



Australian Capital Territory  
**Territory Records Office**  
**GUIDELINE**



# **Guideline for Records Management No. 3 - Records Description and Control**

This Guideline is to be read in conjunction with *Territory Records Office Standard for Records Management No.3 - Records Description and Control*.

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## INTRODUCTION

Records need to be described in order to make them accessible to current and future users, and to help in guaranteeing their reliability and authenticity over time. Description of records also helps users to understand the context in which they were made and how they have been used. Proper description and control of records is required to ensure that they are a full and accurate representation of agency business and that they remain accessible over time.

## PURPOSE

The Director of Territory Records has approved *Territory Records Office Standard for Records Management No.3 -Records Description and Control* for use in the Territory. The Standard sets out minimum requirements for the description and control of Territory records in order to keep full and accurate records, and ensure that they are accessible to current and future users.

The purpose of this Guideline is to supplement *Territory Records Office Standard for Records Management No.3 - Records Description and Control* in a practical way by providing Territory agencies with guidance on how to implement a range of strategies that support compliance with Principle No.1 '*Description and Control*' and Principle No. 2 '*Descriptive Elements*' described in the Standard.

The Guideline is provided to assist all Territory agencies in understanding the processes that are required to be implemented to meet compliance with the minimum requirements of the *Territory Records Office Standard for Records Management No.3- Records Description and Control*.

Section 7 of the *Territory Records Act 2002* identifies ACT entities that are classified as agencies for the purpose of the Act. The following entities are agencies:

- The Executive
- The Supreme Court
- The Magistrates Court
- The Coroner's Court
- The Legislative Assembly Secretariat
- Administrative units
- Other prescribed authorities
- Boards of inquiries under the *Inquiries Act 1991*
- Judicial commissions under the *Judicial Commissions Act 1994*
- Royal commissions under the *Royal Commissions Act 1991*
- Entities declared under the regulations to be agencies

## SCOPE

This Guideline contains advice and a range of strategies that have been explicitly developed to assist Territory agencies to meet their obligations under sections 14 and 15 of the Territory Records Act. Section 14 of the *Territory Records Act 2002*, requires Territory agencies to "make and keep full and accurate records" of their business activities. Section 15 of the Act requires agencies to take steps necessary to ensure that the information in their records continues to be accessible. The Guideline should be read in

conjunction with the *Territory Records Office Standard for Records Management No 3 – Records Description and Control*.

The Director of Territory Records endorses the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA) *Principles on Full and Accurate Records*.

### **CAARA Principles on Full and Accurate Records**

CAARA has issued 15 principles on full and accurate records however the following are most relevant in this context

#### ***Records must be complete***

In order to be understood, records need to have content, context and structure. Content is the substance of a document. Context refers to the information about the record, its making and use. The descriptive elements required by this Standard help to ensure that the context of every record is captured. Structure refers to how the elements of a record fit together. In paper systems structure is provided through mechanisms such as file covers, which make the relationship between documents within a file apparent. In electronic systems the structure of a record is less apparent, and care needs to be taken to ensure it is maintained, usually through the use of metadata. There are a number of recordkeeping metadata standards available that must be used to ensure that electronic systems capture complete records.

#### ***Records must be adequate***

Records need to be adequate for the purposes for which they are kept. This can mean, for instance, that different levels of description might be required for records that are to be kept for long periods. Records that will be made available to the public may need more descriptive information so that they are comprehensible to people outside the agency that made them. Records being kept for a very short time may require less detailed descriptive information, as it is likely that the people making the records will be able to understand their immediate context.

#### ***Records must be accurate***

Description and control mechanisms help to ensure that records are an accurate reflection of the business activity to which they relate. Records need to show what was communicated, decided or done. Close alignment of recordkeeping and business processes assists in accurate recordkeeping.

#### ***Records must be authentic***

Authentic records are records that continue to show the business transactions that they purport to represent. They have not been tampered with or otherwise altered, except in ways that are authorised, detectable and recorded in the recordkeeping system. Records security measures can preserve records' authenticity, and descriptive information such as management and use histories can help to make apparent all uses of the record.

#### ***Records must be useable***

Records must be identifiable, retrievable, accessible and available when needed. Good records description and control systems ensure that users, both internal and external, can

find and retrieve the records that they need. Records control also helps in making records available when needed by guarding against unauthorised destruction.

Records description and control strategies described in this Guideline take into account the CAARA Principles and are consistent with the concepts and principles outlined in the Australian Standard for Records Management *AS ISO 15489*.

## **THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

The *Australian Standard for Records Management, AS ISO 15489*, which has been adopted as the model for best practice recordkeeping by the ACT Government, establishes a regime that describes records using terms that reflect the functions and activities of the agency.

In the broadest sense, classification is the process of categorising information resources according to a predetermined hierarchy or scheme. The use of a classification scheme will ensure these resources are managed in a consistent and organised manner.

A business classification scheme reflects the functions and activities of an agency. This business classification scheme is a cornerstone of any Records Management program, providing the basis for compliance, risk management, retention periods, security safeguards and other related issues.

Functional classification of records focuses on the actual business function, activity or transaction which resulted in the record being created or received in the first place. Questions like “What is the record about?” or “Who created the record?” start the process of classification. More pointed questions like, “What were you doing when you created the record?” also assist in correctly classifying a record.

Agency records are made and received to meet a range of business requirements. These records underpin agency business operations, as they provide the necessary audit trails for providing evidence and retaining corporate knowledge. Records are a key tool to enable staff to perform their duties efficiently.

For agency records to be accessible both now and in the future, they must be effectively described and controlled to ensure that they are a full and accurate representation of agency business. To achieve this aim, description and control of agency records will require a variety of strategies and depend on a number of recordkeeping tools.

Records description and control begins when records are made or received, and continues through the ongoing use of those records as archives, and even after the records have been destroyed. Records management processes such as *capture, registration, classification, access, security, storage, tracking and disposal* generate descriptive information (metadata) and control mechanisms that are linked to records.

### **What is functional classification?**

Functional classification has been designed to ensure that all business records and information relating to a particular function and activity are held together over time, regardless of changes to organisational structures, programs or project names. This approach is used to mitigate the affect of ongoing administrative change within government agencies. If records are classified by their (relatively stable) functions, it is easier to search for records and their related files rather than needing to know the name of

an agency or the business section at the time the records were made. For example, if staff working in a Human Resources section of an agency created a budget estimate for the year ending 2004, these records would be grouped under the function of Financial Management, and the activity of Budgeting, instead of Human Resources.

Further, classification schemes based on business functions and activities provide a basis for developing two critical records management tools:

- A thesaurus of terms to control the language for titling and indexing records in a specific business context; and
- A Records Disposal Schedule that defines retention periods and consequent disposal actions for various classes of records.

Functions are “the largest unit of business activity in an agency”. They represent the major responsibilities that are *managed* by the agency to fulfil its goals. Functions are high-level aggregates of the agency’s activities. Functions are often described as things or with nouns, such as Equipment and Stores.

Activities are the major tasks *performed* by the agency to accomplish each of its functions. Several activities may be associated with each function. Activities are often described as actions or verbs, such as Reporting.

Functional classification requires a shift in thinking about grouping and describing records. Often when describing a record we think about its subject first, and the function or activity it relates to later, if at all. Functional classification provides a consistent way of viewing all business information rather than having many ways of looking at information based on predominant subjects. The relationship between function and subject classification can be seen in the table below.

<b>Function</b>	<b>Subject</b>
Functions explain why a record exists	Subjects describe the content of a record
Functions can be identified before any records are made.	Records must exist before a subject can be identified

Using this approach to group records together is simply another way of thinking about the record. For example, a series of records detailing the upgrade of a software system need to be classified. When we classify functionally, we need to ask ourselves:

- What *is* the overall business goal or outcome is being documented in the records?
- What are *we* doing to make this goal happen? And *does* this activity support other functions?
- Are there any sub topics under this activity to be more specific?

The final answers might be:

- We want to determine the suitability of an existing software system.
- We will do this by evaluating the system.
- Specifically, we are looking at the performance indicators.

So the classification would look like:

- ‘Technology and Telecommunications’ as the function.
- ‘Evaluation’ as the *activity*.
- ‘Performance Indicators’ as the *topic*.

The important points to remember are:

- Think carefully about what exactly is to be documented on the file;
- Think carefully about the agency’s needs;
- Only classify as much as is needed to retrieve; and
- Use terms that are likely access points for retrieval.

Terms in a functional classification scheme are used also to form part of file titles. The implementation of a functional classification scheme is through a thesaurus.

### **What is a functional thesaurus?**

A functional thesaurus derives its terms from the functional classification scheme. A functional thesaurus is a hierarchical thesaurus that describes the business functions carried out across an agency.

The functional thesaurus contains high level functions, each with second and third level terms, as well as non-preferred terms and related terms.

The main purpose of a functional thesaurus is to describe record resources of an agency and to aid discovery of agency information and records. Correct application of thesaurus terms to describe resources will enable end-users to discover those resources.

Within the functional thesaurus the following groupings occur:

- Function (level 1): the broadest unit of business performed by an agency. They represent the major responsibilities that are managed by the organisation to fulfil its goals. Functions are high-level aggregates of the organisation’s activities
- Activities (level 2): major tasks or areas of service undertaken within each function.
- Subject / Transaction (level 3): tasks or subjects being addressed within the functions and activities. Transactions will help define the scope or boundaries of activities and provide the basis for identifying, in detail in Step C, the records that are required to meet the business needs of the organisation. The identification of transactions will also help in the formulation of the records description part of a records disposal authority.

For each term in the functional thesaurus Scope Notes are required. Scope Notes for both functions and activities should always reflect the subordinate components. As a rule of thumb, the scope of an activity should encompass the transactions identified as part of the activity, and the scope of a function should encompass the activities constituting the function. For example, the function term: “Publication” from the Territory Version of Keyword AAA is defined as:

- the function of having works, irrespective of format, issued for sale or general distribution internally or to the public. Includes drafting, manual or electronic

production (design, layout, typesetting, printing etc) marketing, and supply of publications by the organisation.

The scope note includes some of the narrower activity terms such as distribution, drafting, marketing and production to describe the breadth of the function. However, not all of the activities for the function are included in the scope note. For example, routine processes associated with many functions, such as enquiries, planning, procedures, reporting, research and reviewing are omitted. The specific inclusion of narrower terms to define the boundaries of the broader term will vary but, at the very least, should guide the composition of the scope note. Scope notes also provide guidance on the use of a term:

- **Broader Terms:** These are terms at a higher level:
- **Narrower Terms:** these are terms at a lower level:
- **Related Terms:** these are terms at the same level:
- **Use:** these are approved terms used to identify and save documents, and:
- **Non-preferred Terms:** these are other terms not to be used to identify and save documents.

The thesaurus is used to control the terms used to title files, simplify searching and keep the use of terms in file titles consistent over time. For example, terms such as 'Employees', 'Personnel', and 'Staff' all mean the same. In the thesaurus only one of these terms is the preferred one, and the other two are non-preferred. So, if a user searches on 'Employees' and finds that it is a non-preferred term, the thesaurus will point the user to the preferred term. The thesaurus therefore controls language, so that, when retrieving records, only one search has to be done instead of multiple searches on multiple terms.

The thesaurus maintains an alphabetical list of the terms used to describe business functions, activities and subjects. It also provides definitions of these terms in scope notes, controls the hierarchical relationships of terms as narrower and broader terms, and provides cross-reference links to related terms and non-preferred terms. The following codes are used to identify thesaurus components.

Code	Component
SN	<b>Scope Note-</b> provides the definition or description of the term.
BT	<b>Broader Term-</b> a term above this one. For example, 'Financial Management' is a broader term above 'Budgeting'.
NT	<b>Narrower Term-</b> a term below this one. For example, 'Estimates' is a narrower term below 'Budgeting'.
RT	<b>Related Term-</b> a term at the same level as this term referring to a related concept.
UF	<b>Used For (or Non-preferred) Term</b> – a synonym that is not an authorised term. For example, 'Personnel' is a preferred term and is used for 'Human Resources'.

### **Constructing file titles using a functional thesaurus**

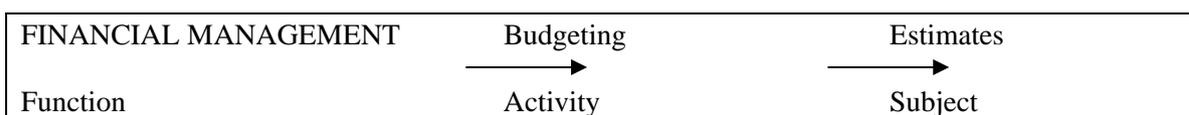
The Director of Territory Records has provided the *Territory Version of Keyword AAA* as a thesaurus of terms relating to the administrative functions common to agencies. This thesaurus is mandated for use by agencies for the titling of records of common administrative functions.

Titling a file will require officers to firstly classify the record by identifying the main function, and secondly the activity to be selected from the thesaurus. The final step is to add the agency information that will identify the file within that agency by adding subject

descriptors developed by the agency to represent these concepts that can be chosen from the thesaurus or created as free text. It should be noted agencies are required to develop their own functional thesaurus from an analysis of their *core* business functions and activities.

The agency-specific thesaurus may use activities from the *Territory Version of Keyword AAA* but these terms cannot be altered in anyway and must be adopted in full. Agencies must not use terms for their agency-specific thesaurus in any way that differs from the *Territory Version of Keyword AAA*. For example if budgeting is an activity in the *Territory Version of Keyword AAA* it can be used as an activity in the agency-specific thesaurus but not as a function or subject descriptor. When combined, the *Territory Version of Keyword AAA* and agency specific thesauri will cover administrative and core business functions. Thus, file titles will be able to be created for all records - administrative and operational.

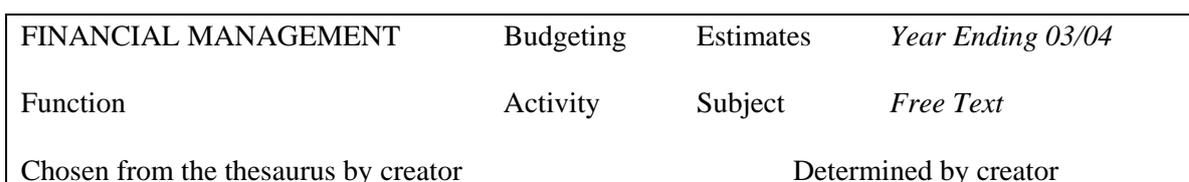
A thesaurus of functions, activities and subjects provides agencies with the means to classify their records according to a business function and activity that made the record in the first place. It also enables authorised terms to be used in a file title in which these records are contained. The levels in a thesaurus move from the broadest concept to narrowest. For example:



Each term in the thesaurus generally has a scope note to provide a definition of the term and directions on how to use it. For example, the scope note for the function of FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (taken from the *Territory Version of Keyword AAA*) reads:

“The function of managing the agency’s financial resources.  
Includes establishing, operating, and maintaining accounting systems, controls and procedures, financial planning, framing budgets and budget submissions, obtaining grants, managing funds in the form of allocations from the Consolidated Revenue Fund and revenue from charging, trading and investments.  
Also includes the monitoring and analysis of assets to assist the delivery of economic and social services to government, industry and the community.”

For example, an agency may have made or received records (or a set of records) about budget estimates for the year 2003/04. This can be broken down as:



Access to the thesaurus may be manual, assisted electronically or as part of the recordkeeping system. For example, a thesaurus may be a separate physical document referenced when creating paper files, accessed as a separate document on a web page, or built into the recordkeeping system itself, so that terms selected appear automatically in the file title.

In whatever format the thesaurus is, users will have to select terms from the scheme. In most agencies users will then need to add in additional free text to uniquely identify records held in files. Free text terms are not listed in the thesaurus and generally include names, words, actions or dates. In some areas of the thesaurus there will be tips on what to add in the free text area of file titles. The activity of Grant Funding for instance, may specify in its scope note, that the name of the program or project be included, round number, year and name of recipient or applicant as free text. An agency should develop its own standards or naming conventions for files and documents. These should also provide a useful guide for selecting proper names, abbreviations at the free text level.

### **Which types of records are included?**

Descriptive information about records can exist in the form of correspondence registers, movement cards, file registers, file covers and in electronic recordkeeping systems. Standardising descriptive information about records in a register for instance, and assigning unique identifiers to each record within a system, will ensure that users of agency records, both internal and external, can find and retrieve the records that they need.

The strategies described below are expressed in a linear sequence. They take into account a number of records management processes. In practice, the control processes do not take place in such a sequence. For example, several activities can take place simultaneously during the registration process of a record or document into a recordkeeping system. Some of these activities depend on the existence of standard instruments such as a business classification scheme, functional thesauri and approved Records Disposal Schedules.

This relates to information, written, electronic or any other form, that is made, received and maintained by an agency or staff member in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of agency business. Records can be made or received in any format. Email messages, digital images of paper documents, video cassettes, databases, photographs, tape recordings, blood samples, and plans are all examples of record formats.

Below are some specific examples of records that are subject to compliance with the Standard.

- Reports
- Minutes
- Letters
- Contracts
- Agreements
- Land titles
- Photographs
- Plans
- Media releases
- Invoices
- Asset registers
- Tenders
- Functional & technical specifications
- Snapshots of web sites
- Registers or indexes of file details
- File movement cards
- Lists of destroyed official files
- Delegations
- Official files
- Audio recordings
- Surveillance camera tapes
- Snapshots of websites
- Training register (OH&S)
- System logs (recording changes to websites & intranet site)
- Submissions
- Proposals
- Briefing, discussion papers
- Electronic commerce transactions
- Notifications
- Risk register
- Technical manuals
- Blood samples
- Visitor books

- FOI requests
- Funding application
- Purchase orders/requisition

### **Benefits of Describing Records**

The primary aim of assigning descriptive information to records is to be able to:

- Retrieve them when required;
- Simplify other records management tasks, such as applying security and Records Disposal Schedules;
- Make it easier for agencies to identify missing or fraudulently made records;
- Provide evidence of who made and used records and when; and
- Identify, authenticate and access records over time.

### **Systems for monitoring the use and movement of records**

A major requirement of records management is to know where active and inactive paper records are at any one time and the actions that have taken place.

It should be possible for agencies to establish the location of a particular record whether it is 'at home' in a filing system, with a particular user, in secondary storage, or whether it is missing or has been destroyed.

Both manual and automated tracking systems are widely used. Common types of manual file tracking systems include:

- Use of a file movement book register to mark files out in date order;
- Use of a separate file movement card for each file, these cards being held in one sequence by file name or number; and
- File movement markers or 'file out' card. These are left in the file storage area in place of a file when a user takes that file.

An automated document and/or file tracking system caters for issues, returns and transfers, and for checking the movement history of files and documents. Many systems incorporate barcode tracking of individual records. Barcoding enables considerable improvements in the speed and accuracy with which records can be issued and returned compared to manual tracking systems. Furthermore, audits of records held in offices and workstations can be done centrally or remotely.

Remote recording of file movements can eliminate the need for other less efficient methods of informing records staff that a document or file has been handed on to someone else (such as using a telephone or sending a file transfer slip).

### **How can this Guideline help?**

Records and recordkeeping systems in the main will differ greatly from one agency to the next. For agencies to comply with the principles set out in *Territory Records Office Standard for Records Management No.3 – Records Description and Control*, this Guideline offers strategies that can be applied in different environments and to records in a variety of different forms. Further, where relevant, references to other guidance and tools have been included.

Adherence to the strategies documented in this Guideline can assist agencies to demonstrate that they have met their obligations under section 14 and 15 of the *Territory Records Act 2002*.

## **PRINCIPLE 1: DESCRIPTION AND CONTROL**

Records need to be described so that they can be retrieved when needed. This description process must happen when the record is made. Agencies will usually describe their records with the needs of their own staff in mind. However, consideration must be given to the needs of external users when describing records that will be kept for more than 20 years and will therefore be available to the public under the *Territory Records Act 2002*. Agencies need to be aware that access to any record may be requested under the *Freedom of Information Act 1989*.

Descriptive information about records helps in controlling and managing them. Describing records using terms that reflect the functions and activities of the agency can simplify other records management tasks, such as applying Records Disposal Schedules. Descriptive information about who made, accessed or carried out tasks on records helps to ensure their reliability and authenticity. Assigning unique control symbols to records makes it easier for agencies to identify missing or fraudulently made records. Information about who made and used records and when is also important evidence of the actions of government, and is vital for short and long-term accountability to regulators and the public at large.

Recordkeeping systems are particular types of information systems that are designed and implemented to capture, maintain, and provide access to information which functions as evidence of business activity. The system is more than the records alone. It includes the people who make and manage records, policies and procedures, and the tools for the making and management of records for as long as they are required.

In any recordkeeping system records need to be brought under control to enable them to be managed, located and understood. This involves documenting information about the record such as its origins and its use, and applying unique identification mechanisms. This information is known as metadata. The creation and retention of this recordkeeping metadata is managed in recordkeeping systems and is essential to the operation of the system.

### **What is metadata?**

Metadata is data about data

Metadata is structured or semi-structured information that enables the creation, management and use of records through time and across domains. Recordkeeping metadata can be used to identify, authenticate and contextualize records; and the people, processes and systems that create, manage and maintain and use them.

Metadata is used to facilitate the understanding, characteristics, and management usage of data. The metadata required for effective data management varies with the type of data and context of use.

The term "metadata" has been used in a broader context by IT professionals for many years to describe data about data, covering such aspects as field names and field lengths. In the context of this Guideline, metadata is structured data that describes records in a consistent manner to enable the efficient retrieval of the records.

Metadata consists of a set of elements (sometimes called fields or attributes) which describe parts of the record. For example, metadata describing a book may contain the

name of the author, the title and publisher of the book. Metadata describing a file may include the name of the file requestor, the title, the date ranges of documentation held on the file, and preceding and later papers and relationships with other files.

### **Types of recordkeeping systems**

The type of recordkeeping system familiar to most agencies is the corporate filing system in which paper records are classified, attached to file covers and stored in secure locations for easy retrieval. Metadata captured by these systems may include a file title, its unique number and action record, recorded on the cover or on a file movement card.

It should be noted that the paper correspondence or file registers themselves are not recordkeeping systems; they are control records or finding aids and should be unalterable. If, however changes are required, an audit trail of changes should be kept. A recordkeeping system encompasses people, policies, procedures and technology (hardware and software) that support the management of records regardless of format.

Electronic recordkeeping systems capture specific recordkeeping metadata about records so that the records are identified, described and managed in a systematic and consistent way, that protects and keeps the metadata about the records until they can be disposed of or retained for their enduring value as Territory Archives.

For this reason, shared drives and email boxes of individual agency staff or workgroups for example, are not electronic recordkeeping systems. These devices lack the management controls that ensure records are properly captured, described and protected over time from alteration, removal or destruction.

Much of an agency's business relies on a combination of electronic and paper-based systems. However, in the transition to electronic business environments (including electronic commerce), good recordkeeping practices that existed in the paper environment have, in many cases, been neglected or discarded. Many agencies electronic business systems provide up-to-date business information, but also may need to maintain a history of past transactions that can be accessed as evidence of an agency's business activity. If an agency's electronic system is not designed to do this, or cannot be modified to do so, an agency may expose itself to accountability and business risks.

Provisions with various Acts and regulations apply equally to all records regardless of their format. The value of records used as evidence in a court of law is enhanced when they are produced under identifiable standards and controls. Agency recordkeeping systems should ensure records are authentic, not altered or tampered with, auditable and produced in systems that use security measures to ensure their integrity.

### **What to capture?**

Records should be captured whenever there is a business need for evidence and information. Each agency needs to determine what records (made and received) should be captured into their recordkeeping systems, taking into account their business, legal and accountability requirements for evidence.

Some common business activities that should be documented and captured in agency recordkeeping systems include:

- Meetings - records should be made to document meetings;

- Decisions, discussions and recommendations - records should be made of important agency business conducted orally in informal situations or through face-to-face contact, such as over the counter in a shop front;
- Sending and receiving correspondence - records of correspondence sent and received by email, fax, post or any other means;
- Telephone conversations - records should be made to document business conducted via the telephone; and
- Electronic commerce - records should be kept from transactions conducted online.

### Levels of description

An agency's recordkeeping system is required to manage the aggregation of records, the way they are stored, archived and shared, and the way their access and security is controlled.

To be of ongoing value however, a record must have certain descriptive elements assigned to it either by a system or a user. The elements serve to identify records from the time they are made and registered in a system, until their business importance, significance or long-term value ceases. Each element must become an intrinsic part of the record in order for the record to retain its value over time.

Specific metadata about the context of a record is required to be captured when it is registered into an agency's recordkeeping system. The design of the system must support the automatic creation and capture of as much metadata as possible during the registration process and also during the lifespan of record. The range of metadata that an agency recordkeeping system needs to capture will depend on an assessment of agency requirements for evidence. An agency that is responsible for processing food licences for restaurants for instance, may need to capture specific metadata at an item and file level. Whereas, another agency may only want to capture metadata at a file level using the title of a file to reflect the contents and business activity the records document.

### File register

In paper-based recordkeeping systems, metadata recorded on the front of an 'official' file cover such as the file number and title can also form part of a file register. The table below provides examples of files that have been made during the year and are still in active use.

**Table 1 - Example of a file register**

Identifier	Title	Date Created	Record Creator's Position
06/001	FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT - Budgeting – <i>Budget Estimates Year Ending 2008</i>	7/1/06	Records Manager
06/002	TECHNOLOGY & TELECOMMUNICATIONS - Acquisition – <i>Electronic Recordkeeping System</i>	10/1/06	Records Manager
06/003	INFORMATION MANAGEMENT - Compliance – <i>Territory Records Act 2002</i>	23/1/06	Records Manager

A register like the one above must be retained as a separate control record or finding aid even after the files to which the information relates may have been destroyed using an approved Records Disposal Schedule.

Most electronic recordkeeping systems are designed to register records and/or files through automating a range of records management processes, transparent to the user. Metadata may be automated at the record level with links to establish a relationship with its related physical or electronic file in which it is contained. For example, the date the record was made and its title may be recorded into an electronic system. At the same time metadata about the file in which the record has been contained can also be included so that, when users are looking for a file they will also be able to access details about the records within the file. Generally, a range of reports can be generated from an electronic recordkeeping system, similar to the register outlined above, if metadata about the records and/or files have been registered into the system.

### Why is recordkeeping metadata important?

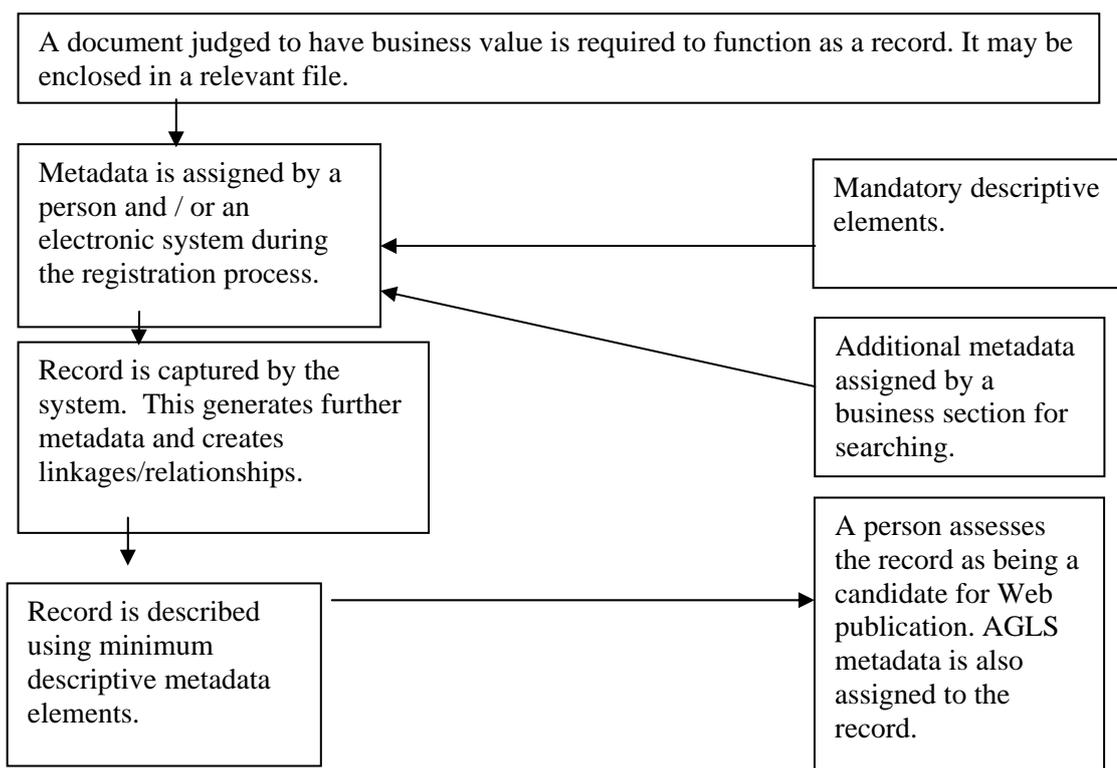
Territory agencies are required to make and keep not only information about what transactions they have carried out, but also evidence, in the form of a record, that captures the content and context of these activities. Metadata captured with a record will enable it to be retrieved and understood over time thus helping an agency to fulfil a range of records management responsibilities.

Using controlled language (a thesaurus) as part of the recognised metadata sets ensures consistent descriptive terminology and aids efficient and high-quality information retrieval. Use of the Territory’s Whole of Government thesaurus is very important for applying consistent and appropriate metadata elements.

Knowing that a record exists is one step; ensuring that people who need to use these items can confidently and efficiently locate them is another. Recordkeeping metadata can provide a solution for that second step.

The following figure shows the interaction of metadata sets and their application required within an agency’s recordkeeping system.

**Figure 1 - Application of metadata**



Whatever form an agency's control record takes, the control record must be unalterable and kept permanently to provide descriptive information about the management and use of agency's records. If, however, changes are required to the control record, an audit trail of changes must be retained.

## PRINCIPLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS

There are six descriptive elements that must be recorded for all of an agency's records in order to comply with this Standard. The following elements are the minimum required for each record in order to describe its context and to comply with the Standard. Agencies should note, however, that in order for electronic recordkeeping systems to operate effectively more elaborate descriptive schemes would be required. Agencies must consult a more comprehensive recordkeeping metadata standard when designing and implementing electronic recordkeeping systems.

Each metadata element described in the Guidelines uses the following structure:

<b>Element Name</b>	<b>The name of the element, e.g. Title.</b>
<b>Related To</b>	Lists any other elements that have a relationship with this element.
<b>Sub-Elements</b>	List the sub-elements which are applicable to the element, indicating each sub-element's obligation for implementation. In cases where an element has no sub-elements, appropriate schemes are indicated at the element level.
<b>Definition</b>	Describes the information that is captured in the element or sub-element.
<b>Purpose</b>	Indicates what is achieved by using the element or sub-element.
<b>Assigned By</b>	Denotes whether the value of the element or sub-element is assigned automatically (system-generated), or whether it is assigned by a user, either by selecting the value from a pick list, or entering the value manually.
<b>Obligation</b>	Indicates whether use of the element or sub-element is mandatory.
<b>Applicability</b>	Identifies what levels of aggregation (item, file or series) to apply the element or sub-element.
<b>Comment</b>	Additional information that may be useful in understanding the element's purpose .

## 1. Date

The date the record was created is important:

- for access - so that people can find information about events according to when they happened;
- for evidential reasons - to understand when something described in the record happened; and
- for contextual reasons - to understand how one record relates to other records, or the environment in which the record was made.

The date that the record was made must be captured and maintained in a recordkeeping system. The date may be the date a document was created in an electronic recordkeeping system but in a paper-based system it may be the date that the file was made. For records that are received by the agency, but not made in the agency, the date of receipt, and preferably also the date of the record must also be captured into the recordkeeping system.

Definition	The dates at which fundamental recordkeeping actions of creation of records and registration occur.
Purpose	To facilitate access to records based on their dates of making and registration To understand when something described in the record happened. To understand how one record relates to other records, or the environment in which the record was made.
Obligation	Mandatory
Required Elements	The date of making of all agency records The date of receipt for records received by an agency from an external source, such as e-mails, or other correspondence

## 2. Creator

Knowing the creator of the record is important in understanding the record's content, purpose and reliability. The record creator's identity is also important in ascertaining whether or not they had the authority to make that record or to carry out the business they were engaged in.

The creator of the record is not usually an individual officer's name but more likely the position title or functional area of the requesting officer. If the position title is not unique then additional location descriptions need to be included to ensure they are unique.. Using position titles enables an agency to maintain the context of the record because it is associated with a particular position not a particular person that may move through the agency.

Definition	An organisational element which is responsible for its making and some action on or usage of records and/or files.
Purpose	To understand the record's content, purpose and reliability To identify the record creator and ascertain whether or not they had authority to make the record/s or to carry our the business they were engaged in.
Obligation	Mandatory
Required Element	A record creator's position or functional area in an agency
Comments	If the record creator's position in an agency is not unique, the name of the creator's functional area must be registered instead. The person who word-processed a document may not necessarily be the same person who requests or needs to action the record.

### 3. Title

Records document functions, activities and transactions. In file-based systems, either paper or electronic, a file should bring together the documentation of a sequence of transactions making up an activity, process or project. The title given to a record, whether at the document or file level, should embody the limits of the transactions or actions and its hierarchical classification as well as place it in its functional context within the organisation. Thus, titles should be representative of the record's context as well as its content.

All records must have a meaningful title in order to help people to find the records they want, to understand their contents, and to distinguish one record from another. Agencies must use a functional thesaurus to title their records, and the thesaurus must be based on the functions and activities that the agency carries out.

<b>Definition</b>	<b>The name given to a record and/or file</b>
Purpose	To assist in identifying records To act as an access point for users To distinguish one record from another To enable searching based on words, phrases and numbers describing the record or file
Assigned by	A thesaurus based on all functions and activities that is carried out by agencies (includes administrative and core business) for function and activity and transaction / subject level and manually assigned free text.
Obligation	Mandatory – function and activity and subject and/or free text
Applicability	At a file level
Comments	Agencies must begin all their file titles with a function followed by an activity that relates to the function. After an activity has been assigned to form part of a file title, agencies must include free text. Free text refines the title and should reflect the substantive contents of agency files.

#### 4. Identifier

All records must be given an identifier, number or control symbol that is unique within the agency's recordkeeping system. Numbering or control systems help to distinguish one record from another, and assist in guaranteeing the authenticity of records within the system. The identifier system used will depend on the needs of the agency and could take one of many forms, such as an annual single number system, where a new consecutive number sequence is begun each year, or an alphabetical system, where the file is identified by the name of a client.

Definition	A unique identifier, number or control symbol that is unique within an agency's system for records and files
Purpose	To uniquely identify the record in the current environment To act as an access point to more information about the record/s.
Assigned by	Manually entered or system generated
Obligation	Mandatory
Applicability	At a record and file level
Comments	Agencies can determine their own composition of identifier. For example, it could be an annual single number system, where a new consecutive number sequence is begun each year, or an alphabetical system, where the file is identified by the name of a client.

## 5. Management History

All records management actions carried out on a record must be recorded. This includes the making of the record, its capture into the recordkeeping system, classification or titling, protective security markings, sentencing, disposal class and destruction. The date of each action must also be recorded, as well as the identity of the person or position carrying out the action. Management histories are important accountability tools and help to guarantee the authenticity of records by ensuring that any action carried out on them is recorded. In paper recordkeeping systems management histories are usually recorded in registers, on registration cards created for each record, on the file cover, or on information slips attached to a file. In electronic systems this information is often recorded in audit logs. Regardless of what system is used the management information about every agency record must be captured and retained permanently, even after the records to which the management history relates have been destroyed, this is the control record.

Definition	The dates and descriptions of all records management actions performed on records and/or files from their capture into a recordkeeping system until destruction or retention as archives..
Purpose	To act as a cumulative control record of all movements, and management actions which are carried out on a single record and/or file over time. To provide a historical log of records management and control actions performed on a record and/ or file.
Assigned by	Manually assigned or system generated
Obligation	Mandatory
Required Elements	The date all records management actions carried out on a record and/or file, must be recorded. These actions includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the making of the record and/or file;</li> <li>• its capture into the recordkeeping system</li> <li>• classifying and titling</li> <li>• sentencing, disposal class and destruction.</li> </ul> The identity of the person or position carrying out the records management actions on a record and/or file must be recorded. These actions includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the making of the record and/or file;</li> <li>• its capture into the recordkeeping system</li> <li>• classifying and titling</li> <li>• sentencing, disposal class and destruction.</li> </ul>
Applicability	At a record and file level
Comments	Agencies are required to make and maintain a management history or register for every record and/or file they make, and retain it even after the record and/or file to which is relates is destroyed.

## 6. Movement / Use History

The movement history of a record is very similar to its management history. Movement or use histories must record the date of use and the identity of the user. It must record use that is made of the record. In paper systems this information is often recorded in file movement cards or on file covers as an action record. In electronic systems it is often recorded in audit logs. Regardless of what system is in place, when a record is used by an agency a movement or use history record must be captured. This movement history must be retained for the life of the record to which it relates.

Tracking the use and movement of agency records and related files within a recordkeeping system is necessary to identify any outstanding actions against records; enable retrieval of records; prevent the loss of records, and monitor the usage for systems maintenance. In particular, capturing and maintaining information about the use and movement of records provides an auditable trail of transactions regarding records management processes and controls (i.e. capture, registration, classification, titling, storage, access, movements, use, migration and disposal).

In paper-file based systems the front of a file cover captures a range of information about the use and movement of particular sets of records. However, the information is not automatically captured. This information must be manually recorded by users (action officers) of the file/s on the front cover. Whereas, electronic systems automatically capture a system transaction as records are accessed. Attachment A provides an illustration of a file cover that shows how the movement and usage of records can be documented on the front of a file cover and Attachment B provides a decision making model for determining the processes and controls for records management.

Definition	The dates and descriptions of both legal and illegal attempts to access and use a record and/or file from the time of its capture into a recordkeeping system until its disposal...
Purpose	To act as a cumulative audit trail of all significant accesses to and uses made of records over time. To provide contextual information about the ways in which the record and/or file is or was used.
Assigned by	Manually assigned or system generated
Obligation	Mandatory
Applicability	At a record and file level
Comments	Agencies are required to make a use history for every record and/or file they make, and maintain that history for as long as the record and/or file to which it relates is kept. For example, in paper systems this information is recorded on file covers or in file movement cards. In electronic systems the information is recorded as audit logs.

## Other Control Measures

Records, and the descriptive information about them, must be maintained in an appropriate and secure environment so that they cannot be altered or destroyed without proper approval. Regardless of whether the agency is using a paper or electronic recordkeeping system, adequate security measures must be in place to ensure only authorised persons have access to records and those records are protected from deliberate or accidental loss, damage or alteration. The security of the records must be addressed in both their physical management and in the procedures the agency puts in place for their making, maintenance and use. The *Territory Records Office Standard for Records Management No 7 – Physical Storage of Records* and the *Records Advice Security Classification of Non-Cabinet Documents* will provide further advice.

An agency's active and inactive records contain information that is a valuable asset and like other corporate assets should be identified as the property of the agency, protected against deterioration, damage, loss and theft. Paper records are particularly vulnerable, as they may be lost, stored in inappropriate storage and facilities, or retained for excessive periods of time by staff.

There are three Acts which principally govern the general protection and disclosure of information contained within an agency's records; the *Territory Records Act 2002*, *Freedom of Information Act 1989* and the *Health Records (Privacy and Access) Act 1997*. All these Acts are concerned with the proper safekeeping and management of records so that they can be accessed according to the requirements of the legislation.

In the context of the public's rights to personal privacy and freedom of information, it is important that there are appropriate security classification systems and controls in place to meet the requirements of the legislation and privacy principles.

The rights of access and restrictions applicable to an agency's records should be formalised so that the risk of records being lost or kept in inappropriate locations is mitigated.

Developing appropriate categories of protection measures should be based on analysing an agency's regulatory framework and business activity at least, and if necessary conducting a risk assessment. Reasonable security and access will depend on the nature of business activity as well as the content and value of the information contained in agencies records requiring protection. Therefore, the purpose served by the record, its physical form and composition, and its use and value, will dictate the nature of a storage facility and services required.

## CHECKLIST OF COMPLIANCE

Agencies will comply with the requirements of Territory Records Office Standard for Records Management No.3 – Records Description and Control if:

- they take account of the principles described in this Standard when describing records, and particularly consider the needs of external users;
- registration and management information about every record is made and kept, even after the records to which this information relates, have been destroyed;
- records are kept appropriately– regardless of format – in a manner that protects them from alteration or unauthorised destruction and ensures their useability and accessibility over time;
- it captures the date of making of all of their records;
- the date of receipt is recorded for records received by the agency from an external source, such as e-mails or other correspondence;
- they capture, for all of their records, the record’s creator position in the agency and their name if the position name is not unique;
- all records are described with a meaningful title;
- each record they made is given a unique, non-repeatable control symbol;
- they create and maintain a management history or register for every record they make, and retain it even after the record to which it relates is destroyed; and
- they create a use history for every record they make, and maintain that history for as long as the record to which it relates is kept.

## **DEFINITIONS**

### **Agency**

The Executive, an ACT Court, the Legislative Assembly Secretariat, an administrative unit, a Board of Inquiry, a Judicial or Royal Commission, any other prescribed authority, or an entity declared under the regulations of the *Territory Records Act 2002* to be an agency.

### **Appraisal**

The process of evaluating business activities to:

- determine which records need to be captured;
- how long the records need to be kept to meet business needs; and
- meet the requirements of organisational accountability and community expectations.

### **Outsourcing**

A contractual arrangement whereby services to or on behalf of an agency, which would otherwise be carried out internally, are provided by an external organisation.

### **Principal Officer**

The Chief Executive of an administrative unit, or its equivalent in other types of agencies.

### **Recordkeeping Systems**

Information systems that capture, maintain and provide access to records over time. While the term is often associated with computer software, Recordkeeping Systems also encompass policies, procedures, practices and resources that are applied within an agency to ensure that full and accurate records of business activity are made and kept.

### **Records**

Information made, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an agency or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business. This recorded information must be maintained or managed by the agency to provide evidence of their business activities. Records can be in written, electronic or any other form.

### **Records of an Agency**

Records, in written, electronic or any other form, under the control of an agency or to which it is entitled to control, kept as a record of its activities, whether it was made or received by the agency.

### **Records Disposal Schedule**

A document, approved by the Director of Territory Records, which sets out the types of records an agency should make and how long they must be kept.

## **Records Management**

The managing of the records of an agency to meet its operational needs and, if appropriate, to allow public access to the records consistent with the *Freedom of Information Act 1989* and for the benefit of future generations. Records management covers but is not limited to the creation, keeping, protection, preservation, storage and disposal of, and access to records of the agency.

### **Records Management Program**

A document that complies with section 16 of the *Territory Records Act 2002* by setting out the means by which an agency will manage its records, and is approved by the agency's Principal Officer.

### **Sentencing**

The process of applying appraisal decisions to individual records by determining the part of a Records Disposal Schedule which applies to the record and assigning a retention period consistent with that part.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA) 2000, *Principles on full and accurate records* (Policy Statement 7). Available at:  
<http://www.caara.org.au/Policy/policy7.htm>

National Archives of Australia. Australian Government Recordkeeping Metadata Standard Version 2.0 - July 2008

Standards Australia 2002, *Information and documentation – Records Management* (AS ISO 15489) Standards Australia, Homebush, NSW.

*Territory Records Act 2002*

Territory Records Office, 2009, *Records Management Programs* (Standard for Records Management Number 1), Territory Records Office, Canberra.



## ATTACHMENT B: DECISION MAKING MODEL

