

Guideline cum Checklist for Review of Records Retention and Disposal Schedules (RMO2)

According to paragraphs 13 and 15 of the *General Circular (GC) No. 2/2009* entitled *Mandatory Records Management Requirements*, Government bureaux and departments (B/Ds) are required to draw up records retention and disposal schedules (“disposal schedules”) to cover all their programme records¹ to ensure systematic planning and orderly implementation of records disposal. With the agreement of Government Records Service (GRS), such draft disposal schedules will be approved in the form of Disposal Authority (abbreviated as “DA”, with the form number as RMO2)².

2. B/Ds are also responsible for implementing and reviewing appropriate policies and practices for records disposal in compliance with the government records management requirements, in particular the mandatory records management requirements as stipulated in the *GC No. 2/2009*.

3. To ensure that the approved disposal schedules could always meet the operational, administrative, legal and regulatory, records management, financial requirements etc., all disposal schedules should be reviewed at least once every 5 years to determine whether amendments are required³.

4. This Guideline cum Checklist for Review of Records Retention and Disposal Schedules (the “Checklist”) provides a set of detailed and specific guidelines and facilitates B/Ds to carry out reviews in a focussed and comprehensive manner, taking into account all relevant factors. On completion, a copy of this Checklist should be documented for record purpose and/or returned to GRS if amendments or cancellation are proposed to the disposal schedule.

¹ **Programme records** are records created or received by a B/D whilst carrying out the primary functions, activities or mission for which the B/D was established. Records of this nature are unique to each B/D. On the other hand, **administrative records** are records created or received during the course of day-to-day administrative activities that deal with finance, accommodation, procurement and supply, establishment, personnel and other general administrative activities. Records of this nature are common to B/Ds. B/Ds should refer to *GRS’ Records Management Publication No. 4: General Administrative Records Disposal Schedules* for the retention and disposal schedules of administrative records and there is no need to compile additional disposal schedules except in the circumstances stated in paragraphs 3.6.1 and 3.7.1 of *GRS’ Records Management Publication No. 1: A Practical Guide to Records Scheduling and Disposal*.

² More details of records scheduling and disposal are given in *GRS’ Records Management Publication No. 1: A Practical Guide to Records Scheduling and Disposal*.

³ See paragraph 617 of the Records Management Manual (RMM) and paragraph 3(c) of GC No. 5/2006.

5. Enquiries relating to this Checklist should be directed to the Records Management and Administration Office (RMAO) of GRS at 2460 3772 or admin_rcinfo@grs.gov.hk.

Bureau / Department:	
Branch / Division / Section / Office:	
DA No:	
Date of Issue of DA / Last Review (whichever the later):	

Part I Issues for Review

Please answer the following questions. (A “Yes” answer to any of the following questions may indicate a need for amendment.)

Section A – Change in Recordkeeping Requirements

Most records disposal schedules will periodically require some changes to meet new recordkeeping requirements. All changes to records disposal schedules should be agreed with the GRS Director. A request for amendment should be lodged with the Records Management and Administration Office (RMAO) of the GRS in the first instance. *(Paragraph 616 of Records Management Manual (RMM))*

Q1 Has any of the following situations occurred, thereby affecting the nature, content, classification or storage of the records concerned?

Reviewing Question	Response (Please ✓)	
	Yes	No
(i) Reorganisation of the B/D, or the section/office/unit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Change in departmental policies, procedures, programmes or activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) Change in legislations, regulations, guidelines and instructions, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iv) Outsourcing, sale or transfer of the function to non-government bodies or private organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(v) Corporatisation of functions to become a government business enterprise ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(vi) Adoption of and migration using new technology in records documentation and information management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Remarks (if any of the above answers is “Yes”, B/Ds need to specify the changes of situations having been identified.)

⁴ Corporatisation of a public service, in which a corporation may be established to carry out specified activities in accordance with established commercial principles, with the Government being the sole or main shareholder whilst the corporation is not part of the civil service, may result in a transfer of records custody and ownership. According to Chapter 8 of the RMM, such transfer requires the agreement of the GRS Director.

Further References

More information relating to the establishment of disposal schedules and on managing records for administrative changes could be found in:

- Paragraphs 13-20 of GC No. 2/2009
- Chapter 6 of RMM (Records Scheduling and Disposal)
- Chapter 8 of RMM (Managing Records for Administrative Changes)

Section B - Change of Records Classification Scheme and Segregation of Records

A records classification scheme allows modifications such as addition of new records series to cater for changing circumstances. To ensure that each scheme remains effective to cope with changes over time and to identify scope for improvement, the Departmental Records Manager (DRM) is required to review the records classification schemes every two to three years, having regard to the principles set out in Appendix II. The results of the review and any follow-up action taken should be documented. (Paragraph 12 of GC No. 2/2009)

DRM is required to have regard to the following in approving a new records classification scheme or reviewing records classification schemes:

- (a) whether programme records are separated from administrative records;
- (b) whether the scheme is systematic, logical, consistent and scalable to facilitate accurate and complete documentation of policies, procedures and decisions for the efficient carrying out of the B/D's functions, activities and transactions;
- (c) whether the scheme can be used easily and the file titles are clear and unique (e.g., avoid the use of "general"/"miscellaneous") to facilitate accurate capturing and ready retrieval of records; and
- (d) whether the scheme facilitates segregation of vital records for protection and establishment of disposal schedules to satisfy retention requirement stipulated by legislation (e.g., Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance) and to separate records which need to be kept for a long period (e.g., those on policy) from those which need to be kept briefly (e.g., routine correspondence).

(Appendix II to GC No. 2/2009)

Q2 Upon any change of records classification scheme, relevant disposal schedules may need modification accordingly. Reviewing the scopes of records series⁵ and/or disposal classes⁶ may also improve the effectiveness of the disposal exercises. Is there any need to revise the disposal schedules in respect of the **scopes of records series and/or disposal classes**?

Reviewing Question	Response (Please ✓)	
	Yes	No
(i) Is it necessary to re-define/re-group the records series in accordance with any changes to classification schemes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Does the records series cover administrative records? (Disposal of administrative records should normally follow General Administrative Records Disposal Schedules.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) Is it necessary to re-define/re-group the records series/disposal classes so as to segregate records with longer retention period requirements (e.g. policy records ⁷) from those with shorter (e.g. routine records ⁸) or predefined requirements (e.g. case files comprising personal data) ⁹ ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iv) Is it necessary to re-define/re-group the records series so as to facilitate segregation of vital records ¹⁰ for protection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(v) Are the current records series title and disposal classes unclear or inconsistent for records capturing and retrieval?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

⁵ A **records series** is a group of records with the following characteristics: (a) created, received and maintained for specific activities or purposes; (b) arranged according to a particular filing system; and (c) sharing a particular physical form. Based on the nature, functions and organisation of the records, they can be grouped to form different records series.

⁶ A **disposal class** is a group of records in a records series which being of similar function, content and retention value merits the same disposal treatment.

⁷ **Policy records** are records documenting major decisions, rulings, regulations, procedures and arrangements. Their relevant retention periods are normally longer than those of routine records. (See Appendix D (ii) Explanatory Notes to the Records Inventory Form in *GRS' Records Management Publication No. 1: A Practical Guide to Records Scheduling and Disposal*)

⁸ **Routine records** are records documenting activities or arrangements of a minor nature. (See Appendix D (ii) Explanatory Notes to the Records Inventory Form in *GRS' Records Management Publication No. 1: A Practical Guide to Records Scheduling and Disposal*)

⁹ B/Ds should note that a records series / disposal class can consist of more than one record type (such as records, papers, documents), or security classification (such as Restricted (Administration), Confidential), or format / storage medium (such as paper, electronic, microfilm), provided that the records under the records series are under the same subject matter, and the records within a disposal class are having the same criterion for defining inactive records, retention period and disposal actions.

¹⁰ **Vital Records** are records containing information essential to the continued and effective operation of an organisation during and after an emergency or disaster. (See paragraph 24 of GC No. 2/2009)

Reviewing Question	Response (Please ✓)	
	Yes	No
(vi) Are the descriptions of subject matters in the disposal schedule out-of-date?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Remarks (if any of the above answers is “Yes”, B/Ds need to specify the reasons behind, factors considered, or observations made.)

Further References

More information on classifications and related matters could be found in:

- *Paragraphs 8-12 of GC No. 2/2009*
- *Paragraphs 414-424 of RMM*
- *Chapters 3-5 of GRS’ Records Management Publication No. 2: Managing Active Records: File Management*
- *GRS’ Records Management Publication No. 3: Subject Filing*
- *GRS’ Records Management Publication No. 4: General Administrative Records Disposal Schedule*
- *GRS’ Records Management Publication No. 6: Manual on Vital Records Protection*

Section C - Changes to the Disposal Schedule and Arrangements

Establish Disposal Schedules

It is important to establish disposal schedules to ensure systematic planning and orderly implementation of records disposal after records have been kept the right length of time to meet the purposes they are created and in compliance with legal or statutory requirements. This will facilitate subsequent transfer of inactive records to GRS’ Records Centres for intermediate storage, transfer of archival records to the Public Records Office (PRO) of GRS for permanent retention or destruction of unwanted records. *(Paragraph 13 of GC No. 2/2009)*

Determine the Retention Period

Permanent retention of records in a B/D is usually valid only when required by legislation. *(Paragraph 619 of RMM)*

The nature and operational requirements of the records are often closely related to the length of their retention. Generally speaking, it is not advisable to keep inactive records for more than 7 years unless there are longer retention requirements specified in enforcing legislation, regulations and codes. *(Please refer to paragraphs 4.2.32 - 4.2.33 of GRS' Records Management Publication No. 1: A Practical Guide to Records Scheduling and Disposal)*

Review the Retention Period with regard to Public Expectations

Government should also review the requirements on disposal schedules, having regard to the circumstances and public expectations, to determine whether there is a need for a longer retention period for certain kind of records. *(Paragraph 4.21 of The Ombudsman's Direct Investigation Report on Public Records Management in Hong Kong)*

Timely Closure of Records

As according to the Public Records (Access) Rules 1996, public records which have been in existence for not less than 30 years shall in general be available for public inspection, the community has an expectation to be able to access files reaching 30 years old. Hence we should adopt the practice of critically and regularly reviewing files created over 30 years to see if they can be closed or disposed of. *(Paragraph (c) of the Letter of Director of Administration to Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments dated 21.3.2014)*

Q3 Is there any need to revise the **criterion for defining inactive records** and the **retention period**?

Reviewing Question	Response (Please ✓)	
	Yes	No
(i) Is the criterion for defining inactive records ¹¹ unclear or indefinite?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Is the current retention period of inactive records ¹² unable to satisfy operational, policy, legal and fiscal requirements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) Is the criterion for defining inactive records or the retention period of similar records from different sections/offices inconsistent with each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iv) Do records of different retention requirements exist within the same records series that should be separated into different disposal classes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹¹ **Criterion for defining inactive records** is specified in the disposal schedule to define when the records are considered inactive. Examples are “after completion of a study/project/audit”, “after acceptance/rejection/withdrawal of an application”, “after settlement of accounts/claims”, “after file closed”, etc.

¹² **Retention period of inactive records** means the time the records are to be kept after meeting the criterion for defining inactive records but before their final disposal.

Q3

Reviewing Question	Response (Please ✓)	
	Yes	No
(v) For records without archival value (i.e. having “Destruction” as disposal action), is there a need for a longer retention period having regard to the operational or legal requirements, or public expectations? For example, are there any records series which may require longer retention period as the B/D’s decision can still be appealed against or the time allowed for seeking appeal or judicial review from the Court has yet to expire?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(vi) For records having archival / potential archival value, is the retention period unduly long, after meeting the criterion for defining inactive records?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Remarks (if any of the above answers is “Yes”, B/Ds need to specify the reasons behind, or factors considered, or observations made.)

Q4 Is there any need to revise the **disposal actions**?

Reviewing Question	Response (Please ✓)	
	Yes	No
(i) Does the existing disposal action contain “R.A.” (i.e. Review by Agency) or “R.A.P.” (i.e. Review by Agency and PRO)? Please provide justification if such arrangement is to be retained ¹³ .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Is the disposal action of similar records from different sections/offices inconsistent with each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹³ To ensure systematic planning and orderly implementation of records disposal, B/Ds should take the most appropriate disposal actions, having regard to the residual value(s) of the records series after the expiry of the retention period. The disposal actions “R.A.” (Review by Agency) and “R.A.P.” (Review by Agency and PRO) should be deployed only when definite actions, such as “D” (Destruction) or “P.P.” (Permanent Retention by PRO), cannot be determined at the time of establishing the RMO2 and should be reviewed whenever appropriate (such as after the enactment of certain legislation governing the creation and retention of the records series). This helps eliminate the chance of deferral of transfer of records with archival value to PRO, or the accumulation of records without archival value in the B/Ds, due to indefinite disposal actions in the RMO2.

Remarks (if any of the above answers is “Yes”, B/Ds need to specify the reasons behind, or factors considered, or observations made.)

--

Q5 Have the options of alternative storage venue, format or media for inactive records to be retained for a long duration been sufficiently considered?

Reviewing Question	Response (Please ✓)	
	Yes	No
(i) Is there a lack of consideration to use GRS Records Centre for intermediate storage of inactive records ¹⁴ ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Is there any change in office accommodation, thus resulting in the need to consider making use of GRS’ Records Centre for intermediate storage of inactive records?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) Is there a lack of consideration to transform storage media, such as microfilming?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Remarks (if any of the above answers is “Yes”, B/Ds need to specify the reasons behind, or factors considered, or observations made.)

--

Further References

More information relating to records disposal could be found in:

(a) Records Scheduling:

- *Paragraphs 13-20 of GC No. 2/2009*
- *Chapter 6 of RMM (Records Scheduling and Disposal)*
- *Chapter 4 of GRS’ Records Management Publication No. 1: A Practical Guide to Records Scheduling and Disposal*

¹⁴ **Records Centre (RC)** is a centralised records repository located in the relatively low-rent area for housing and servicing of inactive records whose reference rate does not warrant their retention using expensive office space and equipment. The RC of GRS is located in Tuen Mun.

(b) Records Storage and Disposal:

- Paragraphs 21-24 of GC No. 2/2009
- Chapters 5 and 6 of GRS' Records Management Publication No. 1: A Practical Guide to Records Scheduling and Disposal
- Notes on Transfer of Records to the Records Centre
[http://grs.host.cngo.hksarg/file/2.3.15_Records_Transfer.pdf]

(c) Microfilming Service:

- GRS' Records Management Publication No. 5: The Microfilming User Manual

Section D - Early Destruction of Original Records

(This section is applicable to disposal schedules involving early destruction of original records.)

Original records are non-electronic records, e.g. a letter or a microfilm in its original form and such records have been separately digitised and stored in a digital form. **Early destruction** denotes the destruction of original records as approved by GRS after digitisation and before expiry of the retention period specified in the approved disposal schedules for the original records¹⁵. The implication is that the digitised records will be relied upon in lieu of the original records for all purposes. *(Please refer to paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 of Disposal of Original Records (for records that have been digitised and stored in a digital form) for more details.)*

A prudent approach should be adopted to assess the risks¹⁶ associated with early destruction of original records, particularly with reference to possible adverse impacts on the legal, business, evidence and accountability needs of the Government. Such risks should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, say once every two years or more often as necessitated by its unique circumstances such as after a relevant court ruling. *(For more details, please refer to paragraphs 5.1 and 18.1 of Disposal of Original Records (for records that have been digitised and stored in a digital form)).*

¹⁵ In the case where a disposal schedule has not been drawn up for the original records, early destruction means the destruction of the original records prior to disposal of the associated digitised records.

¹⁶ Prior to seeking approval from GRS for the destruction, B/D should conduct a risk analysis to assess whether the likelihood, the magnitude and the possible impacts of risks have changed by means of Annex 3 of the guidance document entitled “Disposal of Original Records (for records that have been digitised and stored in a digital form)”, which is accessible at <http://grs.host.cngo.hksarg/erm/s04/415.html>.

Q6 Upon completion of the risk analysis on the early destruction of original records (see footnote 15), the disposal arrangements may need modifications having regard to legal, business, evidence and accountability needs. Has the risk analysis been reviewed regularly and timely to reflect such a need?

Reviewing Question	Response (Please ✓)	
	Yes	No
(i) Are you proposing any early destruction of original records for which a review (see footnote 16) on the associated risks has <u>not been conducted</u> in the past two years?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Are there any changes to legal, business, accountability and evidence requirements or any other factors that call for a review of the early destruction of the original records since the last risk analysis was conducted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) Does the result or finding of the risk analysis necessitate the update of the disposal schedules (e.g. revoke the early destruction of original records for a particular record series)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Remarks (if any of the above answers is “Yes”, B/Ds need to specify the reasons or factors that have been considered.)

Further References

More information relating to early destruction of original records could be found in:

- *Disposal of Original Records (for records that have been digitised and stored in a digital form) [<http://grs.host.ccgo.hksarg/erm/s04/415.html>]*

Section E - Other Issues

In addition to the reviews and studies carried out by the GRS, it is important for the records management function to be examined by the departmental management periodically. It is recommended that the DRM in each B/D should, as far as possible, conduct an evaluation of the records management function every 5 years or more often. (*Paragraph 915 of RMM*)

Q7 Are there any other considerations that may necessitate the amendment of the disposal schedule? (Please specify.)

Q8 Please list the documents, e.g., ordinances, circulars, directives, manuals, etc. that have been referenced to and/or authorities/ subject officers consulted in conducting the above review of disposal schedule –

Part II Result of the Review

Having considered the issues mentioned in Part I, we consider that:
(Please ✓ as appropriate)

- All the answers in Part I are “No” and no amendment to this DA is required.
- No amendment to this DA is required despite a “Yes” answer to some of the questions in Part I. Reasons are as follows:

- This DA should be cancelled. Reasons are as follows:

(Please forward this Checklist under covering email to RMAO of GRS for action.)

- Amendment to this DA is required.

(The request to amend the DA should be submitted to GRS through the “Storage Allocation and Records Centre Information System” (SARCIS)¹⁷. Please also forward this Checklist and any relevant supporting documents¹⁸ to RMAO of GRS for action.)

(P.T.O.)

¹⁷ SARCIS is accessible through the Department Portal of individual B/Ds.

¹⁸ With respect to review of disposal schedules of original records stated in Q6 above, if a B/D, after the review, intends to propose a shorter retention period as compared with the approved retention period specified in the RMO2 and/or propose to change the disposal action of the original records to “destruction”, the B/D concerned should submit a copy of duly completed risk analysis in the format of Annex 3 attached to the guidance document entitled *Disposal of Original Records (for records that have been digitised and stored in a digital form)* and other relevant considerations warranting the attention of GRS but have not been included in the risk analysis, to GRS to support the request. Please refer to paragraphs 14.1, 14.2 and 14.4 of the guidance document for the details.

Prepared by Reviewing Officer	_____(Name) _____(Rank/Post) _____(Tel) _____(Lotus Notes e-mail) _____(Date of Review)
Endorsed by Endorsement Officer ¹⁹	_____(Name) _____(Rank/Post) _____(Tel) _____(Lotus Notes e-mail) _____(Date of Endorsement)
Supplementary remarks, if any	

Explanatory Notes

1. If it is found that no change to the DA is necessary after review, B/D will only be required to retain the Checklist for record purpose and does not need to forward it to GRS. Otherwise, please submit this document and supporting documents, if any, to the GRS Director (Attn: SEO(RM)2) by e-mail (Email addresses: ADMIN_RCINFO/GRS/HKSARG (Lotus notes) or admin_rcinfo@grs.gov.hk (internet)), as well as a request to amend the DA through SARCIS. **Please do not submit by paper or fax as GRS has already implemented its electronic recordkeeping system.**
2. If the email to GRSD is not sent by the Endorsement Officer, please copy to the Endorsement Officer for information. When the amendment to / cancellation of DA is approved, GRS will inform the Endorsement Officer and copy to the Reviewing Officer.

¹⁹ The endorsement officer should be at a rank not below Senior Executive Officer or equivalent, i.e. under the present context, an officer the maximum pay point of whose rank is not lower than MPS Point 44 or equivalent.