

## **RECORD SERIES**

A record series is a group of like records that are filed together and treated as a unit for records management purposes. A records series may consist of many separate files, but it is treated as a single unit for all purposes relating to records retention.

A familiar example is “personnel files” one of which exists for every employee in the organization. Even though there may be hundreds or thousands of these files, they are referred to as a records series – “personnel files” - for records retention purposes

## **RECORDS INVENTORY**

The first step in developing records retention and disposition schedules is to determine what records exist in an agency. This is ideally accomplished by taking a records inventory. The records inventory can be performed agency-wide or on an office by office basis.

The records inventory identifies and quantifies the records created and received by an agency. The inventory is the first step in the development of an agency's (department's) records program and becomes the working document for records retention and disposition schedules, file plans and essential records programs.

Simply defined, the records inventory is a list of each record series, together with an indication of where it is located and other pertinent data.

The inventory is not:

- A document by document listing
- A folder by folder listing

Non-record materials are not required to be included in the inventory. However, since non-records are discoverable and admissible as evidence it is advisable to *include* them in the inventory and describe them thoroughly. If they are duplicates or extra copies, indicate that they are not the record copy and show their use and proposed retention.

## **TAKING THE INVENTORY**

There are basically two methods of inventorying records: the physical inventory and the survey / questionnaire. In the physical inventory, personnel especially trained by and working for the agency records management unit inventory all records in an agency. They use a carefully designed inventory form which provides for all necessary information. The physical inventory is the most accurate and complete method for determining exactly what records exist in an agency.

In the questionnaire method, a well designed questionnaire(s) is distributed to all unit managers for completion by personnel from each unit. This requires commitment and cooperation from each unit. This method can be efficient and effective providing that the individual units cooperate fully with the records management staff.

Before the inventory begins, agency structure, the levels of authority and program responsibilities need to be understood. They can serve as clues to the existence and location of records within the agency. The following matters should be considered:

- Which are the key line and staff offices?
- What programs does the agency have?
- What units are responsible for developing policies?
- What units are charged with carrying out policies?
- What is the nature of staff support activities?

Equally important is a prior knowledge of the agency or department filing systems. The following questions need to be answered:

- Is there a prescribed agency wide filing system? If so, how widely is it used?
- Is there a prescribed file classification system?
- Is there a central file? Does it operate as planned? At what levels?
- Is there an automated records management system or document management system in use by the agency.
- Where is essential documentation likely to be?

## **RECOMMENDED INVENTORY FORMAT**

A form is available from the Records Management Division, Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records. The form can be used for either a physical inventory or as a questionnaire. It should be filled out completely and correctly as it will be the basis for any proposed retention and disposition schedules