



Appraisal and Disposal

The process of appraisal and disposal is an important component of a records management program. It identifies:

- records that need to be created by an agency
- how long records must be retained for
- when records can be destroyed in accordance with business and legislative requirements, and
- records to be retained permanently as archives.

What is appraisal?

Appraisal is the process of evaluating the business functions and activities of an agency to determine what records need to be created and captured and how long those records need to be kept to meet business needs, the requirements of organisational accountability and community expectations. This includes determining which official records should be kept as part of the community's collective memory and cultural heritage¹. The process of appraisal is applied to records in all formats, whether paper-based or digital.

Appraisal Objectives

To assist with the identification of permanent records as part of appraisal, State Records has issued *Appraisal of Official Records: Policy and Objectives*. The Guideline sets out five minimum appraisal objectives, as follows:

- to identify and preserve official records providing evidence of the source of authority, foundation and machinery of the South Australia Government and public sector bodies
- to identify and preserve official records providing evidence of the deliberations, decisions and actions of the South Australian Government and public sector bodies relating to key functions and programs and significant issues faced with governing the State of South Australia
- to identify and preserve official records providing evidence of the legal status and fundamental rights and entitlements of individuals and groups
- to identify and preserve official records contributing to the knowledge and understanding of the society and communities of South Australia
- to identify and preserve official records contributing to the protection and well being of the community or providing substantial evidence of the condition of the State, its people and the environment, and the impact of government activities on them.

¹ Based on definition from *Policy on Records Appraisal and the Identification of State Archives*. State Records Authority of New South Wales. June 2001.

What is disposal?

Disposal consists of a range of processes associated with implementing records retention, destruction or transfer decisions, which are documented in disposal schedules or other instruments.²

In South Australia, the disposal of official records by government agencies and authorities is governed by sections 7(c), 10(a), 17(2) and 23(1-4) of the *State Records Act 1997*.

Disposal includes the:

- retention of permanent records
- transfer of temporary records to temporary storage
- destruction of records no longer required for current administrative purposes in accordance with an approved disposal schedule (and once the minimum retention period has been met)
- transfer of ownership and custody of a record to a non-government entity.

Authorised and timely disposal enables funds and resources to be used effectively and not wasted on the management and storage of records with no ongoing administrative or archival value. It also protects agencies against illegal destruction and therefore forms an important component of a records management program.

What is a disposal schedule?

Disposal schedules are developed to assist agencies and authorities in legally disposing of their official records and with identifying records that an agency creates as part of its business processes and transactions.

A disposal schedule establishes which records need to be retained permanently as archives at State Records and which records can be destroyed after meeting a minimum retention period. In South Australia, disposal schedules must be made as a determination by the Director, State Records and then approved by the State Records Council before they can be utilised to sentence records.

There are two main types of disposal schedules used by state and local government agencies. General disposal schedules (GDS) that cover administrative functions consistent across most agencies and operational records disposal schedules (RDS) that cover records specific to an individual agency.

A third type of disposal schedule, called a Transfer of Ownership and Custody Schedule (TOCS), is developed in limited circumstances to enable the disposal of records of an agency that has been privatised or a government function that has been outsourced or transferred to a non-government entity.

² AS ISO 15489-1– 2002, *Information and Documentation-Records Management, Part 1: General*.

In addition to the disposal schedules, there is also a standing disposal authority called Normal Administrative Practice (NAP). NAP provides for the routine destruction of drafts, duplicates and publications, with the test that it is obvious that no information of continuing value to the organisation will be destroyed.³ It applies to material of ephemeral and transitory value only. For further information regarding the practice of NAP, refer to the State Records website (www.archives.sa.gov.au) or the introductory pages of General Disposal Schedule 15, 18 or 20.

What is sentencing?

Sentencing is the process of identifying and classifying records according to a disposal schedule and applying the disposal action specified in it. Sentencing is the implementation of decisions made during appraisal.⁴ It allows agencies to apply the decisions made about classes of records to individual records. Together appraisal and sentencing help agencies to identify how long records should be retained.

As well as identifying those records of archival value, sentencing enables agencies to identify which records can be destroyed.

Considerations when Sentencing

The following considerations need to be made when sentencing official records.

Apply longest retention

Some files will be covered by several disposal classes. When this occurs it is important that the longest retention period is applied to the file and any related parts.

Sentence by Content

File titles do not always reflect the content of a file, especially where records have been created without using a thesaurus or a business classification scheme. It is therefore important that files be sentenced according to their content.

Sentencing part files

When a file contains several parts each of the parts make up the entire file. Each part contains documents that provide context to the entire file or may have relevance to another part within the file. For this reason, the longest retention applied to any document in any part of a file, needs to be applied to the entire file (including all its parts).

³ From "Glossary" in Judith Ellis, Ed., *Keeping Archives*, second edition, 1987.

⁴ National Archives of Australia, Glossary of Records Management Terms, www.naa.gov.au

For example, File SR03-00021 contains 3 Parts. Refer to the table below for the longest retention period assigned to each part after sentencing:

File Part Number	Longest retention period assigned to a document within the file
SR03-00021 Part 1	Destroy 5 years after last action
SR03-00021 Part 2	Permanent
SR03-00021 Part 3	Destroy 10 years after last action

In this example, the longest retention period of all the parts is contained in Part 2 where at least one document needs to be retained permanently. The file is therefore sentenced as permanent and all 3 parts would need to be retained permanently.

Culling of Files

Culling of files, or removing documents from a file, may compromise the integrity of that file. It also affects the context of the file as individual documents may provide supporting information to other documents within the file. Culling of files is therefore not recommended as standard records management practice.

Management of Hybrid files (electronic and paper records)

Regardless of whether records are in electronic or paper format, the process of sentencing records is the same. Electronic records and paper records are all sentenced against the same disposal schedules, however, how the electronic copies are stored and managed after sentencing may differ. For further information regarding the management of hybrid files, refer to the recordkeeping advice sheet *Management of Hybrid Files*, available on the State Records website (www.archives.sa.gov.au).

When to sentence

It is recommended that records be sentenced on creation using both an operational and general records disposal schedule. Sentencing on creation ensures that agency records are managed according to their value and are retained for as long as they are required.

Sentencing upon creation can be automated where records are captured in an electronic document and records management system (EDRMS). Alternatively, the process can be linked to your business classification scheme. It is necessary to conduct a review of the records prior to disposal to ensure the sentence applied to the records at creation is still current.

Sentencing work needs to be completed by trained practitioners, preferably someone with an understanding of the functions of the agency.

Destruction of Records

Agencies are required to complete an Intention to Destroy Records Report that must be forwarded to State Records for approval prior to the destruction of any records. Destruction must not occur until the agency has been notified that it is appropriate to do so by State Records. This does not apply to records being destroyed under Normal Administrative Practice (NAP) or records with a retention period of 12 months or less.

Further Information

For further information on transferring permanent records to the archives at State Records, contact Collection Management Services on srsaCollectionManagement@sa.gov.au.

For further information on the management and transfer of temporary records to an approved service provider (ASP), the destruction of records and the transfer of ownership and custody of records, contact Records Management Service on srsaRecordsManagement@sa.gov.au.

For further information refer to the following documents available on the State Records website (www.archives.sa.gov.au):

- State Records of South Australia, *Adequate Records Management Standard* (2008)
- State Records of South Australia, *Appraisal of Official Records – Policy and Objectives Guideline* (2003)
- State Records of South Australia, *General Disposal Schedule 15, 18 and 20* (for information regarding NAP)