to classify the new file appropriately. If possible, the record that requires the new file should be attached to the request to assist. Do not create files in *anticipation* of action – this can lead to a waste of time and effort. The following steps should be followed:

1) Receive **or** create record
2) Check if relevant file exists. If no – proceed to step 3. If yes – proceed to step 8.
3) Request new file
4) Determine appropriate file title based on classification scheme (thesaurus or vocabulary) adopted. The request form should be the first record attached to the file – whether the file is virtual or hard copy. If required, print to file.
5) Allocate file number
6) Create file in system/construct new physical file
7) Register new file in records control system (file register)
8) Identify 'home' location (where the hard copy file usually resides, eg Records file room)
9) Request/retrieve file or book out to requesting officer. Alternatively advise of virtual file creation.
10) Attach record to file

File numbering should be sequential, however for larger filing systems or those indicating different filing systems (within sites or business units), a higher level of complexity may be required. In any case, file numbers should never be duplicated – they are a unique identifier and a handy 'shortcut' reference tool. In the case of paper files, coloured numbers on the side of the file on a shelf can help to identify missing files, or out-of-sequence files more easily.

File Management

Records should be placed in chronological order on physical files, and should not be removed. Traditionally, folio numbering to the individual documents on a specific file was also performed to assist with file management, and the integrity of the records series.

A register maintained of agency files may include the following:

- File Number
- Volume Number/part number
- File title
- Date opened

- Date closed
- Related files
- Scheduling information (eg Retention code & action)
- Home location (substantive location – eg "Records File room")
- Current location (eg Secondary storage or with officer)
- Access level

This information may be captured within the design of an EDRMS, or in the event of paper-based system, a spreadsheet template may suffice to manage the creation of new files.

File Closure

Close files when they become too thick and heavy to be manageable (paper) or when they contain a quantity of records that is making finding the right record difficult (electronic). This advice should be used sensibly – close the file at a convenient point, i.e. not in the middle of a transaction!

Where it is useful to manage records annually or by some other date range, then include the dates in the file title and open a new file once this date range has expired. For example, the file *FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT - Budgeting – Budget 2012-13*, will be followed by a new file *FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT - Budgeting – Budget 2013-14.*

Once closed, a physical file should have a 'Closed file' sheet added to the front of the file to clearly indicate the file is not to have further records added. EDRMS systems may have a visual flag to indicate this, or may be 'moved' to an inactive area/removed from 'standard' view to achieve the same outcome.

To identify the relationship between files, volumes and parts, use your file register. You can also highlight related files on the front label of physical files, and/or use the file title itself to indicate additional volumes or parts, e.g:-

File number *File title*

4521/01 *Personnel - Allowances - Higher duties*

4521/02 *Personnel - Allowances - Higher duties Vol (Part) 2*

The relationship is shown in the file register by recording the number of any previous files when you register a new file, and by updating the registration information of the closed file with a note of the subsequent file number. This makes it easier for users to find the whole story on a particular business activity.

Distribution & Tracking

Tracking is important to the management of records – you need to know both what has happened to records (actions or activity) and where they are (location). This is vital to protecting the value of records as evidence of decisions. It is also important to be able to locate records when they are needed.

Once records are registered into the recordkeeping system they should not be changed or altered. Similarly, documents should not be removed from physical files. If changes to a document are required, this should be considered a new record. This is particularly important when managing documents on a network, where changes to a document are difficult to track, and it is not easy to tell if something has been altered.

In an EDRMS system, actions performed are often captured automatically, including distribution, version control, etc. Information required may include what changes were made, who made them, and under what

authority they were made. Tracking actions can be managed in physical files by the creation and addition of a file note.

Tracking the location of records can be done in both electronic and paper systems. In electronic systems, this may mean 'booking' a file or document to an 'owner' or 'location' that is not the 'home' location. This would usually be a temporary arrangement, and most systems will allow for time limits and reminders to be set. This information is then electronically captured as part of the audit trail of that record. Where hard copy files are maintained, and an electronic system is not used for tracking purposes, records staff may use an 'out card' in place of the physical file on the shelf. Where 'out cards' are highlighted in red card, for example, this also provides an easy visual reference to records staff.

For paper records, the home location will need to be documented in the records control system, and when staff request files, the 'current' location recorded either in the control system (register) or on the 'out card'. If 'out cards' are used, information should contain the file title, borrower name, date booked out, and date returned. Similarly, the tracking of distribution and access amongst staff is managed by the use of File movement forms attached to the front of a paper file. These are never removed, and a new page attached to the front of the file as required. This will provide a history of the file's physical movements and access by individuals.

Search & Retrieval

The meticulous maintenance of records controls, including registers, will enable records officers to support staff in their search and retrieval efforts, and assist to preserve and protect the integrity of an agency's information assets.

For paper-based systems, it is recommended that registers are maintained in spreadsheets (such as MS Excel) where viable, because of improved search capacity using the FIND functionality, that helps to reduce the burden of manual search on officers – particularly for larger or more complex agencies.

The implementation and diligent application of strict records controls will allow for improved search, location and retrieval of an agency's records, in whatever form they take. For this reason, it is critical that a centralised or limited group of staff are trained and authorised to manage the control functions within a records program. Routine monitoring and QA must be undertaken to ensure the accuracy of these tools are maintained over time.

Recommended Reading

TAHO Advice 6 Information Classification Tools

TAHO Advice 24 How to manage 3 ½ & 5 ¼ inch discs

TAHO Advice 27 Managing email

TAHO Advice 66 Classification Scheme Considerations

Keywords for Councils – State Records NSW[1]

Australian Governments' Interactive Functions Thesaurus (AGIFT)[2]

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[1] http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/keyword-products/keyword-for-councils
[2] http://naa.gov.au/records-management/publications/agift.aspx

Appendices:

Template – sample file register (Appendix 1)

Template – sample file closed coversheet (Appendix 2)

Template – sample file movement sheet (Appendix 3)

Template – sample file note document (Appendix 4)

Template - sample file request form (Appendix 5)

Further Advice

For more detailed advice, please contact:

Government Information Strategy Unit
Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
91 Murray Street
HOBART TASMANIA 7000
Telephone: 03 6165 5581
Email: gisu@education.tas.gov.au

Acknowledgements

National Archives of Australia *Developing a Functions Thesaurus* [3]

National Archives of Australia *Overview of Classification tools*[4]

Australian Standard *AS ISO 15489.1* & *Guidelines 15489.2*[5]

NSW State Records *Records Management Fundamentals*[6]

NSW State Records *How to take control of your Records*[7]

NSW State Records *Step by Step through Dirks*[8]

Public Records Office of Victoria *Guideline 1 Functional Analysis*[9]

Information Security Classification

This document has been security classified using the Tasmanian Government Information Security classification standard as PUBLIC and will be managed according to the requirements of the Tasmanian Government Information Security Policy.

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Amendments in this Release

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All	All	Document imported into new template

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State Archivist

Appendix 1 - File Register Template

File No	Date Opened	Date Closed	File Name	Requesting Officer

THIS FILE HAS BEEN CLOSED

NO FURTHER DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE ADDED – AS OF CLOSED DATE, ALL NEW DOCUMENTS CAN BE ACCESSED VIA [System / New File No]

DATE CLOSED: XX-XX-XXXX

Appendix 3 – File Movement Sheet

ACTION RECORD SLIP

FILE NO: VOL NO:

THIS SHEET IS *NOT* TO BE REMOVED FROM THE TOP OF THE FILE

AND *NOTHING* IS TO BE PLACED ON TOP OF IT.

		N.B.
ACTION OFFICER -	Officer to whom the file is marked	
DATE REFERRED -	The date the correspondence is referred to the Action Officer	Documents must not be removed from the file without prior consultation with Records staff.
RESUBMIT DATE -	If an Officer wishes to review the file at a future date - he/she should enter a resubmit date	If an Action Officer wants to refer the file to another Action Officer complete Columns 1 & 4 and sign the file off
CTION REQUIRED-	Details of what the Action Officer needs to attend to - Date of Correspondence	If an Action Officer passes a file to another Officer - please advise the Records department or complete a File transfer slip and return it to Records.
ACTIONED BY-	When action has been completed the Action Officer to sign	

Action Officer	Date Referred	Re-Submit Date	Action Required	Actioned By

Appendix 4 – File Note

File Note

Author:

File Ref:

Date/Time:

Subject:

_____

New File Request

- This form is to be completed by staff requesting the creation of new files
- A copy of this form should be forwarded to Records [email address]
- A description of the file's purpose would be helpful
- Please write/type clearly in **BLOCK LETTERS** and tick the boxes as appropriate

Officer requesting:

Name:

Position:

Dept/Unit: Ext:

Date:

File details:

Suggested File name:	
Brief description of purpose/content:	

Ref numbers (eg Contract number; Project number etc):

Priority	File type	Action	Special Instructions/Comments
☐ Urgent	☐ Subject (event; program; committee; etc)	☐ New file	
☐ Routine	☐ Design or Capital Works Project	☐ Name change	
	☐ Contract (tender)	☐ File merge	
	☐ Other (specify)	☐ Other	

Records Administrative Use Only			
Check database	☐ File already exists	☐ created	
Function (level 1)			
Activity (level 2)			
Free text (level 3)			
Actioned By		Date Actioned:	

Disposal Schedule Ref:

Additional notes: