

## What is a File Plan?

A file plan is a comprehensive outline that includes the records series, file organization, active file locations, file transfer instructions, file retention and disposition instructions, and other specific instructions that provide guidance for effective management of records, including vital records.

File plans specify how records are to be organized once they have been created or received, provide a “roadmap” to the records created and maintained by an organizational unit, and facilitate dispositioning of the records.

## Constructing the File Plan

After inventorying all of the records maintained by your office, you are ready to create your office file plan. A file plan describes every type of records in the organization, the location where they should be stored, the rules applying to them, the retention schedule and timeline, manner of their disposition, and the person or persons responsible for their management.

A file plan differs from office to office, but it usually consists of:

- Description of the kinds of documents identified to be records
- The classification of the records into wide range of categories
- Details about the location of the stored records
- Description of the retention schedule and period
- Making the distinction and assigning the responsibility for certain types of records

Start with the file structure. In conjunction with NOAA Records Disposition Schedules and the General Records Schedule (GRS), you will see that every function listed in NOAA Schedules and the GRS have a function code, description (title) and disposition instruction. For example:

- Function code: 100 - Records Common to all NOAA Offices
- Schedule number: 100-03 Administrative Issuances
- Description: The distribution copies and the official record set of all NOAA directives, bulletins, organization charts, functional statements, administrative manuals, and similar records.
- Disposition instruction:

- a. Official Record Set - Permanent: Break files every 5 years and transfer to the FRC. Transfer to NARA when 20 years old.
- b. Distribution copies – Destroy when superseded or when no longer needed for current agency business.
- c. Working papers and background materials. Break files every 5 years and transfer to the FRC. Transfer to the NARA when 20 years old.

The file plan is created by detailing the file series of the records in your organizational unit, as well as information about how they are managed and by whom, incorporating the following information into your file plan.

## Who?

- Describing the person and the office that maintains the records

- Describing the Records Liaison Officer and/or Records Custodian
- Describing the Program Manager who approved the File Plan before it was put in to effect.

## What?

- File code of the agency
- Title of each record
- Medium (electronic, paper, digital media)
- Restrictions of access
- Status of the vital records

## Where?

Where the records are located (everything from address of the storage to the number of the room where they are kept)

## When?

- Dates of the records (when were they archived and the current date)
- All dates of the records, when were they retired, closed, destroyed or transferred
- Disposition status (hold, inactive, active)

Other information included:

- Records description
- Records arrangements
- Records schedule link tree (linking to NOAA's Disposition Schedules)
- People, employees in charge of the file plan
- The date when the file plan was last revised

During the process you will be in a position to decide how those records should be maintained.

- Who has the responsibility for the "official record" and who is in possession of the copies?
- Are the "drafts" of the records included?
- Is the copy of the record kept in an electronic or paper system?
- Deciding in the centralization of the record system?

When creating the file plan, keep in mind that someone else may need to use it in the future. Therefore, avoid using jargon, information titles, abbreviations or proper names of current office holders to describe the records.

Once you have created the file plan you have to make sure that your personnel becomes familiar with it. You may also need to update the file plan at the end of every month or when the records schedules are changed. The file plan should be inspected at least once a year in order to ensure that all office functions are covered. A file plan is your best tool of efficiency if you plan it carefully and keep it up to date.

## SAMPLE FILE PLAN

Office: Audits & Information Management

Prepared by: Jane Doe

Date: February 7, 2013

Approved by: John Doe

Date: February 8, 2013

Kind of Record	Category	Description	Media	Retention Period	Disposition Authority	Contact Person/Location
Administrative and Housekeeping Records	200-01	Records accumulated by individual offices that relate to the internal administration or housekeeping activities of the office rather than the function for which the office exists.	paper and electronic	Destroy when 2 years	GRS 23	Monique Love, SSMC4/7400.
Audit Case Records	200-02	Case files of internal audits of agency programs, operations, and procedures, and of external audits of contractors and grantees, containing audit reports, correspondence, memoranda, and supporting working papers.	paper and electronic	8 years. Record-keeping paper copy: Cut off at the end of FY in which case is closed.	GRS 22 (Withdrawn)	Rhonda Lawrence, SSMC4/7400
Budget Background Records	200-03	Program office copies of materials which constitute program office input during the annual budget formulation cycle and the budget execution phase.	paper and electronic	Destroy 1 yr. after the close of the FY covered by the budget.	GRS 5/2	Mack Cato, SSMC4/7400
Transitory Records including Combined Federal Campaign	200-7	Documents of short-term interest which have no documentary or evidential value and normally need not be kept more than 90 days.	paper and electronic	3 months. GRS 23, item 7	Destroy when 3 months old.	Monique Love, SSMC4/7400.
FOIA Request Records	200-15	Records created in response to requests for information under the FOIA, consisting of the original request, a copy of the reply thereto, and all related supporting records.	paper and electronic	Appealed requests: 6 yrs. After determination.	GRS 14, 11	Wendy Schumacher, SSMC4/7400
FOIA Control Records	200-16	Records maintained for control purposes in responding to requests, including registers and similar records listing date, nature, and purpose of request and name and address of requester.	paper and electronic		GRS 14/13A	Wendy Schumacher, SSMC4/7400
FOIA Appeals Records	200-17	Records created in responding to administrative appeals under the FOIA for release of information denied by the agency, consisting of the appellant's letter, a copy of the reply thereto, and related supporting documents, which may include the official record copy of records under appeal or copy thereof.	paper	Destroy 6 years after final determination by agency, 6 years after the time at which a requester could file suit, or 3 years after final adjudication by the courts, whichever is later	GRS 14, 12	Wendy Schumacher, SSMC4/7400