

Recordkeeping Fact Sheet

Records Schedules

According to the Archives and Recordkeeping Act, 2006, S.O. 2006, chapter 34, Schedule A,

“Every public body shall prepare a records schedule that sets out, for each class of public records that they create or receive, the length of time the records will be retained and the disposition of the records at the end of their retention period”

This means that all of your program files, administrative records, case files, policy files, and other such records must be scheduled.

What is a records schedule?

It is a records and business management document, approved by the Archivist of Ontario, that:

- Identifies and describes the records or classes of records to which it applies
- Specifies how long the records are to be kept by the public body
- Specifies the format or media in which the records are kept
- Identifies the records or classes of records that are record of archival value.

Records scheduling applies to records in all formats or media – anything that captures and documents information in any form such as paper and electronic or digital. Examples range from memos, voice mails, letters, maps, plans, drawings, reports, completed forms, audio tapes, digital sound recordings, film, videotape, computer disk, portable memory drives, CDs, DVDs, podcasts, emails, photographs, and optical disks.

Records schedules ensure that:

- Records of permanent value are preserved and transferred to the Archives of Ontario after the business and legal requirements and value have been met.
- Records with no legal, historical or business value are not kept past their immediate use and are properly destroyed.
- All OPS employees have the information they need to do their work.

- Information can be easily located and accessed across your ministry or agency, which is especially important as issues arise or a re-organization is launched.
- OPS filing cabinets, workstations and computers are not clogged with unnecessary records.

Records schedules protect records that are fundamentally unique and irreplaceable. For example, they:

- Protect the public's long-term right to know how policies came about and why, and what decisions were made when and by whom.
- Protect legal rights both of government and the public. For example, an archival record is one way of establishing aboriginal rights.
- Document the important work done by the Ontario public service.

At times, important records are inadvertently destroyed while others of little value have been kept indefinitely.

A records schedule tells you how long records are kept and when they are to be destroyed and when they are to be transferred to the Archives of Ontario for long-term preservation

Who is responsible for developing a records schedule?

Each public body is responsible for developing its own records schedule. Most have a designated business unit or role with primary responsibility for records management, together with a business process for developing a records schedule.

The Archives of Ontario (AO) has developed tools to assist with the development of records schedules.

One such tool is the Government of Ontario Common Series, designed to provide a consistent approach to managing records of common functions found across ministries and agencies and that they have same retention requirements, such as Human Resources, Finance, and Communications.

Of note is the Act's requirement for all records to be scheduled. To assist with meeting this requirement, the AO has recently introduced a common series for Transitory Records, that is, records with no legal, historic or business value that have a limited shelf-life in the business of the OPS.

If you are the designated role to develop a records schedule ...

Start by making sure that in your ministry or agency, NO information is destroyed until records schedules have been written. Then check to see if there is an existing records schedule. If there is one, check to see that it covers all of the records and whether it

accurately reflects their contents. (Your ministry or agency records management staff can help with this work.)

Next, review the retention requirements that appear on the schedules. Retention tells you how long you keep your records onsite at your ministry or agency, when you send them to the records centre, if and when they are to be destroyed and if and when they are to be transferred to the Archives of Ontario.

You will also need to assess if the records schedule is being followed, and if not, what can be done to improve use and compliance with your schedule.

Assess what parts of your ministry or agency business is covered by the Government of Ontario Common Series, available on the Archives' website.

Adopting the Government of Ontario Common Series saves you a great deal of time and effort.

For more on Adopting government common schedule series, go to the Archives of Ontario's Recordkeeping intranet site on MyOPS.

Where a new record schedule needs to be developed, the steps involved include:

Consultations with business areas

- Inspecting the records you have (called a records inventory)
- Identifying vital records
- Research on retention periods
- Drafting the records schedule
- Reviews and revisions within your ministry and agency as well as the Archives of Ontario
- Archives' appraisal and approvals
- Implementation

The AO's Recordkeeping Support Unit provides recordkeeping advice and counsel to ministry and agency contacts responsible for records management. Contact by e-mail is at: recordkeeping@ontario.ca or by telephone at 416.327.1600.

The public expects each of us to manage information resources carefully and efficiently.

Records in any ministry or agency program do not belong to you. They belong to the people of Ontario, and are held in trust by those of us who are part of the OPS.

Each one of us has a responsibility to make sure that the records we create as part of our work are properly scheduled.

Access all Records Management Fact Sheets and other reference documents including the records scheduling guidelines, on the Archives of Ontario intranet site on MyOPS.