

Guidance note for completing National Archives Appraisal Form

The main elements recorded in the form should provide background information to appraise records for potential destruction. These should include the following:

Describe the Section/Unit that created the records series:

- What are its primary functions and responsibilities?
- Does the section or unit formulate policy or do activities primarily consist of conducting administrative process e.g. processing applications for a specific purpose?

Describe the specific record series:

- intellectual terms:
 - What is the title of the record series?
 - Why was it created? What function does it perform?
 - Is it underpinned by any statutory requirement e.g. specific piece of legislation / statutory instrument / grant scheme etc. and if so, how does that relate to the actual contents of the series?
 - What are the covering dates of the records series?
 - How are the records arranged? (e.g. were they created by a central registry system);
 - What are the 'typical' contents of the files within the series – are they case files for example, and if so, describe the typical process that they illustrate.
- in physical terms:
 - What is the format of the record series?
 - Does the series comprise just hardcopy records?
 - Are there also digital records?
 - What is the relationship between the hardcopy files and the online files? Are they hybrid files? Is everything 'printed to file' for example;

- Are hardcopy forms etc. scanned to form a complete digital file or are documents scanned as part of an 'ingest' system and other electronic documents created?
 - Is the 'digital file' regarded as the 'master record' or not? Provide details of the electronic management system if appropriate.
 - How many files does the records series contain?
 - What volume/quantity of material is involved?
 - What format are they in? For example, departmental files, maps, volumes, legal documents. Standard size or outside.
 - Where are they located i.e. stored? Give details of the address and a description of the location (commercial storage, department office etc).
- Administrative use:
 - Is the records series in current use?
 - Is the series finite, or if not, what is the annual rate of accumulation?
 - What is its relationship to other records? – is the information to be found elsewhere and if so, where?
 - Are there any access restrictions?
 - Are there any retention requirements and if so, what are they? For example, are there any legal / regulatory / fiscal / operational requirements that must be adhered to?

Other questions that must be answered in order to determine whether a record series is worthy of permanent preservation or if it may be destroyed, are:

How significant are the records for research?

The future research potential of records is the most difficult variable to determine. What is of relatively low research use today may become of great research use in the future. Perhaps even more important and difficult to predict are the issues and topics that will be considered of significance in the future. Nevertheless, it is important to consider this question in making appraisal decisions. It is necessary to consider the kinds and extent of current research use and to try to make inferences about anticipated use both by the public and by the Government.

How significant is the source and context of the records?

The significance of the functions and activities performed by the originating agency and the business context within which the records are created are important considerations for the appraiser (i.e. the National Archives).

Is the information unique?

Appraisals must be conducted in context with other records. The appraiser (i.e. the National Archives) must determine whether the records under consideration are the only, or the most complete, source for significant information. Records that contain information not available in other records are more likely to warrant permanent retention than records containing data that is duplicated in other sources.

Do the records document decisions that set precedents?

Do decisions or actions of the originating agency set precedents, or is each decision or action independent of others and merely based on policy set at some higher level? If the former, the records are more likely to warrant permanent retention. Examples include policy files at the highest level within an agency.