

NARA General Records Schedules Strategies
January 15, 2003 (Draft)

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Records Management Initiative (RMI) is considering possible strategies for improving the General Records Schedules (GRS) including adding additional categories of records. The following document presents a number of strategies for improving and expanding the GRS. Some of the strategies can be adopted quickly and relatively easily. Others will involve extensive changes and will require coordination with stakeholders, including Federal agencies, GAO and OMB.

I: Strategies to Improve the Existing GRS

Strategy I.1: Responsibility for the GRS is assigned to Work Group 6.

Rationale:

- Provide a point of contact for GRS issues for both NARA staff and agency records officers.
- Obtain consistency in updating GRS.

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Strategy I.2: Revise the current GRS to make it more usable/user-friendly. This is an opportunity to update the index and make the GRS one document online that can be searched.

Rationale:

- Enhance convenience and usability.

Strategy I.3: Survey non-Federal general records schedules. This is an opportunity for NARA to thoroughly explore and learn from other models and applications of good records disposition practice outside the Federal community. There are records management leaders in private industry, higher education, and state and local governments that share NARA's records management challenges, goals, and objectives. Any evaluation of the GRS should consider best practices in records scheduling outside the U.S. Federal Government. We will consider broad categories and business lines or functions.

Rationale:

- Encourage greater consistency in records disposition decision-making.
- Identify shared (overlapping) records among various business processes (e.g., applications for Federal grants, personnel and payroll).
- Obtain examples of records schedules structured more towards business lines.
- Identify best practices.
- Promote study of new legal requirements.
- Study how non-Federal entities address the retention of contractor records.
- Learn something from how others are processing the proliferation of information.

Strategy I.4: Survey agency records officers for their input on expanding the GRS. Ask agencies what they would like to see in the way of changes and additions to the GRS. This request can be presented to agency records officers through a memorandum to agency records officers or at a BRIDG meeting. Agency ideas on how to consolidate, what to add, and what to delete would be very beneficial. Any other ideas they might have on how to improve the GRS could also be requested.

Rationale:

- Provide useful input into what is missing from the GRS.
- Generate ideas for consolidating some already existing GRS items.
- Learn how agencies are using the GRS.
- Promote awareness and use of GRS.

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Strategy I.5: Revise descriptions in the current GRS to make the chapters and items more widely applicable and identify areas/chapters/items of the GRS that can be combined. This would include clarifying current descriptions and identifying areas/chapters/items that can be expanded. The change would also strengthen the GRS as a tool for dealing with the mounting quantities of routine, administrative records and also reduce the need for agency specific dispositions.

Rationale:

- Bring items and descriptions up-to-date to better reflect how and where information is being created.
- Relate more closely to current Government operations.
- Focus archival appraisal on the analysis of Government business functions.
- Assist users by identifying real examples for exclusions.
- Assist in the evaluation of risk, legal rights/accountability if chapters/sub-functions are merged together to identify all applications of the records in an agency.
- Appraise together those records in support of the same function to identify overlapping information for consistency, accountability and protection of the rights of citizens (all records relating to processing immigrants clustered together, court records, property/facilities management etc).

II: Strategies to Expand Coverage of the GRS

Strategy II.1: Develop new and revised GRS using business lines model. Use the Federal Enterprise Architecture Business Reference Model Business Areas developed by OMB (<http://www.feapmo.gov/feabrm.htm>) as the basis for developing new General Records Schedules.

Rationale:

- Cover records common to multiple agencies.
- Use an existing structure (OMB model) that covers the entire Government.
- Allow use of a "big bucket" approach, i.e. the clustering of related records under a single disposition instruction.
- Give NARA greater flexibility to develop new schedules.

Strategy II.2: Use of mandatory minimum retention periods whenever possible. Use mandatory minimum retention periods and make requesting extensions to GRS retention periods non-mandatory if agencies need longer retention to meet a business need. Dispositions that are broad and flexible (big buckets) allowing the agencies to dispose of records after a minimum retention period unless needed longer for agency administrative needs would be useful. Agencies must clearly understand the risks and costs of keeping GRS records beyond the specified retention period. Use of this strategy would require a statutory change.

Rationale:

- Empower each agency to determine if it needs GRS records longer than the minimum retention periods published in the GRS.
- Approve and publish GRS items in a timely fashion if NARA gives agencies greater responsibility for determining how long records need to be retained beyond the minimum retention periods established by the GRS.
- Enhance the usefulness of the GRS as a tool for agencies if there are fewer individual retention periods for specific series in a function.
- Reduce dispositions for new records officers to review when determining whether or not to submit a SF 115 to NARA.
- Cover all records in a particular function with one broad disposition.
- Reduce the number of individual disposition requests.
- Shorten learning curve for new agency ROs learning the GRS.

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Strategy II.3: List items in the GRS that agencies may destroy when no longer needed. This option will allow agencies greater latitude in deciding when to destroy certain records once their usefulness has been met. This would reduce the number of records with short retention periods that need to be scheduled. Agencies should be aware this would not be used for records with legal rights implications.

Rationale:

- Eliminate scheduling records with short retentions and thus eliminate potential scheduling backlogs.
- Decrease the number of exceptions from the GRS and number of individual disposition requests.
- Allow agencies to more actively determine retention period for their records.

Strategy II.4: Develop GRS authorities or a separate GRS for temporary program records that are likely to be created by every Federal agency. Every agency has temporary program records that could be described in general categories. If a new temporary program records general schedule is established, it will be coordinated with the existing General Records Schedules. (see Strategy I.2 above).

Rationale:

- Reduce number of 115s submitted for processing if temporary program items are already identified in a NARA approved published disposition guide.
- Enhance convenience of GRS.

Strategy II.5: Develop a separate Permanent Records Schedule (PRS) for the following types of records that are not currently covered by the GRS: 1) Permanently valuable administrative records; and/or 2) Permanently valuable program records that are likely to be created by every Federal agency. These new records schedules could be published separately under new names but cross-referenced to the current chapters of the GRS. Every agency has permanent records that could be described in general categories. If a new permanent records schedule is established, it will be coordinated with the existing General Records Schedules. (see Strategy I.2 above). NARA review will include examination of permanent items from previous editions of the GRS for possible inclusion in PRS. (List available)

Rationale:

- Increase clarity and convenience.
- Reduce 115s submitted for processing if permanent items are already identified in a NARA approved published disposition guide.
- Help prevent possible improper disposition by distinguishing permanent records from the current GRS for temporary records.

Strategy II.6: Permanent Records Schedule (PRS) for program records for leadership positions in cabinet and independent agencies. Generally, records created/received by individuals in senior leadership positions are permanent. By describing these records in the generic Permanent Records Schedule (PRS), the number of records to be scheduled by agencies would be reduced and would assure that permanent records related to leadership positions would be scheduled.

Rationale:

- Identify similar program record types with permanent value in multiple agencies.
- Define clearly records management responsibilities of the agency head.

Strategy II.7: Recast Appendix C of the Disposition of Federal Records along the lines of governmental functions with associated records. Appendix C (copy attached) lists fifteen series of records that are normally considered to have archival value and are usually appraised for permanent retention. Issuance of these series with a media neutral instruction could substantially reduce the number of items appraised each year.

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Rationale:

- Reduce scheduling burden for agencies.
- Permit agencies and NARA to utilize records management resources more effectively.

Strategy II.8: Apply general e-mail and word processing disposition to all agency records other than those that are unscheduled or permanent. Develop a GRS item to cover e-mail and word-processing records used to generate recordkeeping copies for all series (program and non-program) that have approved schedules. NARA would issue implementing guidance.

Rationale:

- Reduce the number of schedules submitted that must be processed for routine appraisal.
- Reduce the time for processing schedules in which all other records are permanent.

Strategy II.9: Proposals for immediate action on new GRS items:

A. Program Functions

- Temporary Boards and Commissions (draft exists)
- Agency Advisory Committees (examples exist)
- Chief Financial Officers
- Chief Information Officers

B. Administrative Functions

- Alternate Dispute Resolution (examples exist)
- Administrative Services (such as property management)
- Information Technology Services
- Web Administration
- Flexiplace Administration
- GPEA
- Child Daycare Records
- Employee Assistance (Lifestyle) Records
- GPRA

Rationale:

- Respond to agency requests.

Strategy II.10: Develop a one-day class or short seminar (and/or RACO session) on using the newly developed GRS, especially if a new records schedule is developed which includes permanent items. Implementation of major changes such as this will only work if records officers clearly understand how the change is useful to their work.

Rationale:

- Enhance usefulness of new GRS by increasing understanding of changes.