

Guidance for Flexible Scheduling

I. What is the purpose of this guidance?

The purpose of this guidance is to provide information to agencies that want to create flexible "big bucket" or large aggregation schedules for their records, or wish to use flexible retentions for record disposition.

II. How does this guidance differ from previous information on this subject?

This guidance provides a practical approach to creating big bucket/large aggregation flexible schedules in a Federal agency. It explains when it is most appropriate to use big buckets or large aggregation schedules or flexible retentions.

III. Guidance on flexible scheduling strategies for Federal records managers

1. What is a "big bucket" or large aggregation schedule?

A big bucket/large aggregation schedule is a type of flexible schedule. The difference from the traditional scheduling approach is that the unit to be scheduled is not necessarily the individual records series or an electronic system, but all records in all media relating to a work process, group of related work processes, or a broad program area to which the same length of retention should be applied. Flexible scheduling using big buckets/large aggregations is an application of disposition instructions against a body of records grouped at the series level or some higher level of aggregation along specific program areas or functional lines, or in a defined business process. The goal of this type of flexible scheduling is to provide for the disposition of records at any level of aggregation in a way that supports the business needs of agencies, while ensuring the creation of adequate and proper documentation necessary to protect legal rights and assure government accountability.

2. What is flexible retention?

Traditionally, the disposition instructions in schedules for temporary records provide for the disposal of records after a fixed period of time (e.g., Destroy when 3 years old, destroy 2 years after employee separates, etc.). As a result, whenever business needs dictate a change in the retention period for a previously scheduled temporary series, agencies must submit a schedule to NARA. To ease this burden, we now encourage agencies to propose flexible retention periods for records when appropriate.

To provide flexibility, the disposition instructions in a schedule may:

- Specify a mandatory minimum retention period for records, but allow for continued retention beyond that time. Example - Destroy when 3 years old. Longer retention is authorized if records are still needed for business purposes.
- Specify a mandatory maximum retention period for records, but allow for disposal if records are no longer needed prior to that time. Example - Destroy when 3 years old. Earlier disposal is authorized if records are no longer needed for business purposes.

- Specify a time band that provides both minimum and maximum retention periods for records. Example - Destroy when records are no less than 3 years old but no more than 6 years old.
- Authorize the disposal of records when no longer needed for business purposes. Example - Destroy when records are no longer needed. Note: This disposition is generally appropriate only in the case of transitory records, as defined in GRS 23, Item 7, and other records that contain minimal evidence of Government operations.

3. When should a big bucket/large aggregation flexible schedule be done?

Flexible scheduling can be undertaken at any time. However, there are several considerations that help determine when it is most appropriate to use a big bucket/large aggregation flexible schedule:

- The agency can clearly identify its mission and the work processes or business functions that allow it to accomplish that mission and wants to manage its records in the context of its work process or business functions.
- The agency wants to simplify all or part of its records control schedule by providing consistent or uniform disposition instructions (e.g. "harmonizing" or "synchronizing") disposition) to bodies of like records.
- The agency is able to clearly identify records in each business process or functional area in all media and all formats
- The agency wants to manage their records in the context of their work processes or business functions rather than by individual records series or electronic systems.
- The agency is in need of simplifying all or part of its business processes, and wishes to reduce the number of individual disposition instructions to ensure proper management of its records.
- The agency is considering adopting a records management application (RMA) and managing records in larger aggregations will simplify recordkeeping for individual staff.
- When organizational changes or changes in work methods are frequent, but the underlying function and purpose of the records does not change or remains substantially the same.

4. When should a big bucket/large aggregation flexible schedule not be done?

- When the agency prefers to manage its records in a traditional series-by-series, system-by-system approach, and has determined that the traditional method of managing its records is sufficient for its business needs and assures the creation of adequate and proper documentation.
- The agency does not possess a sufficient level of control over its records to group them by agency functions and business processes.
- The agency is in a state of flux, and business processes and workplace cultures and methods of performing work are not well defined or uniform procedures are not in place.
- The agency business process(es) are comprised of a high percentage of permanent records that are high profile or high risk that might not be identified and managed appropriately in aggregated buckets.

- This situation does not require agencies to forego flexible scheduling, but they must proceed with caution. An agency in this situation must define the level of risk— i.e., the degree to which records are in danger of improper disposition—before proceeding. An agency may identify some areas within the organization that are good big bucket/large aggregation candidates and other areas where traditional records management best meets its business needs.
- Permanent buckets/aggregations would prove particularly useful for managing the records of agencies whose mission/work functions are well defined and relatively stable and may prove extremely valuable when dealing with electronic records.
- The agency is unlikely to commit the proper time and resources to the creation of a flexible schedule and then the implementation of that schedule.

5. What are the advantages of a big bucket/large aggregation flexible schedule?

- Allows agencies to schedule records at a level of aggregation that meets its business needs.
- Simplifies disposition instructions to something that may be more useful to agencies implementing an RMA.
- Simplifies managing agency records by synchronizing retentions and dispositions of records in the context of their work processes or business functions rather than by individual records series or electronic systems.
- May reduce the need to resubmit schedules for new and unscheduled records.

6. What are some additional considerations for developing a big bucket/large aggregation flexible schedule?

- As systems and series change over time, records managers may need to maintain the detailed level of intellectual control that was previously accomplished through traditional scheduling techniques.
- Flexible Scheduling may not help agency staff and records managers establish appropriate methods to arrange, file, manage and locate records in offices where recordkeeping relies on traditional records series.

7. How do you do a big bucket/large aggregation flexible schedule?

1) Determine if a big bucket/large aggregation flexible schedule meets agency business needs and ensures adequate and proper documentation. An agency with reliable existing schedules might review them to determine if existing records series can be grouped into big buckets/large aggregations. Contact the NARA appraisal archivist for the agency for consultation and guidance.

2) Conduct functional or business process analysis. Determine the functions or processes performed by organization or unit. Business process analyses and workflows may already exist and if so, would be useful tools in developing a flexible schedule.

- a) Study the work processes and functions of the agency and program offices to ascertain logical groupings of records.

- b) Review relevant parts of agency manuals or record schedules for changes such as reorganizations, name changes, and elimination of programs and functions.
- c) If the business processes are being reengineered, it would be advantageous to piggyback on that work since the business process analysis will be occurring anyway. This might also be an opportunity to inject records management requirements into the business process redesign.

3) Identify records series that come from work process(es).

- a) Interview staff responsible for or involved with each identified function to determine all series related to each function. Also, use existing record schedules to determine all series related to each function and then interview staff for accuracy and to discover unscheduled or unknown series pertaining to each function.
- b) Conduct a physical review of a representative sample of the records.
- c) For each identified series determine:
 - Workflow that creates uses the records
 - Location
 - Format
 - Volume
 - Whether records are Temporary or Permanent
 - Retention
- d) Use agency data and technical tools at your disposal in accomplishing the task.
 - Create or use existing databases to track information and ensure proper intellectual control.
 - Locate and use internal reports, which present a clear picture of types and locations of records.

4) Determine values for records series and/or larger groupings of records

- a) Determine levels of control – function or subfunction at which to keep records and apply disposition.
- b) Determine retention period for each level of control.
- c) Identify subfunctions and assign them to higher-level functions when possible.

5) Group like record series into larger aggregations or buckets.

- a) Segregate records on the basis of retention and disposition, i.e. place like records together within buckets/aggregations, permanent records with permanent records and temporary records with temporary records.
- b) Identify those series, systems or groups of records, if any, requiring use of traditional scheduling methods.

6) Name larger aggregations or buckets. Review names of the aggregations or buckets for clarity, completeness, and conciseness.

7) Determine value of records within each aggregation, bucket, or series.

- a) Develop crosswalk from records with previously approved dispositions to new buckets/aggregations.
- b) *Harmonize* (synchronize) retentions and dispositions – either by assigning one disposition to all records within a bucket/aggregation or by proposing flexible retention periods for records when they are appropriate (section IV.2).
- c) Choose a primary bucket/aggregation location for any records that could fall into multiple buckets/aggregations.