

RECORDS CENTRE OPERATIONS

A records centre is a central facility designated to store semi-current records for the duration of their retention period. The primary function of a records centre is to serve as a cost-effective and efficient alternative to storing semi-current records in agency offices or storage areas, where the cost of storage space may be relatively high. Best records management practice favours centralised storage of semi-current records in records centres to realise cost savings through economies of scale, to eliminate the need for each public service agency to relocate its semi-current storage with each office move or agency reorganisation, and to prevent the accumulation of abandoned semi-current records in storage areas for which no public service agency takes on-going responsibility. Records centres not only provide a safe and secure storage space for such records, but their staff provide service back to the transferring agency by retrieving and delivering semi-current records if they are needed for reference purposes and by disposing of records according to approved records retention schedules.

To serve its purpose effectively, a records centre should meet the following minimum requirements:

- It should be located where it is not so far from the offices that will be making requests for records stored in it that those requests cannot be handled within a reasonable amount of time, and not so near to prime commercial space as to reduce the cost-effectiveness of the facility.
- It should be located away from areas and other buildings that introduce sources of risk to the records such as fire, floods, infestation or sabotage. For example, a records centre facility would never be situated in an area prone to flooding.
- It should be appropriately staffed to support its operation. At a minimum, a records centre clerk will be needed to carry out the functions performed by the records centre, such as receiving records for storage, assigning accession control numbers and storage locations, retrieving and refiling requested records, and implementing final disposition of records stored in the records centre.
- It should be designed and laid out to ensure the protection of records against loss by water damage, fire, infestation, harmful natural elements (e.g. sunlight and dust) or sabotage. The ideal facility will:

- be designed and constructed to prevent deterioration of records by natural sources (e.g. no windows in records storage areas to minimise the entry of natural light);
- be air-conditioned to keep temperature and humidity stable and at acceptable levels to prevent the deterioration of records;
- be designed and constructed to specifications that reduce the risk of destruction by natural disaster;
- have in place fire detection and suppressant systems, and be subject to regular fire inspections;
- not have water pipes running through or above areas where records are stored;
- be designed and constructed so as to reduce the accumulation of dust and dirt in the facility (e.g. no open windows, cement floors);
- be designed and constructed as a secure facility and have in place security systems;
- have an uninterrupted power supply to ensure that air-conditioning, fire suppressant and security systems remain running at all times; and
- will have adequate lighting to facilitate retrieval of records.

A public service organisation may choose to construct a purpose-built facility, retrofit an existing building, or, an option that may be best-suited to small islands, convert one or more shipping container(s) into a records centre facility.

In 1991, when the University of the West Indies was establishing its Archives and Records Management Programme, it required a records centre at its Mona Campus in Jamaica. At the time, there was no existing building that could be retrofitted to serve as a records centre and it was decided that a facility would have to be built. To keep the costs of construction to a minimum, the University contracted a company to convert two shipping containers into a new records centre. The contractor built a foundation on which to place the containers, welded the containers together, constructed a wooden floor, lined the container with dry-wall (gypsum rock board), and installed six rows of Dexion steel shelving. The facility was then air-conditioned. It has been serving effectively as the records centre for the Mona Campus since that time, providing 1,000 square feet of records storage space. A second container has recently been added to double the available space.

RECORDS CENTRE INVENTORY CONTROL SYSTEMS

Inventory control and retrieval systems for the records centre must be put into place and followed to ensure that there is maximum efficiency in the use of the facility and that records are retrievable.

Upon transfer of semi-current records from the originating agency and their receipt at the records centre, records centre staff should accession the records. Accessioning is the process and procedures involved in transferring physical custody of records. At this point, the records centre, as the new custodian of the records, becomes responsible for their protection, the tracking of their movement within and outside the centre, and ensuring their proper disposal (e.g. destruction or transfer to Archives).

Accessioning entails assigning a unique accession number to a given group of semi-current records transferred to the records centre, that is, all the records that arrive at one time and in one batch from a single agency. This number usually is recorded in an accession register, which may be manual or automated, to ensure that accession numbers are not duplicated. An accession register generally includes the following information:

- the date on which the accession was received;
- a brief description of the records;
- the number of the records retention schedule under which the records were transferred;
- the date of final disposition and action to be taken; and
- the quantity of records expressed in linear feet/metres.

In assigning an accession number, it is best to use a simple system. A combination of the year and a sequential number is often used (e.g. 1998-1, 1998-2, etc.).

Normally, an accession control record should also be created for each accession. In a manual system, accession records traditionally are kept in card form and filed numerically by accession number, but accession control records are automated easily.

In a manual system, it is helpful to maintain an index by record series title of each accession in storage in the records centre to assist in retrieving the records. The index cards or sheets should be filed alphabetically, and will indicate the accession

number and physical storage location of the files associated with a given records series title.

Once records have been accessioned, they must be physically placed on shelves in the records centre. It is best not to arrange records in a record centre by agency, as this method of arrangement will require that boxes be shifted when public service agencies re-organise. In keeping with best records management practices, each row, shelf and space on a shelf should be assigned a unique number or address, along the lines of the following:

Top View of Shelving

	Shelf 1			Shelf 7			Shelf 13		
Row 1	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Row 2	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
	Shelf 1			Shelf 7			Shelf 13		

Side View of Shelving

Shelf 1	Shelf 7	Shelf 13
Shelf 2	Shelf 8	Shelf 14
Shelf 3	Shelf 9	Shelf 15
Shelf 4	Shelf 10	Shelf 16
Shelf 5	Shelf 11	Shelf 17
Shelf 6	Shelf 12	Shelf 18

Using this system, each box within an accession receives its own unique address or location based on its placement on the shelves as follows:

- Box 1= Row 1, Shelf 1, Space 1 or 1-1-1;
- Box 2 = Row 1, Shelf 1, Space 2 or 1-1-2;
- Box 3= Row 1, Shelf 1, Space 3 or 1-1-3;
- Box 4= Row 1, Shelf 2, Space 1 or 1-2-1, etc.

The advantage of the records centre addressing system described above is that the location or address of a given box is completely independent of its content or relation to the other boxes that form part of the same accession. Giving each box a separate location code or a records centre address eliminates the need to physically re-arrange boxes in order to tighten up shelf space if some of the boxes in an accession are removed or if additional boxes are received at a later date. For example, if one box in an accession is disposed according to an approved records retention schedule, a new box from a completely different accession can be assigned to the space released by the previous box to achieve maximum efficiency in the use of records centre storage space. In addition, boxes need not be arranged on shelves in accession and box number order, but can be placed on shelves according to their rate of retrieval (e.g. boxes containing records with a higher rate of retrieval can be placed on lower shelves) to improve efficiency.

RECORDS CENTRE INVENTORY CONTROL SYSTEMS

An efficient inventory control system will ensure that any requests for material stored in the records centre can be dealt with quickly and accurately. Therefore, all records stored in a records centre must be listed. Controlling records centre inventory is much easier if forms listing the records have accompanied the records to the records centre because the records will not require listing after transfer, which can be time-consuming and create backlogs. Location codes, indicating the physical location of each box within a given accession stored in the records centre, should be recorded on the forms as well as in any indices to the accessions. The records centre's copy of the transfer form, once the accession number and location codes have been recorded, may be filed in accession number order to assist the records centre with retrieval of its inventory of records. Another copy of the transfer form should be returned to the transferring agency as notification of the records centre accession number and storage locations to facilitate future retrievals.

RECORDS CENTRE RETRIEVAL SYSTEMS

Whenever a request for material stored in the records centre is made, it is vital that a record of what has been requested from the centre is maintained in order to ensure its return. A loan form should be created for any material removed from a box. Records centre loan forms are usually completed in triplicate, with one copy being placed in the box from which the material has been removed, one copy attached to the material to be loaned and one copy filed in date order to facilitate the tracking of borrowed material. Periodically, records centre staff should review loan forms to recall material that has been out on loan for an established period of

APPENDIX J

Records Centre Inventory Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES RECORDS CENTRE

RECORDS INVENTORY ACC. NO. 92.5 DISP. AUTH. NO. _____ PAGE 24



FILE NO.	DESCRIPTIVE AND DATE RANGE	DISP. DATE	FINAL DISP.	BOX NO.	R.C. NO.
5/6/18	^{K 32577} Examiners Reports - Licentiate. 1 B.A. Theology pt. 1 1967-73			41	2-7-2
5/6/18	pt. 2 1974-80				
5/6/18	pt. 3 1981-89				
5/6/22	^{K 3873} Examiners Reports - Education pt. 1 1967-75				.
	pt. 2 1976-85				.
5/6/25	^{K 3753} Examiners Report - Law pt. 1 1972				.
5/6/25	pt. 2 1973-88				.
5/6/25/1	^{K 3912} Examiners Report - B.Sc. Special Anatomy, Psychology - Biochemistry (Comp 4)				.
5/6/26	^{K 3118} Examiners Reports - Scholarship Exams pt. 1 1972-76			41	.
5/6/26	pt. 2 1977-80			42	2-7-3
	pt. 3 1980-82				.
	pt. 4 1983-84				.
	pt. 5 1985-87				.
5/6/26	pt. 6 1987-91				.
5/6/27	^{K 3924} Examiners Reports - M.Sc. Acctg. & Marks Sheets pt. 1 1977-79				.
5/6/28	^{K 3928} Examiners Reports - Ph.D. M.Sc. Govt. pt. 1 1971-75				.
5/6/29	^{K 3934} Examiners Report Ph.D. M.Sc. Sociology pt. 1 1972-73				.
5/6/29	pt. 2 1978-89				.
5/6/37	^{K 3941} Examiners Reports - M.A. in Education pt. 1 1977-83			42	.

time (e.g. one month). Regular reviews are important to ensure that borrowed material is eventually returned to the records centre, not misplaced.

In order to ensure the timely delivery of requested material, delivery procedures and mechanisms will have to be in place. A records centre that is located far from other public service agencies' offices may require its own courier to ensure that requested material can be delivered within a reasonable length of time.

Once material is returned to the records centre, it should be refiled as quickly as possible so that it will be available if requested again and not misplaced. When material is returned to the records centre and refiled in the appropriate box, the copy of the loan form should be removed and matched to the copy filed in date order. The forms for returned loans can be tabulated periodically to gather statistics on records centre reference, such as:

- how many references are made to a given series of records;
- the dates of records that are being referenced;
- who is using the records centre;
- how often users are requesting material from the records centre; and
- the location of records with high rates of reference;

to assist the records centre to run more efficiently.