**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**

***State Records Management Program***

**Agency Records Coordinator**

**Records File Plan Overview**

**Title:** Records File Plan Overview.

**Scope:** This training is created for Agency Records Coordinators that participate in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s State Records Management Program. This includes both agencies under the Governor’s jurisdiction and agencies not under the Governor’s jurisdiction.

**Overview:** This training is designed to assist Agency Records Coordinators in creating agency records file plans. A records file plan is a snapshot of the existing records inventory for an office, bureau, region, or division of an agency. Following a records file plan will provide office staff specific guidance in maintaining records without worrying about any repercussions from disposing of records too soon or keeping them too long. For example, if an agency receives a Right-to-know Law request for public records and the agency still possesses those records after the indicated agency retention on the records file plan has expired, the records must be provided. A records file plan often contains information about the location of records, (e.g., office room number, State Records Center, network shared drive, or electronic system or database). Simply put, it is the primary tool used to manage agency records by combining records from both the General and/or agency-specific records retention and disposition schedules.

**Objectives:** After completing this training, Agency Records Coordinators will be able to:

1. Explain the components of the records file plan.
2. Prepare for and conduct Records Management meetings in their agencies.
3. Create a records file plan for any office, bureau, region, or division of an agency.

**Lesson 1:** The Components of the Records File Plan.

**Overview:**

The records file plan consists of column headers, known as the components, that summarizes specific Records Management information and provides instruction to agency staff for records under their direct control. It is important to understand what information to collect and how the information relates for Agency Records Coordinators to ask the right questions and gather appropriate information while conducting Records Management meetings in their agencies.

A records file plan template can be located on the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s (PHMC) [website](https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Records-Management/Pages/Forms.aspx) within the Archives section in the Records Management tab, under General Information, under the Forms section. However, any form of a records file plan template is acceptable if it contains information and components that allow staff to easily understand how to manage their records. For this training, we will be using the following [file plan template](File%20Plan_Template.pdf).

Understanding the following components will assist Agency Records Coordinators in completing a records file plan.

1. **Bureau/Office Name** – Enter the full name of the business area that the records file plan belongs to. No standalone acronyms please, spell out the name the first time it is used. This may also include divisions, regional offices, etc. There should only be one business area per tab on the file plan spreadsheet.
2. **10-Digit Bureau Code** – Enter the 10-digit SAP/cost center code of the business area that the records file plan belongs to. The 10-digit code is used by the PHMC to manage agency-specific schedules in the Enterprise Records Management System (ERMS), the Records Management system where all retention and disposition schedules are housed.
3. **Record Title** – Enter the record name or title that it is commonly referred to in the business area by staff. For example, record titles may be equivalent to the business area’s file folder names maintained electronically or in hard copy. No standalone acronyms please, spell out the name the first time it is used.
4. **Records Description** – In the first two sentences, describe the nature, purpose, and use of the records in this series. Indicate reasons why the business area is maintaining the records. The records description should always provide a few examples or types of records that are found in the files, (e.g., Excel reports, email correspondence, and pdf forms) and how they support the record series. The description should also provide useful information such as the ending of a records series, a date forward for when records were converted to electronic format, physical and electronic storage locations (SharePoint and other Databases), how records are generally received (email accounts, US Postal Service, etc.), **\***retention addendums, and references to current policies, acts, or regulations that specifically govern related retention requirements.

**\***See component **i., Agency Retention** for more information on retention addendums.

1. **Media/Format type** – Enter the format that the records currently exist in, (e.g., paper, electronic, CD, microfilm). If records exist in multiple formats, you can enter “multiple”or if records exist in paper and electronic formats, you can enter “paper/electronic”.

**Note:** Records that exist in multiple formats must follow the same total retention.

1. **Essential Records Y/N** – Enter “Y” for yes and “N” for no. Only enter “Y” if the record series or system has been deemed as essential on the business area’s agency COOP plan in the BOLD Planning System. If unsure, contact your Agency COOP Manager. Essential records were previously referred to as vital records.

**Note:** Generally speaking, approximately 2% of an agency’s records inventory is considered essential.

1. **General Schedule Item Number & Series Name** – If the record item is covered by a records series from the General Schedule ([M210.09](https://www.oa.pa.gov/Policies/Documents/m210_9.pdf)), enter the General Schedule item number and record series name.

**Note:** The retention must match the identified General Schedule item or else the item must be added as an agency-specific record and an exception must be requested.

1. **Agency Schedule Item Number** - If the record item is covered by an agency-specific schedule, enter the agency-specific schedule item number. In this case, the record title and agency-specific schedule item name will be the same on the records file plan. **Notes:**
2. The agency-specific schedule is only to be used when said record items cannot be covered by the General Schedule. In other words, the business area will need unique retention(s) to meet its business needs and operational demands.
3. Since agency-specific schedule item numbers may only be used one time during the life of an agency, a tracking log should be maintained by the Agency Records Coordinator to manage the use of agency-specific schedule item numbers.
4. **Agency Retention** – Enter the agency retention of the record series in years, months, or both. For example: 8Y, 3M, or 4Y 6M. You may also enter specific trigger points, referred to as a **\***retention addendum, to notate when the retention begins. For example, retain 3Y after completion of audit; Retain 4Y after end life of contract; Retain 7Y after close of case.

**Notes:**

1. If a record series is following the agency-specific schedule, then agency retention on the records file plan must match the agency retention of that record item number indicated on the agency-specific schedule.
2. If a record series is following the General Schedule, then agency retention on the records file plan must match the agency retention of that record item number on the General Schedule.
3. **State Records Center (SRC) Retention** – Enter the required SRC retention of the record series in years, months, or both. For example: 3Y, 6M, or 4Y 6M.

**Notes:**

1. If a record series is following the agency-specific schedule and SRC retention is indicated, then SRC retention on the records file plan must match the SRC retention of that record item number on the agency-specific schedule.
2. If a record series is following the General Schedule and SRC retention is indicated, then SRC retention on the records file plan must match the SRC retention of that record item number on the General Schedule only if records are intended to be transferred to the SRC at a future date. If records are not intended to be transferred to the SRC because the business area can manage the volume of records in the agency, then the total retention of agency retention plus SRC retention must equal the agency retention on the records file plan.
3. **Contact Information** – Enter the name and phone number of the employee(s) that is responsible for the maintenance of the records. Ideally, the contact should be very knowledgeable of the records including how and where they are maintained. **Note:** When a record series has inventory at the SRC, the contact information should include both the person most knowledgeable about the records and the person who is provided access to the records stored at the SRC.
4. **Records File Plan Example** – This is a [training example](File%20Plan_Training%20Example.pdf) of a bureau records file plan to help illustrate components **a. through k.** covered above. As some components are self-explanatory, extra emphasis should be spent on the Records Description, General Schedule Item Number & Series Name, Agency Schedule Item Number,Agency Retention, and SRC Retention components.

**Note:** Please take as much time as needed to review and compare all file plan components to the training example above.

**Lesson 2:** Preparing for Records Management Meetings in your Agency.

**Overview:**

It is the responsibility and expectation of the Agency Records Coordinator to meet with all offices, bureaus, regions, or divisions of their agency to familiarize themselves with the functions of the business area, to engage the executive level buy-in, and to discuss Records Management practices. During these meetings, it is essential for the Agency Records Coordinator to meet with the appropriate staff to gather accurate and complete information for the records file plan.

We realize that all agencies vary in size, functionality, and nature of business, however, the following information will assist Agency Records Coordinators with scheduling and conducting Records Management meetings in their agency:

1. **Agency Organization Chart** - Obtain a copy of your agency’s current organization chart which provides a visual layout of all agency offices, bureaus, divisions, etc. The organization chart is a great tool to plan, organize, and track your Records Management meetings to ensure that no business areas were forgotten. Current agency organization charts can be found on the Office of Administration’s (OA) website under [Policies](https://www.oa.pa.gov/Policies/Pages/org.aspx), or you can contact the OA, Office of Continuity and Records Information Management (OCRIM) at 717-783-5055 or via email at [ra-eb-dms@pa.gov](mailto:ra-eb-dms@pa.gov) to request a current copy.
2. **Where do I start?** - Deciding where to start in your agency is easier said than done! This will vary depending on current situations, priorities, and ongoing projects in the agency. Sometimes it requires you to make a judgement call. The best thing to do is just start somewhere to get positive momentum rolling. Here are some "getting started" suggestions that may assist you in deciding where to start in your current working environment.

* The business area where you currently work.
* A business area that has an existing agency-specific schedule. Copy and paste the existing records on your records file plan template, review and discuss!
* A business area where a records file plan already exists.
* A business area you are currently assisting or recently assisted with their records.
* A business area where you are known and have good business contacts and relationships with staff.
* A business area where you are familiar with the records and business activities.
* A smaller business area in your agency.
* A business area that is not currently overwhelmed with projects or other distracting priorities.

1. **Who do I schedule meetings with?** – This will depend on your current agency situation. Ideally, Agency Records Coordinators should meet with the business area executive first for a kickoff meeting to explain the benefits of the records file plan project and to engage upper-level buy-in. During the kickoff meeting, request the business area executive to encourage the business area's supervisor, records liaison(s) and subject matter experts (SMEs) to participate in follow-up meetings with you. **Recommendation:** Schedule the kickoff meeting for 1-half hour max.
2. **Scheduling of Records Management Meetings** – After you choose the business area meeting path, schedule your first round of kickoff meetings with business area executives in Microsoft Outlook as soon as possible. Time is precious to all, people are always busy, and calendars will fill up quickly! Do not wait until the last minute. It is most effective to get the meetings scheduled well in advance which will provide you adequate meeting preparation time. It is also strongly encouraged to schedule follow-up meetings with business area supervisors, records liaisons, and subject matter experts at least two weeks after the kickoff meeting to help keep the momentum rolling. **Recommendation:** Schedule follow up meetings for 1-hour max.
3. **How do I ask the right questions and gather adequate information in Records Management meetings?** – First, just understanding the components of what makes up the records file plan from Lesson 1 and how they relate to the records file plan will help you ask better questions and take more efficient notes during meetings. This will make it easier to transfer records information to the records file plan afterwards. Also, making a connection with the business area you are working with enables more efficient collaboration. Please take a few minutes to review the "Questions to Ask" document which may assist you with making a connection and asking some of the right questions in Records Management meetings. [Questions to ask](RC_RM%20Meetings_Questions%20List.pdf).

To ensure that you collect enough information for each item on the records file plan, familiarize yourself with a copy of [Form STD-64, Records Action Request: Addition or Amendment to Records Retention and Disposition Schedule](https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Records-Management/Documents/RM-STD-064-Records-Action-Request-Addition-Amendment.pdf). The best suggestion is to download and use this form to formulate your questions and answers. Form STD-64 is located on the PHMC's [website](https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Records-Management/Pages/Forms.aspx) within the Archives section in the Records Management tab, under General Information, under the Forms section.

Form STD-64, when used, is a great tool to capture the complete records analysis of the business area's record items which then should be transferred directly to the records file plan. Also, the sections and fields of Form STD-64 are the same as the sections and fields located in the Enterprise Records Action System, also known as ERAS. ERAS is the automated system Agency Records Coordinators use to amend agency-specific schedules. The agency-specific schedule is also a great tool to take to Records Management meetings because records are already identified, and you can discuss each record item and make updates as needed.

Some Agency Records Coordinators prefer to work on their agency-specific schedule first followed by their agency's records file plans. The fact is that you should work in the manner that is most effective for you. A recommended approach is, whenever you meet with a specific business area of your agency, always work on updating the records file plan and agency-specific schedule, if it exists, for that area at the same time. **Why?** Because the records file plan consists of both General Schedule and agency-specific schedule items, you will save a lot of time and get off to a great start by including the existing agency-schedule items on the records file plan and it is difficult to circle back and update both later.

**Lesson 3:** Conclusion

**Summary:**

Now that you know what the components of a records file plan are and understand how they apply to the records file plan, and have learned of various approaches, recommendations, tools, and resources for scheduling and conducting Records Management meetings, we hope that you are more confident and better prepared to create or update records file plans in your agency. The key is to just start somewhere and continue until you have met with all the business areas in your agency. Remember, when one door closes another one opens! If the momentum in one business area stops due to uncontrollable circumstances, pick another business area, and keep on moving!

The following information will recap the main takeaways, recommendations, tools, and resources from this training.

**Main Takeaways, Recommendations, Tools, and Resources:**

* The records file plan is a snapshot of the existing records inventory for an office, bureau, region, or division of an agency which consists of records that are covered by both the General and/or agency-specific records retention and disposition schedules.
* Following a records file plan provides office staff with specific guidance in maintaining records without worrying about repercussions from disposing of records too soon or keeping them too long.
* A records file plan often contains information about the location of records. For example, an office room number, at the State Records Center, a network shared drive, or an electronic system or database.
* Any form of a records file plan template is acceptable if it contains information and components that allow staff to easily understand how to manage their records. Remember, the key is to ensure that staff will actually use the records file plan when completed! A records file plan template and other Records Management forms are located on the PHMC's [website](https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Records-Management/Pages/Forms.aspx) within the Archives section in the Records Management tab, under General Information, under the Forms section.
* It is highly recommended that Agency Records Coordinators use a tracking log to maintain their agency-specific schedule item numbers because agency-specific schedule item numbers may only be used one time during the life of an agency.
* The organization chart is a good tool to plan, organize, and track your Records Management meetings to ensure that no business areas were forgotten. Current agency organization charts can be found on the Office of Administration's (OA) website under [Policies](https://www.oa.pa.gov/Policies/Pages/org.aspx), or you can contact the OA, Office of Continuity and Records Information Management (OCRIM) to request a current copy.
* It is most effective to schedule Records Management kickoff meetings and follow up meetings well in advance to help keep momentum rolling and to provide adequate preparation time for all participants.
* It is essential to have established records liaisons and/or subject matter experts in each business area of your agency as Records Management resources. If there are none established, make a request to the business area executive to appoint appropriate staff to assist you with Records Management.
* [Form STD-64, Records Action Request: Addition or Amendment to Records Retention and Disposition Schedule](https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Records-Management/Documents/RM-STD-064-Records-Action-Request-Addition-Amendment.pdf) is a tremendous tool to use to formulate your questions and answers for Records Management meetings because it captures the full record analysis of record items when completed.
* The agency-specific schedule is a great tool or resource to generate discussions in Records Management meetings because record items are already identified and will populate a significant portion of the records file plan after updating.

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