Section Five

Creating a New File

5. Creating a New File

5.1 Opening a New File

When a document comes into the Records Office, the records staff must decide whether an appropriate file already exists, as described earlier. If no appropriate file exists, create a new file and allocate a reference and a title. No new file may be opened before there is correspondence to go on it. Opening files in the expectation of future correspondence leads to waste of effort, waste of valuable file covers and most damaging of all, confusion in the file index. If there is any doubt at all about whether a new file is required, the Head of the Records Office will ask the relevant action officer for advice. Action officers should be encouraged to indicate their need for files.

If a new file is required, the Records Office staff must think carefully about what it will contain and how it will grow. Remember that each file should relate to a single subject, a well defined area of business or a particular type of transaction. ***(The steps taken to record a new file are described in Section 6.)***

Not all papers need to be placed on registered files. Keep ephemeral papers off files altogether or on files that can be destroyed early. It is vital that files destined for early destruction contain only papers that have a short-term potential value. ***(See Section 9 for File disposal procedures)***

5.2 Classifying Files

Classification systems are required to identify individual files and forms of records and to indicate the logical relationships between files and records. Without some system for classifying papers, it is not possible to show the links between related files or to file papers consistently and accurately. Whichever system is used in the Records Office, each file must have a unique identifying reference number. This may be a number or a combination of letters and numbers. *(Systems of Classification will be outlined in a separate Classification Manual)*

5.3 Classifying General Subject Files

Assigning reference code to documents, which belong in the General Subject Files series, involves analysing the subject-matter of the document to be classified, identifying the appropriate file in the series on which the document should be placed and assigning the appropriate reference file/code number to the document.

Determining the key words and phrases in a document is essential in the selection of proper file subjects and file numbers. The title or subject line on memoranda, the letterhead, the name of the addressee, and a signature/position title on the document will provide information needed to identify the content of document with some speed and consistency

Start the subject analysis by identifying the primary subject of the document and relating this to the appropriate sub-series in the General Subject File series (e.g. a document that deals primary with the subject of a Government Back account would be assigned to the sub-series on Bank Accounts). Once the primary subject has been determined, the specific subject or file reference number under which the document should be classified can be determined. (e.g. In the Deputy Governor's Office classification scheme, if the document relates to house tax in the BVI, it would be assigned a reference code in the sub-series dealing with taxation on specific subjects, under the general reference code 22- 4, which deals with 'Finance. Taxation and Revenue.' The appropriate sub-series and reference numbers could be located by consulting the File Index

5.4 Committee Files

Committee files contain documents relating to meetings of Government committees. They may consist of members' appointment letters, committee terms of reference, committee operational procedures, correspondence relating to the arrangement of committee meetings, agendas, papers, minutes, and correspondence relating to follow-up activities.

The official corporate record of Government Board meetings is retained on the Committee files in the Records Office and should be bound as Committee minutes and papers volumes.

Committee secretaries may also have working files in their office related to Committees to which they provide secretarial service. Secretaries may destroy working files upon completion of each meeting or retain these files for future reference and destroy them at a later date provided the Records Office has received file copies of committee documents.

Committee members who receive copies of correspondence, agendas, papers and minutes related to a Committee on which they serve may also retain these documents in working files if they choose.

5.5 Organization of Committee Files

It is suggested that committee files be established and organized as follows:

1. Membership and Terms of Reference
2. Documents relating to meeting arrangements
3. Agendas/Papers/Minutes
4. Follow-up or action correspondence

Membership and Terms of Reference files should remain open for the life of the Committee. New parts should be created when the file contains approximately 200 enclosures or is 1.5 inches thick. All other Committee files should be closed off at the end of each year.

5.6 Case Files

Case files are files that are similar in content but relate to different individuals, organisations, projects, places, events, items of equipment or other common characteristics. The most common type of case file found in government agencies is the personal file containing official papers relating to an individual public servant. Other types of case files include contract files (containing documents relating to contracts between a ministry and outside organisations or individuals); vehicle files (including records relating to specific government vehicles); or files containing similar information relating to individual non-government organisations (NGOs).

Because particular series of case files contain similar records and only differ from one another by being specific to a particular person, institution, geographical area and so on, they are easy to identify and should be assigned their own series codes. Within their own series, the simplest method of arrangement is by the characteristic which identifies them, whether it is a name, geographical area or project title. For example, case files relating to individual NGOs can be identified by the exact name of the organisation. Each NGO may be issued a number in sequence and an alphabetical index of NGOs, linking them to their numbers, will be held as a finding aid to the files.

5.7 Assigning Files Titles

Choose a clear and precise title for each file. The title should be as descriptive as possible to provide adequate details of the file's actual and likely contents. It should trigger in the user's minds what the file contains. At the same time it ought to be specific enough so that the Records Office staff does not use the file to cover different aspects of the same business or new developments that really should be the subject of several files. As well as describing the contents, a file title should also limit the scope of the material to be placed on the file.

When adding new papers to a file, take care that the file title continues to reflect the contents accurately. At the same time, do not change the title of a file unless it is absolutely necessary. Users become familiar with titles, and changing them, leads to the files containing earlier related papers.

If there is any doubt about the title of a file, consult the appropriate action officer. Users' views on file titles should always be taken into account.

Where it does seem justified to change the title of a file, obtain permission from the Head of the Records Office before any change is made. In exceptional circumstances, a file whose title no longer reflects its contents should be closed and a new file with the correct title opened.

5.8 Identifying the File Series

The first step in assigning a file number is to determine the appropriate file series. In general, there is a file series for each ministry's, department's or agency's clearly identifiable principal functions. If the agency has been organised into self-contained units that clearly supports these functions, there will be a file series for each unit.

If one of the units handles several distinct functions this will best be supported by several series. Alternatively, if two units served by the same Records Office routinely work together on a common function, one file series should be established to cover work in this area. Where units share some files but in general have different files for their own particular functions, two separate file series will be required.

It will sometimes be difficult to relate the functions of an agency to the organisational units. In such cases, work out the content and scope of the file series with the action officers who use the files.

5.9 Assigning File Reference Numbers

The reference number for a file should be constructed in accordance with the file classification system in use in the Records Office. The classification scheme provides a logical framework for organising files in relation to one another. The coding system is a representation of the classification scheme, in letters and/or numbers, and in accordance with the pre-established rules. Whichever system is used, each file must have a unique identifier comprising a multi-part alphabetical and/or numeric reference code. (***Options for Classification and coding schemes will be discussed in a separate Classification Manual)***

5.10 Assigning Sequential Numbers

The last element in the file reference will be a sequential number distinguishing it from other files relating to the same or a closely connected subject. This is normally written as '01', '02', etc. , for example:

AC/10/17/01

The growth of sequential numbers must be carefully monitored. When the number of files exceeds 20, this will be an indication that the classification of these files may need to be subdivided into narrower themes. Alternatively, a large sequence of files with the same classification may indicate that they are 'case' files which can more conveniently be classified as a series.

5. 11 Cross-Referencing Documents

Sometimes a document will deal with more than one subject. In such cases, the document should be cross-referenced to all appropriate General Subject Files. This entails preparing a photocopy of the document to be cross-referenced. The reference number of the file on which the original document is to be placed in addition to the reference numbers of all the files to which the document is to be cross-referenced should be written in red ink in the upper right-hand corner of the original document (e.g. 2-15, x-ref 1-19) if the document is incoming or, if it is outgoing, in the space provided for the reference number. The photocopies should bear the number of the file on which they are to be placed and the reference code assigned to the original document (e.g. 1-19, x-ref 2-15).

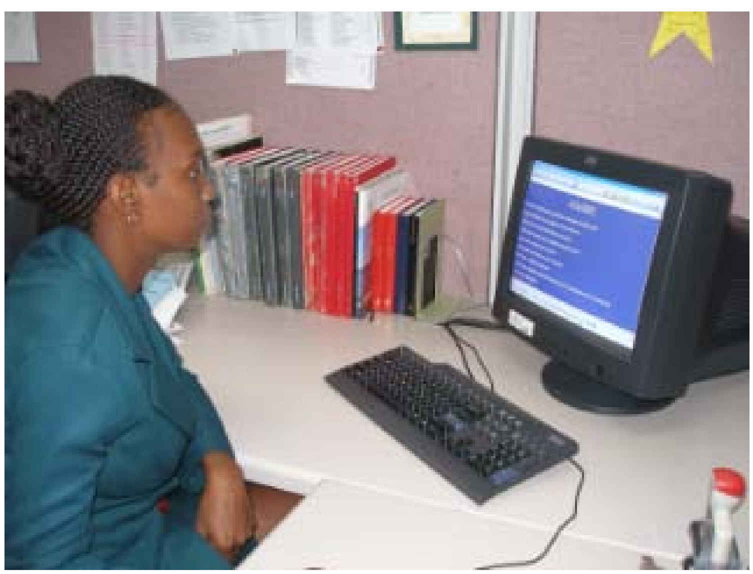
Staff members are asked to advise the Records Office whenever they think copies of incoming documents should be placed on more than one file.

5.12 Opening New File Parts

Files when initially opened do not need to be given a specific 'volume number'. Open a new part or volume of an existing file when the current part has become full or if it contains papers which span more than an agreed number of years (usually three to five, representing the active file cycle.) Indicate this by the use of sequential letters of the alphabet, thus, for example:

AC/10/17/01 (first part)
AC/10/17/01A (second part)
AC/10/17/01B (third part).

Note that the second part is numbered 'A'. Many documents already filed on the first file part, as well as the Records Office's file control forms, will already bear the file reference number AC/10/17/01. These cannot be changed. Write the reference number of any previous and subsequent file parts in the relevant boxes of the file cover and the file transit sheet.



Electronic File Management