Guideline

Creating and Maintaining a File Plan

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Introduction

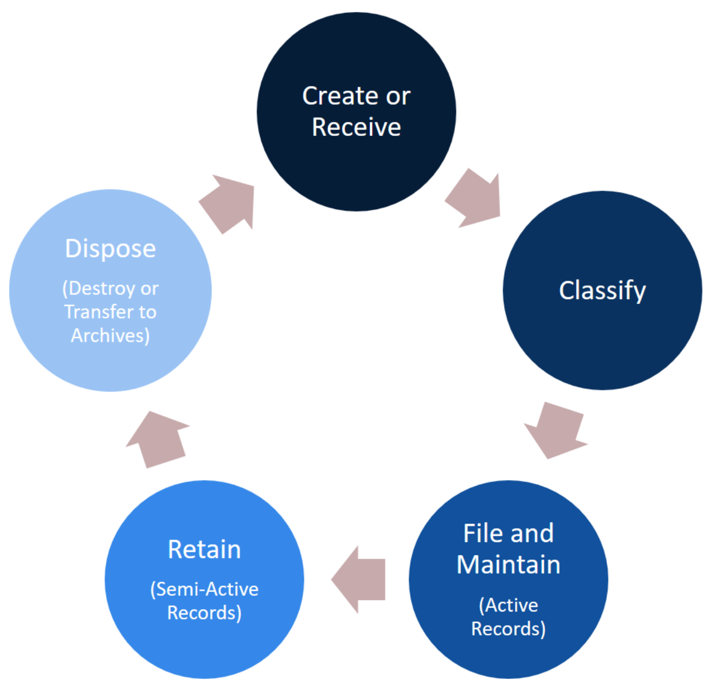
What is a File Plan?

A file plan is a tool for you and others in your office to use to help manage records. It is a roadmap, listing different records maintained by the office, where and how they are stored, and how long they are to be kept. A comprehensive office file plan provides a location for every record in an electronic or paper filing system. Understanding the file plan helps users know where to file their records and helps others know where to find the records they need to complete their tasks.

Key Concepts

The Life Cycle of a Record

Records follow a natural life cycle. Upon creation or receipt, records should be classified so they can be filed in a paper or digital recordkeeping system and retrieved when necessary. They will be used as evidence or as reference to an event or transaction. Over time, records will typically be referred to less and less frequently until they are no longer required by the office that created or received them. Records should not be retained indefinitely; rather, the office should apply the retention period defined by the appropriate records retention schedule and follow the pre-determined disposition—either deletion/destruction or transfer to the University Archives for permanent preservation.



File Plan

Records Inventory

An Inventory is a high-level survey of all types of records and information created, received and stored by your office. This can include both records and non-records and both physical and electronic documents. The inventory identifies what information is created and used, where it is stored, how long it should be stored, and in what formats it is retained.

The inventory serves as the foundation for your Office Manual and is the basis for many of the other instruments required to manage records effectively, including the office File Plan.

Function-based File Plans

Classifying records by function provides the best method for organizing business records. Function-based file plans organize records based directly on the work that an office performs to fulfill its mandate and goals, its **functions**. Instead of organizing records by what they are about (subject- or topic-based file plans), or who created them (position-based file plans), function-based file plans answer the fundamental question of why records are created and used by classifying them based on work processes. Function-based file plans are also stable and long-lasting. Subjects and positions can change frequently, but what an office does (its functions) generally stay the same over time.

Queen's University Records Retention Schedules are organized into broad **groups:** Administrative Records Group, Executive Records Group, and Operations Management Records Group. Each group contains a variety of **functions** identified by a broad alphanumeric code, and a descriptive title. Each function contains a variety of **activities** identified by a narrowing of the alphanumeric code, and a descriptive title. Each activity contains one or more **records series** identified by a two-digit code and a record description. The records series description will contain instructions on retention period and final disposition.

For example:

- Records Group: **Administrative**
- Function: **AD2000/3000** Financial Management
- Activity: **AD2500** University Accounting
- Record Series: **32** - Accounts Payable
- Retention period: **7 years** [Active years plus semi active years 1+6]
- Disposition: **Destroy**

The image below illustrates the hierarchical relationship between record groups, functions, activities, and records series:

File Plan

Record Groups (All)	**Administrative Records Group**	**Executive Records Records Group**	**Operations Management Records Group**
Functions (All)	• Public Relations • **Financial Management** • Human Resources Management • Physical Resources Management • Environmental Health and Safety Management • Information Management	• **University Governance** • Academic Governance • Legal Issues Management	• University Advancement • Support Services • Student Records Management • Student Services • **Research Management** • Teaching
Activities (Select examples based on function)	• University Financial Management • University Budgeting • **University Accounting** • Research Accounting • Banking • Taxes • Internal Audit Services • Procurement • Departmental Purchasing • Investment Management and Loans • Insurance Management • Funding Initiatives Management • Administration of Funds • Signing Authority Administration	• University Strategic Planning • Senior Management • Facilitation of University Policy Development • Principal's Office • University Annual Review • Institutional Research and Planning • Administration of Nomination and Appointment to Governing Bodies • **Board of Trustees** • External Relations • Relations with Higher Education Institutions • International Initiatives • Government Relations • University Relations with Student Societies	• Research Chairs Management • Establishment of Research Centres • Relations with Research Funding Institutions and Agencies • Research Grant Management (External Programs) • **Research Grant Management (Internal Programs)** • Research Contract Management • Research Awards Administration • Research Ethics AdministrationResearch Support Services • International Research Programs • Animal Care Management
Records Series (Select examples based on activity)	• General Ledger • General Journal • **Accounts Payable** • Accounts Receivable • Financial Reporting	• **Board of Trustees Minutes** • Board of Trustees Committee Minutes • Appointment of Principal	• Successful Research Grant Application Files - Peer Review • Successful Research Grant Application Files - Travel Awards • **Unsuccessful Research Grant Applications Files**

Creating the File Plan

File Plan steps

Step 1: Plan the Project

Before creating a file plan, consider the people and resources that will be required:

- Who will be responsible for supporting the project?
- Who will be responsible for leading the project?
- Who will be responsible for maintaining and updating the file plan?
- What information and resources will be required?

Depending on the size of the project, different resources and levels of support may be required.

Step 2: Gather Information

Begin by gathering together information about the office and the records it manages. The goal is to recognise the type of work that the office performs, and of principal importance, identify the records that are created and used to support these work processes.

- Existing file plans
- Existing file directories, from shared network drives, email accounts or similar locations
- Policies and procedures
- Organizational charts
- Annual reports and similar documents that describe the essential work undertaken by the office
- Retention and disposition schedules
- Descriptions of the office's mission, services, and responsibilities
- Websites
- Strategic plans

Review this information to gain a general understanding of the most important work and principal tasks performed by the office. Also, get a sense of the most common types of records that are created and used to support this work.

Step 3: Create an Inventory of Records

Using the information gathered in step 2 begin to list what types or series of records your office creates and/or maintains. The list should include all records that your office produces as well as any documents that you receive in the course of university business, as well as any documents that you elect to retain for reference or convenience purposes.

File Plan

Once you have compiled a list of records, consult the University Records Retention Schedules to identify the record group, function, activity, and records series. Currently Queen's University does not have a complete set of retention schedules; therefore, it may be necessary to leave certain categories blank until you can confer with the Records Management and Privacy Office. Once the correct retention schedule has been identified fill in the Classification Code and Retention period. Additionally, fill in the media (paper, digital, etc.), the current volume of records, expected annual accumulation of records, their current storage locations, and any notes that relate to the records that you deem useful.

The example below illustrates the information that should be included in an inventory of records:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	**Description**	**Function**	**Activity**	**Record Series**	**Classification Code**	**Media and location**	**Active Life**	**Semi Active Life**	**Current Retention/ Disposition Practices**	**Notes**	**Date Range**	**Current Volume in Office**	**Annual Accumulation**
2	travel expenses	AD2000/3000 Financial Management	AD2500 University Accounting	32 - Accounts Payable	AD2500-32	Paper (file cabinets in Mackintosh-Corry Hall Suite F300), Digital (I: Shared / Financial / Receipts / Travel)	1 year	6 years	Destroy		2012-2017	One 5 drawer file cabinet, 120 MB on shared drive	12" of hard copy files, 30 MB
3													
4													

Dark blue columns consist information provided by the office staff, light blue columns consist of information provided by the University retention schedules, grey columns are optional and consist information provided by the office staff.

Conclusion

Things to keep in mind

When creating the file plan, keep in mind that someone else will need to use it in the future. Therefore, avoid using jargon, abbreviations, or proper names of current office holders.

Once you have completed the file plan, ensure that all office staff become familiar with it. Review the file plan at least once per year to make sure all office functions and activities are covered and accurate.

Store an authoritative version of the file plan in a central location such as your office's shared drive. A file plan can be one of your best tools for efficiency if you plan it carefully and keep it updated.