AMS SECRETARIAL TRAINING COURSE

Session 3--Records Management
Records and Communications Branch, ASD

RECORDS AND CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT

I   CREATING RECORDS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Question: What can you do to help get incoming mail replied to quickly?

Answer: Secretaries and clerks can not be sure their Supervisor will
           answer a letter quickly. They can take action to facilitate
           the mechanics of replying. They can:

    1   Work out with the head of the office, a definite plan out-
         lining responsibilities for opening various classes of mail,
         and for routing it quickly to the desk of the person who is
         to prepare the reply. This is a clerical responsibility.

    2   In relatively heavy correspondence areas, use already pre-
         pared guide and form letters approved by the Supervisor.
         A clerk can fill in the information requested on the form
         or guide letter rather than the Supervisor having to prepare
         an individual answer to each routine letter. (See GSA
         handbooks, "Guide Letters" and "Form Letters.")

Question: How can you eliminate creating and filing useless material?

Answer: By: --

    1   Not preparing or filing extra copies of letters, etc. For
         each typing job, the typist should know how many:

         a   Courtesy copies are needed,

         b   Information copies are required for other offices, and

         c   File copies are required by originating office. (If
              more than one, or possibly two,--check to see why needed.)

    2   Controlling periodicals and other reproduced materials
         received by the office by:

         a   Listing all such materials received, if at all voluminous,

         b   Checking to see if the office can be removed from the
              list if publication is not needed,

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      c   Determining which publications can be circulated among the staff and then disposed of, and

      d   Setting retention periods for those which must be filed.

3   Using routing slips to circulate material among office personnel. (See sample, AD-514)

4   Eliminating preparation and filing of transmittal letters when transmitting self-explanatory material.

5   Using Form AMS-51, Transmittal Record, when a record of transmittal is required.

6   Using the "endorsement method" where possible, particularly on Washington-field correspondence.

7   Filing routine requests for information, reports, or transmittal letters you prepare, separately from the more valuable case-history type records.

II   SETTING UP AND MAINTAINING RECORDS

Question: Should all record material in the office be kept physically together in one central location under a single organized file?

Answer: Usually not,--even in small offices. In small offices it is appropriate to locate all materials centrally, but because there are different types of material in the office, you may have to set up separate files for the different types of material. For example, reproduced reference materials, stocks of publications and forms, and usually the administrative housekeeping records will be kept separately from the basic program type records in differently organized files.

Question: If there are several people in an office, should each person be allowed to maintain and file his own material?

Answer: Uniformity of procedure is desirable. If several people in an office keep file material it is difficult to have this uniformity of procedures and to maintain uniformity in the filing system. While not necessarily a full-time job, the responsibility for the bulk of the filing should be given to one person.

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Question: How do you know whether your office has a good filing system?

Answer: If your office is under one of our national uniform filing systems, or has had a system installed by a Records Officer, it will have met the requirements for a proper system and filing procedure.

These are:

1   Putting records under a written system of arrangement and under proper procedures so that like material is consistently brought together and placed in the same category in the files without too much manpower.

2   Physically housing the records properly so that the folders and guides within the file drawers will visibly show the system under which the records are arranged.

Question: What type of filing system meets most of the requirements for a good system?

Answer: A subjective-type file system, with a written list of subjects covering the subject matter of the functions of the office and with written procedures available to govern the filing under the system, will best meet these requirements. While it may be faster to file letters by the name of the person to whom a letter is addressed, it is difficult to bring all material on a transaction together under this system, and after material gets a little old it is difficult to remember to which of the various officials you directed a letter.

Question: If we set up a subjective type file, can't we set up folders for the file as we need them rather than try to develop a written listing of subjects in advance?

Answer: No. There are several reasons why this does not work.

1   Unless there is a written list of subjects available which in effect serves as an outline of the folders in the file, we can not always remember whether a folder for a subject has been previously set up. We would have to check the file constantly to see what has been set up. If this is not done we may set up a separate folder with a differing subject title for material for which we may have already set up a folder. This will split the files on transactions.

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2   Unless you have prepared a listing of subjects previously, it is difficult to bring the various subdivisions of related material together under a major subject heading. For example, when you prepare a listing of subjects covering the functions of your office you will undoubtedly find numerous separate entries which are closely related. In order to bring all like material together in a subject file on the basis of its subject matter content, you should select certain major or primary subject titles, and under these group all related minor subject titles.

(Group will participate in solving problems on correlating subjective filing titles and the proper preparation of drawer, guide, and folder labels.)

III   RECORDS DISPOSITION

Question: What do you do when your file cabinets become full, and you are unable to get another cabinet?

Answer: Records disposition is the best solution. This can be achieved either by destroying records which have outlived their usefulness, or by sending records not immediately needed for your operations to the AMS Records Depository.

Question: Do you have authority to destroy any file material that you want to?

Answer: Partly. You may destroy non-record material in your office with the approval of your supervisor. However, any official record material in your custody may be destroyed only with the approval of the Archives and Congress. Such approval can only be obtained through the Records Management Section, Administrative Services Division. Normally, after such approval is obtained, your Division will issue an instruction outlining the approved retention-disposal standards for the various classes of records. If you are not sure of the approved retention period for any official record material in your office, contact your Division Administrative Officer.

Official record material includes all papers created or received in pursuance of Federal law or in connection with the handling of public business, and kept to show the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other Government activities.

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Non-record material includes (1) extra copies of correspondence used for reference, such as reader files, chronological files, etc.; (2) duplicate copies of any documents kept in the same file; (3) extra copies of reproduced material of which a "record" copy has been kept; (4) stocks of blank forms, publications, and reproduced documents kept for supply purposes; and (5) other reproduced reference material such as trade magazines, journals, newspapers, or other periodicals.

Question: What is the AMS Records Depository, and how do you go about sending records there?

Answer:

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The AMS Records Depository consists of file transfer drawers, shelving, and other records storage equipment located in the attic of the South Building. (There is also a small storage space in the attic of the ███████ for use by offices in that building.)

The first step in getting records to the Depository is to prepare and submit Form AMS-33, Request for Storage of Records in AMS Records Depository, according to the instructions for use on the reverse side of the form. See Exhibit 1 for an example of a properly completed form. You may obtain supplies of Form AMS-33 through your Division Administrative Officer.

The Records Management Section will inspect the records and, if acceptable for storage, assign a job number (upper right corner of the form), and also assign the storage space. As soon as working conditions permit, empty transfer drawers will be delivered to the room shown in item (2) of the form, or other transfer arrangements will be made. You are responsible for transferring your records to the drawers, arranging them in the proper order, and labeling the drawers. You are also responsible for listing the records on the AMS-33 (or on a separate attached list) in sufficient detail that you can easily find them when needed.

When the drawers are filled, notify the Records Management Section by calling extension 6040. After the drawers have been taken to the Depository, you will receive a copy of the completed Form AMS-33, showing the job number and the location of the records in the Depository.

Question: If a record is needed after it has been moved to the Depository, who gets it?

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The Division or office which had the records taken to the Depository is responsible for servicing all requests for such records. Instructions on the use of the Depository are included on the reverse side of Form AMS-33.

Question: Will the Records Management Section automatically destroy the records in line with the disposal date shown in item (8) of Form AMS-33?

Answer: The Records Management Section will not remove or destroy any records in the AMS Records Depository without the written concurrence of the office or Division concerned.

Question: Is there any depository for AMS records other than the one we have been discussing?

Answer: Yes, the General Services Administration operates a Records Center for the Department of Agriculture and other Government agencies at Franconia, Virginia. One-day reference service is provided. Special instructions for sending records to the GSA Records Center will be given by the Records Management Section upon request.

Question: Will the Records Management Section automatically send records to the GSA Records Center from the AMS Records Depository in line with the transfer date shown in item (7) of Form AMS-33?

Answer: Not without the written concurrence of the Division or office concerned.

Question: Is there a report made of the volume of records on hand in your office?

Answer: Once each year, as of June 30, your Administrative Officer will want to know the volume of records destroyed in your office during the fiscal year just ended. You should keep a running record of this so that you will not have to guess. Be sure you do not include stocks of forms or publications, printed books or material not included in filing equipment. Your Administrative Officer may also want other information, such as estimate of the volume of records accumulated during the fiscal year, or volume on hand at the end of the year.