ACTION GUIDE FOR IMPROVED RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN THE U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Overview of the Program

Files Planning and Organization

File Maintenance and Disposition

Issued by M/AS/ISS/RM

First Edition — May, 1994

USAID Records Management Initiative

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PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Many USAID bureaus, offices and missions are experiencing an operational paper jam. Overloaded file cabinets. Poorly labeled files. Endless photocopies. Lack of staff and time to sort it all out.

Faced with frequent reorganization and pressures to keep funds and programs flowing, the last issue on the minds of USAID staff is "records management." However, with rightsizing underway, this is a perfect time to put the past where it belongs, pare down current files to just those that are needed, and organize it all according to a common system which everyone can follow.

This guide contains the *basic* information needed to accomplish these tasks. It is not intended as a replacement for *Handbook 21, Part II,* but rather as a summary of the most important guidelines which all staff need to be aware of. It is also not intended as a replacement for training of those staff who prefer a structured learning environment. However, experienced staff may find that the information contained in this guide is all that they need to get started in making incremental improvements in their files and records management procedures.

Part 1 should be read by *all* Agency staff. It defines the purpose of records management, and identifies the role of every USAID staff member in achieving a system which ensures access to "the right information, by the right person, at the right time, in the right format, for the least cost." Document creation and file maintenance are no longer the sole responsibility of secretarial staff. Everyone who reads an e-mail message or creates a WordPerfect document should be aware of records management procedures and responsibilities.

Part 2 is intended for everyone involved in creating or maintaining an office filing system. It emphasizes the importance of creating a Files Plan. It details the simple but sometimes neglected steps involved in sorting documents into logical filing categories, and properly labeling and filing them. While the emphasis is on starting with paper control, the management of electronic and audiovisual records follows parallel procedures. These will be the subject of later additions to this guide.

Part 3 focuses on maintenance of files throughout the year. With reference to the office Files Plan, this guide summarizes common sense procedures for daily use, filing and refiling, and annual review and disposition of records. This section is intended for anyone who must supervise these processes, as well as anyone who must carry them out.

PART 1
OVERVIEW OF THE RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IN USAID

PURPOSE OF A RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Every Federal agency is required to have a Records Management program. The purpose of the program is to:

- Ensure that the Agency has the recorded information necessary to conduct Government business.
- Avoid unnecessary and wasteful duplication of that recorded information.
- Avoid costly storage of materials which are no longer needed.
- Preserve the official record of Agency business for legal and archival purposes.

WHAT RECORDS MANAGEMENT MEANS TO YOU

From the point of view of the average information producer and consumer, reduction of waste and longterm preservation are usually not high on the list of daily priorities. However, it may be helpful to remember what proper Records Management means on a daily basis:

Getting the right information
to the right person
at the right time
in the right format
efficiently and at the lowest possible cost.

You may be that right person, and benefit from a records management program that enables you to get the information you need in a timely fashion. But often enough, you may be the person who has to locate and deliver the right information to someone else.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A RECORD?

The word "record" takes on various shades of meaning in different contexts. For example, USAID work with databases involves "data-

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base records", population sector analyses involve use of "census records," and so on.

In the context of Federal records management, the term "records" is given a specific, legal definition. The components of this definition are as follows (see Glossary for exact wording).

Records are **documentary materials, in any form** including:

paper
fax
electronic text
electronic databases
e-mail messages
videotapes
film
audiotapes
maps
photographs

...which a USAID bureau, office or mission **creates or takes action on,**

...and **preserves as evidence** of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of Government

...or because of the informational value of data in them.

Records are the property of the U.S. Government, not of an office or staff member. Records that are created by USAID or received by USAID from contractors or participating agencies belong to USAID.

Many materials used in the course of the Agency's work fall outside of the definition of records. These are called **nonrecords,** or nonrecord materials. Examples include extra file copies, library materials and publications. What is especially important is that **nonrecord material is maintained for convenience or reference only.**

USAID'S RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

USAID's records management program is designed to assist the Agency's Bureaus, offices and missions in managing both their record and nonrecord materials:

- Each organizational unit is responsible for managing those records which document its function. These are maintained in the **Official File** of the unit.
- Convenience and reference materials kept by the unit as a whole, or by individual staff members, are maintained in **Working Files.**

The specific procedures for managing records and nonrecords in USAID are described in *Handbook 21, Part II.* These procedures provide a framework for the consistent handling, control and disposition of records throughout their life cycle, involving:

- Record creation
- Distribution and use
- Maintenance, and
- Final disposition

Recognizing that there is a great deal of variation in the work of the USAID bureaus, offices and missions, the Handbook does not prescribe a specific file structure for each organizational unit. Rather, it provides guidelines for analyzing the content of files, and then developing and maintaining an operational system appropriate for each office.

The responsibility for developing and following sound records management practices lies with each organizational unit. It is also in the self-interest of each unit to make records management a priority.

The Importance of Files Planning

The foundation of an effective office-based records management program is a Files Plan. A Files Plan not only serves as a "roadmap" to the location of all files, but also defines the retention period for each type of file.

Part 2 of this Action Guide, *Files Planning and Organization*, elaborates on the process of developing a filing system suited to the needs of each office, but at the same time follows the Agency-wide framework established in *Handbook 21, Part II.* In USAID/W, this guide should be used together with *Handbook 21, Part II, Chapters 4A, 4B and 6A.*

Files Planning in Overseas Missions and Offices

The procedures for records management in overseas Missions and offices are identical to those in USAID/W. However, since Missions hold fewer of the **official** files, the significant file categories and disposition of those categories are different. When using the Handbook, overseas Missions and offices should therefore refer to *Chapter 6B* for the purpose of files planning rather than *Chapter 6A.*

WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

Although the development and operations of a records management program is the responsibility of each organizational unit, everyone has a role to play in making the program work.

All Staff

- Know your office's function, and the types of records your office must retain to document that function.
- Understand the filing scheme in your office; support file maintenance within that scheme.
- Label all files completely, following formats/procedures recommended by the File Custodian.

Heads of Bureaus, Staff Offices, and Overseas Posts

- Implement effective records management procedures within your organizational unit.
- Designate a Records Management Liaison Officer (RMLO) for the organizational unit. A copy of each RMLO designation (or

subsequent redesignation) must be forwarded to M/AS/ISS/RM.

Records Management Liaison Officers

- Supervise implementation of the USAID File System.
- Recommend location of file stations.
- Assist and direct activities of File Custodians.
- Provide supplementary records training.
- Ensure that records eligible for disposition are removed from office space.
- Approve office Files Plan and forward to the Agency's Records Management office annually.

Files Custodians

- Operate your files station in accordance with prescribed standards and procedures contained in *Handbook 21, Part II.* (See also Part 2 of this Guide.)
- Maintain files on a current basis.
- Remove inactive files by retirement or destruction, as appropriate.
- Provide reference service to active and retired files, and return charged-out material to the appropriate file.
- Assist office staff in proper labeling of working files.
- For designated file cabinets, prepare/revise Files Plan annually and submit to the Records Management Liaison Officer.

ACCESSING RECORDS THROUGH USAID/W OFFICIAL FILE CENTERS

Several Bureaus and offices in USAID/W have elected to centralize their official project files. This provides a common point of access to the material in these files, and ensures proper control over their retention and disposition. Until January 1993, these files were retained on microfiche, with reader/printers provided for viewing and printing copies as needed. Beginning in mid-1993, a new storage and retrieval medium was tested and implemented — CD-ROM.

The CD-ROM work stations enable users to:

- Identify a record using search menus
- Retrieve the image on the screen

  or

  Determine that the image resides in the adjacent microfiche file
- Print one or more pages as needed

All work station operations are menu-driven and designed to be easy to use.

To access the CD-ROM in your office, contact the appropriate staff person responsible:

Bureau/Office	Bldg/Room	Contact Person	Contact Telephone
AFR/MRP/PMI	NS/2925	Gary Johnson	202/647-8801
ANE/ASIA/DP/PD	NS/3208	Linda Levine	202/647-5806
ANE/NE/DR/EPS	SA2/208	Cathy Green	202/663-2475
ENI/EUR/EMS	SA14/1600B	Mike Conrad	703/875-1729
LAC/DR/PS	NS/2252	Janice Little	202/647-5215
M/FA/OP/PS/SUP	SA14/1472	Alvin Summers Diane Travis	703/875-1047

NEED HELP?

Records Management specialists are available to answer specific questions, or to assist an office in any of the following:

- Applying approved records disposition schedules.
- Conducting an inventory of the records in the office to determine what categories of files exist.
- Developing a Bureau-wide or office-specific Files Plan.
- Retiring files.
- Scanning office files onto a CD-ROM (compact disc) for compact storage and easy retrieval.
- Analyzing the need for short-term or shared contract staff to assist in records management functions.

USAID's Records Management office is located in Room B930, New State. To get in touch with the Records Management Client Analyst assigned to your office, contact:

Tel: 202/736-4740
Fax: 202/647-9130

PART 2
FILES PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION

OBJECTIVE: AN OFFICE FILES PLAN

Records are created to be used.

It is therefore important that each office develop and maintain a system which facilitates control and use of its records. A well designed filing system ensures that:

- There is a definite place in the files for each record.
- Like records are treated the same, that is, are filed together.
- Records can be retrieved easily from the files, by label.
- File categories are physically arranged in a logical, useful order.
- Inactive or obsolete records are retired or disposed of when no longer needed for day-to-day operations.

A Files Plan is an outline of this system, geared to a specific organizational unit. It provides a common reference point for all staff who file and/or use office records; it identifies the types of files maintained by office, their location, and the length of time that each file should remain in the office. It also provides specific instructions on the disposition of the files which are no longer needed.

The process of developing a filing system and producing a Files Plan is a dynamic one. Annually, one copy of the Files Plan is submitted to the USAID Records Management Office on Form 520-2. (See Appendix III for an example of a partial plan.) However, at any time during the year, the Files Plan can and should change if office functions or records change. A current copy of the Files Plan, either for an entire office, or for each specific cabinet, must be easily accessible by office staff.

THE FILES PLANNING PROCESS

The basic steps in planning a new filing system, or modifying an existing one, involve asking and answering the following questions:

1. What is the office function?
2. What records are filed in the office?

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3. What belongs in the Official File?
4. Are there project case materials?
5. Are there other case materials?
6. What should be organized by subject?
7. What belongs in the Working File?
8. Where should each file group be located for convenient use?

While the planning process is similar for all offices, the resulting plan for each office is unique, reflecting its specific functions and accompanying records.

The next section identifies several concepts and resources essential to the planning process. This is followed by step-by-step guidelines on how to use the list of questions above to create an office-specific file plan.

GETTING READY: TOOLS AND CONCEPTS FOR FILE ANALYSIS

Handbooks and other Resources

In order to develop and maintain a filing system which both meets the needs of the office and complies with Federal records management requirements, it is essential to have a copy of *Handbook 21, Part II.* The most current edition is distributed on CD-ROM under the title, *USAID Directives Resource CD (DR-CD).*

Specifically, the files planning process requires reference to the following Handbook sections:

- *Appendix 4A and 4B: Subject Outlines*
- *Appendix 6A: Records Disposition Schedule, USAID/W* or *Appendix 6B: Records Disposition Schedule, Overseas Missions and Offices*

Because these sections will be consulted several times during the planning process, it may be helpful to print out the subject and disposition pages from *DR-CD* which pertain to the office for which a plan is being developed.

An understanding of office functions is also a key element of file planning. *Handbook 17* (on *DR-CD*) provides functional statements for each office. Agency organization charts and telephone directories may be of additional help in clarifying office functions.

Where to Go for Assistance

For questions or technical assistance in completing any aspect of file planning, remember that Records Management Client Analysts are available in the USAID/W Records Management office.

Concept: Official Files vs. Working Files

Official Files

Official Files contain records which document the work of an office, i.e., that work for which an office has functional responsibility. The records in the Official File of an office include both those which the office originates, as well as those which it takes action on. This includes:

- those records which are designated as originals
- any record containing original signatures
- any record designated as the ACTION COPY.

Each USAID/W office and overseas post must designate Official Files stations where official Agency records will be maintained. Official Files stations should be established at locations convenient to files users: they may be either centralized or decentralized. In either case, proper maintenance and controls over the use of the official records must be provided.

Official Files are retained either for an extended period of time (e.g., 3-10 years after cutoff), or permanently, as defined in the USAID Records Disposition Schedule.

Official Files are always flagged with **Yellow Labels.**

Working Files

Working files include any non-record material maintained to satisfy the day-to-day information and reference needs of staff, such as:

- Convenience copies of records maintained in Official Files
- Draft materials and background analyses
- Technical Reference Files

Working Files are destroyed when no longer needed, generally within three years after cutoff. The specific retention period for various types of Working Files is also defined in the USAID Records Disposition Schedule.

Working Files are flagged with **Green Labels.**

Concept: Personal Papers

Any personal papers maintained in the workplace must be separated from Official and Working Files, and must be clearly labeled "personal papers".

Personal papers include:

- Personal and private papers which do not contain references to official business.
- Personal calendars, diaries and logs that concern primarily personal activities, provided that official portions are extracted to document official records.
- Handwritten notes, reminders and summaries of telephone calls, provided that all official information has been incorporated in a memorandum for the record and placed in the Official File.
- Reference books and other personal items brought from private life.

Concept: Record Series

The records within Official and Working Files are further subdivided and grouped, based on one or more common characteristics. In the field of records management, these categories or clusters of similar records are referred to as a file **series.**

A file **series** consists of:

... a collection of records

... which relate to a particular subject or activity, or have a common form

... are kept apart from other records in the office

... and are disposed of in the same manner.

A **series** may consist of only a folder or two, or it may consist of hundreds of cubic feet of files.

The process of dividing records into series makes for easier filing, easier finding, easier disposition, and in the long run helps to conserve file space, supplies and equipment.

The term **series** is introduced here because it is a records management term used in *Handbook 21, Part II.* In this Action Guide, the terms "file group" or "file category" are also used as natural language alternatives.

Basic Series in USAID

The following series are found thoughout USAID as a whole:

- Case files
- Case working files
- Subject files
- Transitory correspondence
- Convenience files
- Technical reference files
- Special file types

Not all file categories are relevant to all offices. Following is a brief description of each type. Further details on filing and labeling within each type are discussed as part of the planning process below.

Case files are usually the easiest to identify and maintain. They contain official records filed and referenced by a number, name or date. The material may relate to a specific action, event, person, organization, location, product or thing. A case file usually has a beginning and an end, and contains ALL types and forms of material relating to that case, including correspondence. Most, perhaps 85%, of the Agency's records are filed by case. For example:

- Project Files
- Contract Files
- Loan Files
- Personnel Files
- Participant Files
- Country/Region Files
- Organization Files
- Conference Files

Case working papers are often filed separately from the official case files, as they have a shorter period of use and are destroyed sooner than case files. They include bulky background or supporting papers: spreadsheets, questionnaires, notes, data obtained for the case or project, data analyses, drafts. They are often needed for budget, project, loan, contract and similar files which have large amounts of background or supporting papers.

Subject files contain general correspondence normally asked for by subject, as well as directly related forms, reports and other attachments. They are used for grouping policy, procedural and action material together in terms of Agency functions. There are two broad types of subject files:

- Administrative — relating to housekeeping, staffing, managerial operations
- Program — relating to the program activities of the Agency

Under each of these types are specific categories and sub-categories. USAID has developed a set of standard subject codes for use in labeling subject files.

Transitory files contain correspondence that ordinarily would be filed in subject files except that it pertains to matters of short-term interest. These files are normally kept for only 2 to 6 months. They are maintained separately from other subject correspondence because of their disposition date. Examples include: transmittal letters or forms, routine requests for information, publications or communications, acknowledgements, and other types of papers.

Convenience files contain extra nonrecord copies of cables, correspondence, forms and other papers kept solely to satisfy a particular reference need. The contents are disposed of when no longer needed, with reference to the USAID Records Disposition Schedule. Convenience files are often referred to by the following distinct file names:

- Chron or Chronological files — extra copies of telegrams, memos or correspondence
- Reading files — extra copies of random current information papers circulated within the office
- Suspense files or Tickler files — extra copies of documents which serve as reminders (e.g., of action due on a certain date)

Technical reference files include printed or reproduced copies of technical reports, manuals, directives, pamphlets, periodicals, guides and handbooks kept for reference purposes. The materials may be either internally or externally produced. They never belong in the Official Files.

Special file types include records in nonpaper format, such as electronic records, microfiche, and audiovisuals.

Official and Working File Categories

The descriptions of each of these file categories indicate that some belong in the Working Files only, while others could be filed in either Official or Working Files, depending on the reason why they are retained. Combining the concepts of Official Files, Working Files, and File Series, the possible logical combinations are as follows:

OFFICIAL FILES	WORKING FILES
Case Files	**Case Files (copies) and/or Case Working Files**
Administrative Subject	**Administrative Subject (copies)**
Program Subject	**Program Subject (copies)** **Transitory Correspondence** **Convenience Files** **Technical Reference Files**

Remember that the file series or groups actually maintained by each office are suited to the functions of that office. Although USAID defines standard series, all offices do not necessarily maintain all types.

If it is likely that office staff will look for an item in several different files, or if a reading or reference copy is needed in addition to an Official File copy, it is always possible to make a copy and cross-reference the file locations. In general, copies should be kept to a minimum.

The physical arrangement of file series or groups within cabinets may differ from that listed above, based on size of files, frequency of use and ease of access. Physical arrangement of files is discussed further below.

APPLYING THE PLANNING PROCESS

By following the sequence of questions presented in this guide, records should be sorted into the group to which they most logically belong in each office. If a particular question does not apply, or the answer is no, just move on to the next question.

For example, by setting aside project records first, all materials identified by project number are already assigned to the appropriate case file category, including project cables and correspondence. Project-related cables do not remain as a candidate for filing with subject materials or other correspondence, unless extra copies are needed in the office Chron File.

At the end of this filtering process, all office records should be sorted into an appropriate category; any remaining records may need to be disposed of, with approval, or retired.

WHAT IS THE OFFICE FUNCTION?

Again, any decision about the content and categorization of office files is based upon an understanding of the work and responsibilities of the office. Clearly, the material which belongs in the Official File of a personnel office will be different from that in the Official File of a procurement office. Copies of policy information which belong in the Working Files of most offices, will only be filed in the Official File of the originating office.

Actions

1. Review the functional statement for the office in *Handbook 17.*
2. Check or ask for up-to-date organization charts for the office. The names and relationships of sub-units help to clarify functions and responsibilities.
3. Ask managerial or supervisory staff to resolve questions about office functions.

WHAT RECORDS ARE FILED IN THE OFFICE?

Every office has some sort of filing system in place. The system may or may not conform with the filing practices recommended in this guide.

Actions

1. If there is no existing or up-to-date Files Plan for the office, make an outline of the system currently in place. Inventory the files and list the file categories currently maintained. Include materials in file cabinets (in folders as well as in piles), on book shelves, and in boxes. Include both central files and files in the offices of individual staff members.

2. Consult *Handbook 21, Part II, Appendices 6A (for USAID/W) or 6B (for Missions and overseas offices).* Check the Table of Contents for "Records Common to Most Offices," plus any other chapter heading relevant to the office. Review the types of files listed in these chapters to identify the types of records which are likely to be in the office, and which reflect the office's function.
3. Make a list of any file categories which are not currently maintained, but should be.

WHAT BELONGS IN THE "OFFICIAL FILE"?

Prior to common use of laser printers, the distinction between official and working materials was straightforward, as each was printed on a different color of carbon paper.

Today, the determination is often a bit more difficult. What visually appears to be the same record may be found in the Official Files of one or more offices, as well as in the Working Files of still other offices. For example, a cable may be filed: (1) in the Official File of the office which originated it (e.g., a Project Office); (2) in the Official File of the office responsible for disseminating it (e.g., the Cable Room); (3) in the Official File of the office(s) which take action on it; and (4) in the Working File of all offices which keep a copy for reference or short-term information purposes only.

To determine what belongs in the Official File, review the inventory with reference to the office function.

Actions

1. Mark the categories on the list created above according to whether you believe they belong in the Official File. If possible, highlight the official categories with a yellow marker.
2. The Official Files in an office may currently be either centralized or decentralized. For example, some "official files" may be maintained in the file cabinets of individual staff members. Remember to include all relevant files.
3. One further means of identifying Official File material is to again consult *Handbook 21, Part II, Appendices 6A (for USAID/W) or*

6B (for Missions and overseas offices). Check the types of files listed under the relevant chapter heading for the office. Also check for files which the office originates or takes action upon under the section, "Records Common to Most Offices."

4. Discuss the result with other staff in the office as appropriate. All office staff may need to get in the habit of marking materials for filing in terms of the Official/Working distinction. Once an office Files Plan is created, it too may help to serve as a reference for future decisions on filing categories used in the office.

5. As the office evaluates and sorts the contents of its Official Files, remember that these should be flagged with a **yellow-banded label**. If the labels on folders in the Official File are not marked by a yellow band, either relabel or draw a yellow line across the top of the label with a yellow marker.

ARE THERE PROJECT CASE MATERIALS?

Project files are one type of case file; materials which pertain to the same project are filed together by project number.

Most Official Project Files in the Agency are already segregated from other types of files. Most of the Official Project Files are also already organized by project number and type of document as listed below. Other offices may not hold the complete set of documents for a project, but may still need to retain information about some aspect of a project in either their Official or Working Files. It is recommended that any project files follow this standard filing format.

Organizational Structure for Project Files

<u>Project Development</u>
Feasibility Study
Market Study
Pre-PID Document, Miscellaneous (including Concept Paper)

<u>Core Project</u>
PID (Project Identification Document)
PID Revision

PID Approval Document
PRP (pre-1978 project)
PRP Revision
PP/PAAD (Project Paper/Program Authorization Approval Document)
PP Amendment (or Supplement)
Project Authorization
Project Authorization Amendment
Grant Agreement
Grant Agreement Amendment
Loan Agreement
Loan Agreement Amendment
Waiver, General
Core Official Correspondence
(including Action Memo, Issues Paper, Congressional Notifications, TNs, Advice of Program Change, IEE)
Loan and Grant Agreement

Correspondence
Cable, Incoming
Cable, Outgoing
Correspondence, General
Financing Request (including Vouchers, Budget)

Conditions Precedent to Disbursement
Condition, Pre-Disbursement
Implementation Letter

Disbursing Authorization
PIO/T (Project Implementation Order/Technical Assistance)
PIO/C (Project Implementation Order/Commodities)
PIO/P (Project Implementation Order/Participant Training)
L/COM (Letter of Commitment)
Procurement Authorization/Purchase Requisition
DRA (Direct Reimbursement Approval)
Excess Property Letter Order/Purchase Order (supplies)

Contracts/Contract Amendments
Contract
Contract Amendment (purchase orders)

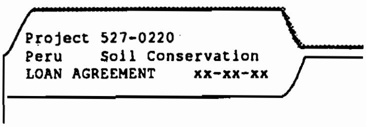
IFB/RFP (Invitation for Bid/Request for Proposal)
Response to Invitation
Awarded Invitation for Bid
Work Order
Task Order
Delivery Order
PASA/RSSA (with amendments)

<u>Reports</u>
Report, Research
Report, Progress (quarterly)
Report, Evaluation (including Project Evaluation Summary)
Report, Audit
Report, Final (including Project Assistance Completion Report)
Report, Implementation
Report, Trip
Report, End of Tour
Report, Miscellaneous/NEC (Not Elsewhere Covered)

Labeling Project Case Files

Each label should identify the following elements in a consistent format:

- Project number
- Country or region name
- Project title (brief)
- Document type
- Document date



Actions

1. Examine the labels of all project files. Make sure labels are complete.
2. If the project files are part of the Official Files of the office, make sure that the labels are flagged by a yellow band.

3. Any project files which are retained for information and reference only should be marked with a green band.
4. Organize the Official Project Files in the order outlined above; it is recommended that the organization of materials in the Working File parallel that in the Official Files.

ARE THERE OTHER CASE MATERIALS?

Any other materials filed together by a common number, name or date comprise a case file. Usually, a "case" also has a beginning and an end.

Although many records can be referenced by more than one filing feature (e.g., project number, contract number, date of contract, name of contractor), the sorting and filing principle is again based on the functions and responsibilities of the office and the way in which the material needs to be retrieved in the office.

Cases Files Identified by Number

- Contracts - are agreements between USAID and firms, organizations and/or individuals for goods and services (commodities and technical support) needed to complete a project or for non-project use. In a projects office, contracts relating to a project are filed with the project files (see above). Contract-related materials maintained elsewhere are usually filed by contract number.
- Loans - are agreements between USAID (representing the US) and a borrower, for US or foreign currency. In a projects office, loan activity connected with a project is filed with the project files (see above). Elsewhere, materials relating to a particular loan are usually filed together by loan number.

Other types of files grouped and arranged by number include:

- Leases
- Vouchers
- Purchase orders
- Travel authorization number

Case Files Identified by Name

- Personnel Files

- Participant Files
- Country/Region Files
- Organization Files
- Conference Files

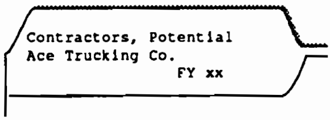
Case Files Identified by Date

- Clippings
- Materials relating to an event

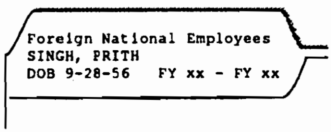
Labeling Non-Project Case Files

Each label must identify the general and specific filing feature (number, name or date). A date should also be included to identify the filing period.

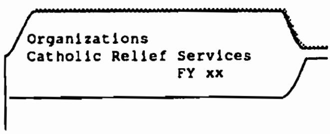
Example: Filed by Company Name



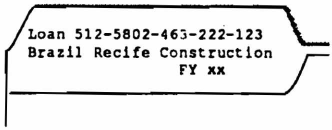
Example: Filed by Personal Name



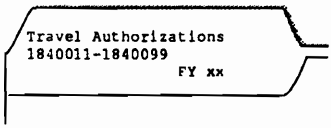
Example: Filed by Organization Name



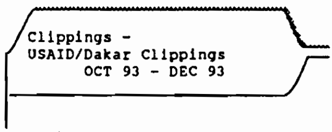
Example: Filed by Loan Number



Example: Filed by Travel Authorization Number



Example: Filed by Date



Actions

1. Examine the labels of all non-project case files. Make sure labels are complete.
2. If the case files are part of the Official Files of the office, make sure that the labels are flagged by a yellow band.
3. Any case files which are retained for information and reference only should be marked with a green band.
4. Check the order of files in the Official File, making sure that they are in proper sequence; it is recommended that the organization of materials in the Working File parallel that in the Official Files.

WHAT SHOULD BE ORGANIZED BY SUBJECT?

The remaining non-case material which belongs in the office Official File should be grouped together by subject, using the standard USAID Subject Outlines, or subject filing categories. These files serve to group together correspondence, memoranda, telegrams, reports and other materials relating to the same subject. For example, almost all **policy and procedural** information not found in USAID handbooks will be found in a subject file.

Subject Files comprise roughly only 15% of all Agency files. However, this does not mean that 15% of the files in every office will be labeled by subject.

Handbook 21, Part II, Appendix 4A identifies 23 primary subject headings. Each of these are further broken down into a number of secondary headings. Related primary and secondary headings are also identified by a common three-letter mnemonic code. The codes for secondary headings are identified by an additional number. For example:

ADM	Administrative Management
ADM 1	General Policy and Plans
ADM 2	General Reports and Statistics

Each file code and heading listed in *Appendix 4A* is accompanied by a detailed description of the type of records to be included under that subject.

While *Appendix 4A* is organized alphabetically by subject file codes, *Appendix 4B* contains an index to the codes, organized alphabetically by subject words and phrases. *Appendix 4B* makes it easy to identify the appropriate code.

Administrative Subject Files

Of the 23 subject headings, six pertain to Administrative subject materials. These include:

ADM	Administrative Management
FIS	Fiscal Accounting and Audit
GRS	General Services
PER	Personnel

PRC	Procurement and Contracting
TRV	Travel

Official Subject Files in these areas are usually only created and maintained by certain organizational units. For example, subject files concerning accounting or payroll operations are only likely to be found in the Official File of a controller's office.

Many offices, however, may use these codes to organize copies of administrative materials in their Working Files.

Program Subject Files

Seventeen of the subject headings pertain to USAID's program activities. These are further broken down into two sub-groups:

Program Background, Support and Development

BUD	Budget
ECF	Economic and Financial Affairs
INF	Information and Mass Communication
LEG	Legislative and Legal
LGP	Loans, Guaranties, Private Enterprise
OCM	Organizations, Committees and Meetings
PRM	Program Development, Evaluation and Research

Programs

AGR	Agriculture
EDU	Education
FPC	Food for Peace
HLS	Health and Sanitation
IND	Industrial Development
PUB	Public Administration
SCT	Science and Technology
SOC	Social and Institutional Development
TRG	Training (pertaining to participants)
TRP	Transportation (as a sector)

Each of these subjects should be used to organize records in the Official Files of each office responsible for the subject area. They may also be used to organize copies of records maintained in Working Files.

Subject labels

Subject file labels capture the following information:

Line 1

- Subject code, taken from *Handbook 21, Part II, Appendix 4A*
- Subject file title which corresponds to the code

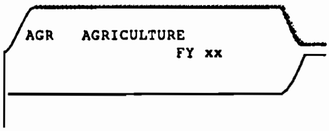
Line 2

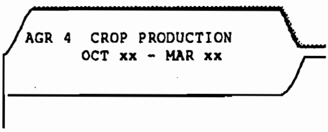
- Expanded heading, if needed to further qualify the subject title

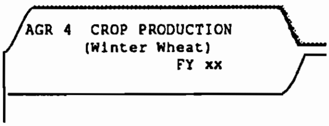
Line 3

- Fiscal year for which file is maintained
- Inclusive dates of content, if folder is broken during the year

The information on the label is arranged as follows:







If the label indicates a primary subject, position the label at the top left of the folder. If secondary, position in the center of the folder.

Actions

1. Review the instructions and contents of *Handbook 21, Part II, Appendix 4A and 4B.*
2. Make a list of the codes and headings relevant to the Official File of the office. Review this list with office staff if it will significantly change the way in which subject file material is organized. It is recommended that the same procedure be followed for applying subject headings in Working Files.
3. Properly label all Subject Files. Use yellow or green-banded labels as appropriate.

WHAT BELONGS IN THE WORKING FILES?

As discussed above, **convenience or reference copies** of materials held in Official Files may be kept in the Working Files. These may be organized in the same manner as the Official File materials. Working Files may also contain information and reference materials organized into the following file categories:

OTHER WORKING FILE MATERIALS	COMMENTS
Transitory correspondence	**Transmittal letters or forms; routine requests for information or publications; acknowledgements, etc.**
Chron files	**Convenience copies of incoming cables, outgoing cables, correspondence, memos**
Reading files	**Convenience copies of random current information circulated within the office**

Suspense or Tickler files	**Convenience copies of documents which serve as a reminder of an action due**
Technical reference	**Published or photocopies of reports, articles, etc. maintained for reference**

Actions

1. Identify the categories of Working Files that the office currently maintains. Are there some materials in the office which are scattered about, but which should be brought together into a working file for improved access? Are there any categories which do not exist, but which would be useful for staff members?
2. Organize the contents of each file (by date, etc.). Put the most recent date at the front of the file. Normally, cable and chron files contain material for the current fiscal or calendar year (as preferred by the office). Set aside materials which should not be in the folder for the current year.
3. Create a **green-banded label** for each file, showing the name of the file and the starting date of the content. If a green-banded label is not available, use a green highlighter pen to draw a line across the top of the label. On a file folder, position at the left.
4. Review any older material. Keep material for the previous year, if needed, and label. Discard unneeded material, as approved by the office Records Management Liaison Officer.

WHERE SHOULD EACH FILE GROUP BE LOCATED FOR CONVENIENT USE?

The distinction between Official and Working Files is best maintained by keeping the two different types of files in separate cabinets or drawers. However, where the total number of files is small, or where staff prefer that certain Official and Working Files be interfiled, take extra care to maintain proper labeling and color coding.

With regard to physical arrangement of the various file categories, in general, it may be helpful to consider the following when determining location:

- Size of the file category
- Frequency of filing
- Frequency of use

For example, Working Chron Files which are accessed daily for filing of incoming material may be best located in upper file drawers. Large, infrequently used case files may be best located in lower drawers.

Location is a matter of preference, but should be based on patterns of use.

NON-PAPER-BASED RECORDS

There are records which because of their size or physical characteristics should be kept in a separate group. They include electronic records, films, disks, and tape records which require special equipment and handling, cartographic materials and drawings, and computer printouts. However, the basic principles of records management discussed throughout this Action Guide also apply to these materials.

For additional guidance on the management of electronic and audio-visual records, refer to Chapters 8 and 9, respectively, of *Handbook 21, Part II.* Corresponding sections of this Action Guide are under preparation.

PREPARING THE FILES PLAN

As a result of the planning process, each office should be able to create a smoothly functioning filing system which also complies with Federal and USAID records management requirements.

In addition to serving as a file locator tool, a written copy of the Files Plan also identifies the disposition of each file series or category. This can be done when preparing Form 520-2. The procedures for completing this form are detailed in *Handbook 21, Part II*, pages 2-11 and 2-12.

Reference to the Records Disposition Schedule has been made throughout the planning and organizing process, but use of the schedule to identify the disposition of some file series/categories may still present some difficulties. Contact the Records Management office to speak with the Client Analyst assigned to the office if assistance is needed. It is possible that not all records maintained by each office are reflected in the schedule, and that the schedule needs to be amended.

A working version of an office Files Plan can also be maintained as a Word Perfect 5.1 file, using "Math/Columns " to create a Table. Each column in Form 520-2 can be replicated as a column in the table. This working version is easy to update and duplicate. If maintained in the office's Local Area Network, Public Directory, office staff can also reference the plan online to locate needed materials.

One copy of the completed form should be submitted to USAID's Records Management office. A sample of a partial plan is provided in Appendix III.

Part 3 of this Action Guide series provides additional information on how to make use of the Files Plan and disposition information to keep the files free of materials which are no longer needed.

SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES FOR ORGANIZING OFFICE FILES

1. Become familiar with the **functions** and **responsibilities** of your office.
2. Make a list of the general types or categories of record material currently produced by and maintained in your office files.
2. Determine if you have **Official Files** at your file station.
3. If so, organize that material into one of the three filing categories below, depending on the function of your office and the nature of your work:
   - Case files (project, contract, personnel, etc.)
   - Administrative subject files
   - Program subject files
4. Within each filing category, file by either number, name, or code, as appropriate.
5. Label each Official File with a **yellow** label.
6. The remainder of what you have is **Working File material.**
7. Following a file structure which parallels that used for Official files, organize it into:
   - Working case files
   - Working administrative files
   - Working program files
   - Transitory correspondence
   - Convenience files (chron files, reading files, suspense files)
   - Technical reference files
8. Within each filing category, file by either number, name or code, as appropriate.
9. Label each Working File with a **green** label.
10. Create a **Files Plan** identifying the location and disposition status of each file.
11. Use the Files Plan to help staff locate materials, and to keep files organized and free of no longer needed materials (see Part 3).

PART 3
FILE MAINTENANCE AND DISPOSITION

Creating Procedures for Maintenance and Use of Files

Charging Out Files

Adding Records to the File

Adding a New File Category

Folder and Drawer Maintenance

Cutting off Files

Disposing of Files

Onsite Storage of Inactive Records

Preparation for Retirement

Calendar of Responsibilities

Supplies and Forms to Keep on Hand

CREATING PROCEDURES FOR MAINTENANCE AND USE OF FILES

Files are dynamic. Each day, existing files are used and new materials are added. Over time, selected materials are removed as they lose importance to the work of the office.

Just as it is essential that each office develop a records management system and office-specific Files Plan, it is important that everyone abide by a common set of procedures for maintaining the files.

Each office must determine:

- What priority is given to maintaining files
- How often new materials will be added
- Who monitors the removal of files for use, if anyone
- How the location of removed files is noted
- Who is responsible for refiling
- When office files will be reviewed for disposition

Part 3 of this Action Guide provides practical guidelines on how to maintain office files. Each office should use these guidelines to develop its own specific procedures.

CHARGING OUT FILES

The simplest way to indicate that a file is in use is to insert a chargeout card in place of the file. There are several forms which can be used, depending on where the materials will be taken and for how long.

A reusable card (Optional Form 23, or OF-23) is usually inserted to indicate that part of the contents of a file has been removed. The word "OUT" appears at the top and is visible above the top of the other folders in the drawer. There is space on the card to indicate the name of the file, the specific item(s) removed, the name of the person using the material, and the date. If only one or a few papers are removed from the file, attach them to a Backing Sheet (AID Form

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5-103) to help identify them for refiling.

If the material will leave the immediate area of the files station, a four-part form (USAID Form 5-68) is completed, one part of which is attached to the materials, and one to the charge-out card. The remaining two parts can be filed (1) by date of charge-out, and (2) by borrower name, to aid in retrieval of the material.

If an entire folder is charged out, an unlabeled folder is inserted in its place to hold the charge-out card, as well as any other materials which need to be added to the file when it is returned.

Additional details on these forms and charge-out procedures are provided in *Handbook 21, Part II, Chapter 3.*

Each office must also determine who will handle charge-out and refiling of materials.

ADDING RECORDS TO THE FILE

Filing of new materials is best handled daily. Decisions about where to file materials are not always easy, especially for staff relatively new to the office. The process of filing a stack of incoming materials involves:

- Determining whether each item needs to be filed
- Determining where each item should be filed

Avoid Unnecessary Filing

Files can easily become cluttered with materials that are not needed. Before adding material to the file it is important to know:

- The definition of official records maintained by the office
- What types of materials are maintained for information and reference only
- The file categories which are used by the office

This information should be summarized on the office Files Plan. (See Part 2 above for additional information about the Files Plan.)

There are several other steps which can be taken to avoid the accumulation of unneeded materials in the first place, for example:

- Stop making unnecessary copies
- Stop sending extra copies to other offices unless requested
- Request that the office be taken off distribution lists of unneeded materials
- If an incoming letter is not needed for the file, reply directly on the letter
- Circulate publications, then discard rather than file

Conduct a Prefile Check

Before an item goes in the file, check whether it is ready for filing:

- Should it be circulated first?
- Is the filing authority on the paper? e.g., "file" + initials of action officer.
- Is there a date?
- Is it stamped to show that outgoing correspondence was signed?
- Are papers complete, or are some missing? Check for enclosures, attachments
- Are parts of another file accidently attached?
- Are all routing slips, envelopes, etc. removed?
- Do torn pages need to be mended?.

Remove all copies of mail control forms, classified cover sheets, backing sheets, routing slips unless they contain remarks of record value. Also remove rubber bands, paper clips, other temporary fasteners.

Determine the File Category

It often appears that a record could be filed under a number of different file categories. To determine the most logical category:

- Check for a subject line or title
- Scan the text; the actual subject may be different from that on the subject line
- Determine the purpose or function of the paper
- Determine who would ask for the item, then ask where they want

to find it
- When in doubt, ask supervisory or management staff

To aid in filing and refiling, enter the filing category in the upper right corner of the document.

If office staff are likely to reference the material in more than one file, (1) make a copy, or use Optional Form 21 (OF-21) in place of an extra copy, (2) file copy or OF-21 in each appropriate category and (3) cross reference the copy to the original file. See *Handbook 21, Part II, Chapter 3* for details.

Filing Tips

- If a folder reaches 3/4" in thickness, begin new folder (see "Breaking" below)
- Leave at least 4" of working space in a file drawer
- Always label completely, and with appropriate yellow- or green-banded labels

ADDING A NEW FILE CATEGORY

Over time, it is likely that office functions change, and/or new types of records need to be filed. First, discuss the need to add a new file category with appropriate office staff. If the need is validated by staff, submit to the Records Management office a copy of the description of the category and length of time it is to be maintained. Be sure to note the addition on the office Files Plan.

If a Subject File code is needed for a subject which does not appear on the Subject File outline in *Handbook 21, Part II, Appendix 4A*, discuss the need with the Records Management office. The Subject File outline may need to be amended so that other offices in the Agency can make use of the same new file code.

FOLDER AND DRAWER MAINTENANCE

Within folders, papers are filed in chronological order, with the latest date in the front of the folder.

Breaking a File

If a folder becomes 3/4" thick, close out the folder. Mark the end date of that folder, and make a new folder. The new folder label is identical to the old, but indicates the new starting date.

Drawer Labeling and Maintenance

The drawer label should indicate the content, including especially the following information:

- Drawer contents — Official or Working
- Date of contents
- Content of first and last folder in the drawer

File guides separate groups of files in a drawer. They extend above the tops of the file folder labels, making it easier to find an individual file in the drawer. It is recommended that no more than five guide cards should be used in one drawer.

CUTTING OFF FILES

Files "cut off" is the segregation of active and inactive files. Established cutoff of files is essential for effective control and disposition of records.

At least annually, review the office files to cutoff and segregate inactive files from active files. The cutoff date for each file category is prescribed in the Agency's Records Disposition Schedule; the cutoff criteria for each type of file in a given office should be transferred onto the office Files Plan for easy reference. In general:

- Chronological Files are cut off at the end of the fiscal year (or in some cases, calendar year).

- Subject Files are generally not date-sensitive, but are usually reviewed and cut off at the end of the fiscal year for the purpose of controlling file size.
- Project and other Case Files are usually cut off upon completion of the project or activity, end of the event, final payment of the contract, or separation of the employee.
- USAID projects are closed out when the project assistance completion date has been reached, or a project evaluation concludes that the project should not be continued.

If a document from a cut off file is needed for continuing active use, a Continuity Reference Sheet, Optional Form 22, should be completed and filed in place of the document removed in the closed file.

If a complete folder needs to be brought forward into the active file, mark its place among the inactive file folders with an empty, labeled folder. The label bears the same information as on the folder brought forward, but is marked, "carried forward to (appropriate date)."

Records control schedules always key the transfer to a records center and the destruction of records to the date they were "cut off."

The retention period is computed from the date of cut off or from the close of the fiscal year in which the cut off was made. No disposal action can be taken unless the file is closed.

"Cut off" files may stay in the office for one to three years. They are then either destroyed or retired as specified.

DISPOSING OF FILES

A good records disposition program:

- Saves space
- Saves time
- Saves money
- Saves permanently valuable records

Disposition refers to the retirement, transfer or destruction of records:

Retirement: sending records either to a local Federal Record Center or the National Archives for storage, and ultimate destruction or retention.

Transfer: change of custody from one organization or Agency office to another. Records may be transferred to another office as a result of reorganization or change in functions. Because of close cooperation between USAID and other Federal agencies, other agencies may ask for USAID files to support activities in their assistance programs. However, records should not be transferred to another agency without the approval of the USAID Records Management Officer.

Destruction: physical destruction of record material itself, or the removal of information content.

USAID provides instructions for the disposition of all paper files in *Handbook 21, Part II, Appendices 6A and 6B.* The specific instructions for the disposition of the files in each office are transferred onto the office Files Plan for easy reference.

The status of all office files should be reviewed at least annually. Large files may be reviewed semi-annually or quarterly.

ONSITE STORAGE OF INACTIVE FILES

Inactive project files are stored locally until eligible for retirement

Records to be retained for less than three years should be destroyed in office space at the appropriate time.

PREPARATION FOR RETIREMENT

Annually, inactive records and those not scheduled for early destruction should be retired. Some of the things to consider:

- Volume. Small amounts of records (less than one cubic foot) should not be retired. Wait until at least one or two boxes are ready for transfer.

- Retention less than three years. Ordinarily, records should not be retired if they will be destroyed within three years of transfer. They **may** be retired if the file is bulky and causing problems in office space.
- Reference rate. Files which are referred to not more than once per month per file drawer may be transferred.
- Cost. An expensive move to storage would be a strong argument against retirement.

Steps in retirement

1. Prepare Notification of Retirement of Inactive Files (AID Form 5-45), and a Shelf List (SF 135-A).

The shelf list is an inventory of the files you are putting in the records box for retirement or transfer. Refer to *Handbook 21, Part II, Chapter 6* for details on using these forms.

Make an original plus two copies of the shelf list. Send the original and one copy to the USAID Vault when the boxes of records are transferred there. Keep one copy as a followup and tracer file. When the records are transferred from the Vault to the local Federal Records Center (i.e., the Washington National Records Center, or WNRC), the USAID Vault will return a copy of the shelf list with accession and location information at the WNRC for retrieval of files if needed. Keep this amended copy in a safe location, as it is the only key to finding records that have been retired.

2. Pack records correctly.

As the shelf list is typed, pack the corresponding folders in a box. Use standard one-piece cardboard records storage and shipping boxes (15 x 12 x 10) which hold one cubic foot of records. Boxes can be obtained from the Vault Supervisor in USAID/W (they are also available in Missions overseas). However, if the shipment is going to the Washington National Records Center (WNRC), a Federal Records Center box must be used.

The unstitched, 12" side is considered the front of the box. Letter sized records are packed to face the front. Legal sized records are packed to face the left side of the box. Records are packed in an upright position in the same order as in the files. Leave enough room for folders to be pulled out. If the last box is not full, place wadded paper in the empty space. Wrap oversized materials, such as ledgers, in heavy paper and tie or tape securely.

The following packing instructions should be given special attention:

- Overseas offices must pack classified and unclassified records in separate boxes.
- USAID/W should pack classified and unclassified materials separately if a logical grouping can be maintained. If not, mark the outside of box with highest classification.
- Do not intermingle permanent and non-permanent records.
- Try to pack records with the same retention period in the same box.
- Do not pack guidecards.

3. Label boxes.

Label each box on the front end with the following information:

- Lot number (USAID/W only - obtain from USAID/W Records Management)
- Box number
- Accession number (USAID/W Records Management will complete)
- Office symbol
- Brief description of the records
- Either the word: "Retain", or the appropriate disposal date
- Highest security classification

CALENDAR OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Daily

Complete filing before the end of the day.

Monthly

Review and update the Files Plan and circulate to staff.
Check filing supplies and order as needed.
Check that any "borrowed" files have been returned, or are still in active use.

Annually

Submit Files Plan, Form 520-2
Cut off official subject files at the end of the fiscal year. Label new folders for new fiscal year.

SUPPLIES AND FORMS TO KEEP ON HAND

Files maintenance quickly becomes sloppy when the proper supplies are lacking. Make sure that sufficient quantities of the following materials are kept on hand. Order additional supplies well in advance of the time they are needed.

File folders
File folder labels — yellow and green
Highlighter pens — yellow and green
3-hole and 2-hole punch
Fasteners
Rulers

Records Management Forms

Throughout this Guide, reference is made to various forms. These forms should be readily available in each office:

Files Plan:

AID Form 520-2	Records Inventory and Disposition Plan

Filing/Cross-referencing:

Optional Form 21	Cross-reference
Optional Form 22	Continuity Reference

Charge Out:

Optional Form 23	Charge Out Record
AID Form 5-68	Charge Out and Follow-up of Files
AID Form 5-103	Backing Sheet for Charged Out Files (papers)

Retirement:

AID Form 5-45	Notification of Retirement of Inactive Files
SF 135-A	Shelf List

If additional cabinets or packing boxes are needed, complete and submit Form 5-770 to the Records Management office in USAID/W.

APPENDIX I GLOSSARY OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT TERMS

ARCHIVES

(1) The noncurrent records of an organization that are preserved due to their continuing or enduring value. "National Archives of the United States" indicates those records that have been determined by the Archivist of the United States to have significant historical or other value to warrant their continued preservation by the Federal Government and that have been transferred to the Archivist's legal custody. (2) The organization or agency responsible for appraising, accessioning, preserving, and making available permanent records. Also called archival agency. In the U.S. Government, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). (3) One or more buildings, or portions thereof, where permanent records are located after being accessioned by an archival agency. Also called archival depository or archival repository. See also National Archives.

AUDIOVISUAL RECORDS

Records in pictorial or aural form. Include still and motion pictures; graphic materials, such as posters and original art; audio and video recordings; and combinations of media such as slide-tape productions.

CASE FILES

Records, regardless of media, documenting a specific action, event, person, place, project, or other matter. Case files often represent the "mission", "function", or work of the office. Includes development assistance project files, official personnel files, loan files, and contract files.

CASE WORKING PAPERS

Bulky background or supporting papers, such as spreadsheets, questionnaires, notes and machine listings.

CENTRAL FILES

Files accumulated by several offices or organizational units and maintained and supervised in one location. Also called centralized files.

CHARGEOUT

The act and result of recording the removal and loan of a document or a file to indicate its location. Usually involves the use of a form, such as OF 23.

CHRONOLOGICAL (CHRON) FILES

Outgoing correspondence records arranged chronologically, in contrast to those arranged by subject. Also called reading files.

CLASSIFICATION

(1) Determination of the sequence or order in which to arrange documents. (2) The process or result of identifying records containing national security information.

CLOSED FILE

(1) A file unit or series containing documents on which action has been completed and to which more documents are not likely to added. (2) A file unit or series to which access is limited or denied.

CONVENIENCE FILES

Extra non-records copies of correspondence, forms and other papers, kept solely for ease of access or reference. Includes extra copy materials such as reading or chron files, suspense or tickler files, office copies of Agency notices, and selected documents reflecting policies, precedents and procedures.

COPY

(1) A reproduction of the contents of an original document, prepared simultaneously or separately and usually identified by function or by method of creation. Copies identified by function include action copy, information or reference copy, official file copy, reading or chronological file copy, suspense or tickler file copy, and stock copy. Copies identified by method of creation include carbon copy, electrostatic copy, mimeograph copy, and ribbon copy. (2) In electronic records, the action or result of reading data from source data unchanged, and writing the same data elsewhere on a medium that may differ from the source.

CROSS-REFERENCE

In files management, a finding aid, such as OF 21, directing a user from one place in a file to another when a particular document must be retrievable under more than one filing feature. See also FILING FEATURE.

CURRENT RECORDS

Records necessary to conduct the current business of an office and therefore generally maintained in office space and equipment.

CUTOFF

Breaking, or ending, files at regular intervals, usually at the close of a fiscal or calendar year, to permit their disposal or transfer in complete blocks and, for correspondence files, to permit the establishment of new files. Case files are generally cut off at the end of the year in which the case is closed.

DESTRUCTION

In records management, the major type of disposal action. Methods of destroying records include selling or salvaging the record medium and burning, pulping, shredding, macerating or discarding with other waste materials.

DISPOSITION

(1) The actions taken regarding records no longer needed for current Government business. These actions include transfer to agency storage facilities or Federal records centers, transfer from one Federal agency to another, transfer of permanent records to the National Archives, and disposal of temporary records. Disposition is the third stage of the records life cycle. (2) The actions taken regarding nonrecord materials when no longer needed, including screening and destruction.

DISPOSITION SCHEDULE

See RECORDS SCHEDULE.

DOCUMENT

(1) Recorded information regardless of physical form or characteristics. Often used interchangeably with record. (2) An individual record or an item of nonrecord materials or of personal papers.

ELECTRONIC RECORDS

Records stored in a form that only a computer can process. Also called machine-readable records or ADP records.

FILE

(1) Usually an accumulation of records or nonrecord materials arranged according to a plan. Sometimes an accumulation of personal papers so arranged. (2) A unit, such as a folder, microform, or electronic medium, containing such records, nonrecord materials, or personal papers. (3) Storage equipment such as a filing cabinet.

FILE SERIES

See SERIES.

FILE STATION

Any location in an organization at which records are maintained for current use.

FILE TYPES

Categories or classes of files. Include case, case working, general correspondence, reading, transitory correspondence, convenience, and technical reference files, along with vital records and special records. Each of these types is defined in this guide.

FILES

A collective term usually applied to all records and nonrecord materials of an office or agency.

FILES PLAN

(1) A plan designating the physical location at which an agency's files are to be maintained, the specific types of files to be maintained there, and the organizational element(s) having custodial responsibility. (2) A document containing the identifying number, title or description, and disposition authority of files held in an office. See also FILING SYSTEM.

FILING

Putting documents into their place in accordance with a plan, or filing system.

FILING FEATURE

A characteristic by which a document is filed and found, such as a number, date, title, name, or subject. See also CROSS-REFERENCE.

FILING SYSTEM

A set of policies and procedures for organizing and identifying files or documents to speed their retrieval, use, and disposition. Sometimes called a recordkeeping system. See also Files Plan.

INVENTORY

(1) A survey of agency records and nonrecord materials that is conducted primarily to develop records schedules and also to identify various records management problems, such as improper applications of recordkeeping technology. (2) The results of such a survey. (3) In archives administration, a type of finding aid for accessioned permanent records.

LIFE CYCLE OF RECORDS

The management concept that records pass through several stages: Creation, Maintenance and Use, and Disposition.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The Federal agency responsible for appraising, accessioning, preserving, and making available permanent records. See also ARCHIVES.

NONCURRENT RECORDS

Records no long required to conduct agency business and therefore ready for final disposition.

NONRECORD MATERIALS

US Government-owned documentary materials excluded from the legal definition of records or not meeting the requirements of that definition. Includes extra copies of documents kept only for convenience of reference, stocks of publications and of processed documents, and library or museum materials intended solely for reference or exhibition. See also RECORDS

OFFICIAL FILES

Documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristics that are made or received either pursuance of Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and are preserved or are appropriate for preservation due to the informational value of data contained therein. See also RECORDS, NONRECORD MATERIALS, and WORKING FILES.

PERMANENT RECORDS

Records appraised by NARA as having sufficient historical or other value to warrant continued preservation by the Federal Government beyond the time they are needed for administrative, legal, or fiscal purposes. Sometimes called archival records.

PERSONAL PAPERS

Documentary materials belonging to an individual that are not used to conduct agency business. Related solely to an individual's own affairs or used exclusively for that individual's convenience. Must be clearly designated as such and kept separate from the agency's records. Also called personal files or personal records.

RECORDS

According to 44 U.S.C. 3301, "includes all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of that organization's functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operation, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them. Library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference of exhibition purposes, extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience or reference, and stocks of publications and of processed documents are not included." Also called

Federal records, which exclude Presidential records and records of the US Congress. See also Nonrecord Materials.

RECORDS CENTER

A facility for the low-cost storage and servicing of records pending their disposal or transfer to the National Archives. Includes NARA-authorized agency records centers and NARA-operated Federal records centers.

RECORDS SCHEDULE

A document providing mandatory instructions for what to do with records (and nonrecord materials) no longer needed for current Government business, with provision of authority for the final disposition of recurring or nonrecurring records. Includes the SF115, the General Records Schedules, and the agency records schedule, which when completed becomes a comprehensive records schedule that also contains agency disposition instructions for nonrecord materials.

RETIREMENT

The transfer of records to agency storage facilities or a Federal records center.

SCHEDULE

See RECORDS SCHEDULE.

SCHEDULING

The process of developing a document that provides mandatory instructions for what to do with records (and nonrecord materials) no longer needed for current Government business.

SERIES

File units or documents arranged according to a filing system or kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific kind of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use, such as restrictions on access and use. Generally handled as a unit for records management purposes.

SUBJECT FILES

Records arranged and filed according to their general informational, or subject, content. Mainly letters and memorandums, but also forms, reports, and other material, all relating to a program and administrative function, not to specific cases.

SUBJECT OUTLINE

In files management, a list of topics arranged hierarchically (i.e., by primary, secondary, tertiary topics) and serving as the source for selecting file designations for arranging, or classifying the documents of a subject file.

SUSPENSE FILES

Files arranged chronologically to remind officials of actions to be completeted by a specific date. Also called TICKLER FILES.

TECHNICAL REFERENCE FILES

Nonrecord copies of articles, periodicals, reports, studies, vendor catalogs, and similar materials that are needed for reference and information but are not properly part of the office's records.

TEMPORARY RECORDS

Records approved by NARA for disposal, either immediately or after a specified retention period. Also called disposable or nonpermanent records.

TICKLER FILES

See SUSPENSE FILES.

TRANSITORY CORRESPONDENCE FILES

Correspondence relating to matters of short-term interest, such as acknowledgments for publications received, routine inquiries for publications, and announcements of savings bond campaigns, in contrast to administrative and program correspondence making up the general correspondence files. Also called transitory files.

UNSCHEDULED RECORDS

Records whose final disposition has yet not been approved by NARA.

VITAL RECORDS

Records essential to the continued functioning or reconstitution of an organization during and after an emergency and also those records essential to protecting the rights and interests of that organization and of the individuals directly affected by its activities. Also called essential records. Vital records considerations are part of an agency's records disaster prevention and recovery program.

WORKING FILES

(1) In USAID, the term "working files" is used in *Handbook 21, Part II* in contrast with the term "official files." In this sense, "working files" refers to all nonrecord files maintained for convenience and reference only. (2) Specifically, also refers to one type of nonrecord file which includes rough notes, calculations, or drafts assembled or created and used to prepare or analyze other documents. Also called working papers. See also OFFICIAL FILES.

APPENDIX II
CHECKLIST OF SOUND FILES MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

RECORDKEEPING PRACTICES

- Maintain personal papers separately from official records.
- All Official Files belong in a *single* designated location from which they may accessed.
- Electronic, microform, and audiovisual records are considered records just like paper files. Staff should be aware which copy is the official copy and what constitutes a complete record.
- Permanent records must be clearly designated as such. Special care must be taken to prevent damage or accidental destruction of permanent records prior to their eventual transfer to the National Archives.
- Always follow reference and chargeout procedures in order to facilitate the finding, borrowing, and refiling of records.
- Filing cabinet space is valuable, and should not be used to house office supplies, personal belongings, stocks of blank forms, publications, routing slips lacking significant notations or duplicates of correspondence and reports not needed for cross-reference.
- Information copies which are intended solely to keep officials posted and will not be needed for future reference should not be filed.

CASE FILING

- All case filed papers should be noted as such by standard case identifiers such as number, name or codes. These identifiers should appear in a consistent location on all papers belonging in the file.
- Maintain case working papers separately from regular case records by establishing a separate working papers file to manage the case's bulky background and supporting papers. The working papers file may be filed near the case files themselves. A separate

disposal date is usually established for working papers.

- As cases are closed, clearly mark the case file as "closed". Remove inactive closed case files from office filing cabinets in accordance with prescribed disposition guidelines.
- Maintain records which are case filed by a number, name, place, organization, or thing separately from documents filed by general subject content.

SUBJECT FILING

- Maintain subject files that contain substantive information about the program operation of your office separately from administrative (housekeeping) subject files.
- Separate transitory files (reading files, information copies, routine inquiries and announcements) from subject files. Transitory files are nonrecord and have shorter retention periods than subject files.
- At the end of each year, close subject files, and start a new file. Subject files should not contain papers which are more than one year old. Remove closed inactive files from file cabinets, and dispose of the files in accordance with USAID's records schedule.

TECHNICAL REFERENCE MATERIALS

- Technical reference materials are nonrecord and should be maintained separately from official record material to avoid confusion.
- Use shelf storage to house technical reference materials as it is less expensive than filing cabinet storage and allows staff easy access.

- Review reference materials periodically (at least annually) and purge all superseded/obsolete items.
- Only develop an index if reference materials are so extensive and frequently used that the materials are unable to be physically arranged to satisfy user needs.

DAILY FILING

- The most recently received papers are those most frequently requested and should be filed on a daily basis for easy retrieval.
- Conduct a "pre-file check" to assure that each item belongs in the files, papers are complete and file authority is present. If the file authority is absent, it may indicate that necessary staff action has not been taken. This check for completeness prevents loss of essential record material.
- Properly assemble, classify and sort documents prior to filing. Related records, such as incoming and outgoing correspondence should be stapled together.
- Cross-references should be limited to subjects proven by experience to be needed. Copies are easier and cheaper to make than completed cross-reference forms.
- Standardize drawer, guide card, and folder labels for quick reference. Keep file labels for retrieval ease.
- Individual folders hold no more than 75 to 100 sheets. Files are kept upright in drawers and new folders made when they become 3/4" thick.
- Check files periodically (once or twice a year) for misfiles.

ELECTRONIC RECORDS

- Electronic documents that relate to the transaction of public business are considered Federal records. Electronic records may not be erased, deleted, scratched or otherwise disposed of.
- Electronic indexes assist in locating particular records by date, subject, case identifier, sender, or receiver as appropriate to the file type.
- Make file backups in accordance with a regular schedule to safeguard retention.
- Permanent or unscheduled electronic records should be kept on magnetic tape, rewound at specified times, and scheduled or placed in archival custody as soon as possible to prevent information loss.

APPENDIX III
SAMPLE
USAID FILES PLAN,
FORM 520-2

AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

RECORDS INVENTORY AND DISPOSITION PLAN

(INSTUCTIONS ON REVERSE)

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT

PAGE 1 OF 1 PAGES

1. ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT NAME FHA/FFP/ANEE		2. FOR RECORDS MAINTAINED FROM: 10/01/93	TO: 09/30/94
3. FILES PLAN *(Check one)* ☐ New ☒ Revised	4. DATE PREPARED Feb. 25, 1994	5. PREPARED BY *(Files Custodian)* Mary Smith	6. PHONE NUMBER 351-XXXX

7. RECORDS MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK 21, PART 5			8. CLASSIFIED	9. MEDIUM	10. VOLUMES *Cubic Meters (Cubic Feet)*		
A ITEM NO. & LOCATION (FILE CABINET/DRAWER)	B TITLE OR DESCRIPTION	C DISPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS	YES OR NO	P - PAPER A - AUDIOVISUAL M - MICROFORM E - ELECTRONIC O - OTHER	A TRANSFERRED TO FRC OR LOCAL STORAGE	B DESTROYED	C ON HAND
GREEN LABELS	***REFERENCE/CONVENIENCE FILES***		NO	P			2cf
01030	Incoming Cables Outgoing Cables Chron Files	Cut off at end of calendar year. Destroy when 1 year old.					
GREEN LABELS	***ADMINISTRATIVE SUBJECT FILES***		NO	P			6cf
01010	ADM-01, Management Policy & Plans BUD-01, Annual Budget Submission	Destroy when 2 years old.					
YELLOW LABELS	***PROGRAM SUBJECT FILES***		NO	P			12cf
01120	AGR-12, Food Supply FPC-01, Commodities	Cut of end of FY, Hold two years, retire.					
YELLOW LABELS	***PROGRAM CASE FILES***		NO	P			10cf
04010	FVA Grant Files	Cut off, hold 2 years, retire.					
04100	Section 416 Agreement, Originals	PERM. Offer to NARA in 5 year blocks.					
	Please refer to Handbook 21, Part II, Chapter 6 for complete disposal instructions.						

11. THIS PLAN REFLECTS ALL RECORDS MAINTAINED BY THIS OFFICE	*Supervisor's Signature*	*Date*
12. THIS PLAN CONFORMS WITH RECORDS MANAGEMENT STANDARDS.	*Record's Liaison Officer's (RLO) Signature (Appointed by Bureau/Officer Director)*	*Date*
13. THIS PLAN CONFORMS WITH RECORDS MANAGEMENT STANDARDS AND IS APPROVED	*Agency's Records Manager's Signature*	*Date*

AID 520-2 (09/93)--Report Control Symbol W-155

(Use Form AID 520-2A for Continuation Pages)

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