

Study Unit 1: Life Cycle of Record

Introduction

In this study unit, you will be introduced to the records life cycle, the stages and its relationship to the concept of archives management.

Learning Outcomes of Study Unit 1

Upon completion of this study unit, you should be able to:

- 1.1.Differentiate between documents and records.
- 1.2.Describe Records Life Cycle.
- 1.3.Explain the stages in managing records.

1.1. Concept of Document and Record

Document

- A unit of recorded information.
- Piece of written information in any form produced or recorded by an organization or person.

Some documents never end up in a records management system, but some need to be kept as evidence of business transactions, so they become official records. Therefore not all documents will become records, but records start as documents.

Record

This is a piece of information created by or recorded by an organization or business that gives evidence of a business transaction or decision. It can also be defined as information captured in reproducible form that is required for conducting business.

Therefore all records are documents but not all records are documents.

ITQ

Why is it important to keep records?

ITA

Records keep evidence; can be used for legal purposes, decision making, for continuity, and many more.

Box 1.1: Definition of Archives

Archives are a group of records usually valuable and historical that are in most cases not referred to in the day to day operations of the organization.

It is also defined as a place where important historical documents are permanently maintained.

Archives are preserved in and managed by specialized archival institutions where they are safeguarded and made available for use.

1.2. Records Lifecycle

This lifecycle theory maintains that recorded information has a life similar to that of a biological organism in that it is born, (i.e. the creation stage), it lives (i.e. maintenance and use) and it dies (i.e. disposition stage).

There are four major stages in the records life cycle

- Creation stage
- Distribution and Use
- Maintenance
- Disposition

Note: Not all records will need to go through all these stages, some will be disposed off at earlier stages depending on their critical nature.

1. Records Creation

This is the first phase and it involves records being created, collected or received through the daily transactions of the business unit, school or regional office and can include printed reports, email or phone messages, documents that detail the functions, policies, decisions or procedures of the agency.

Records can be created in different forms like text, Sound, Audiovisual files or Images.

2. Distribution & Use

This is the act of delivering a record to an individual who has a need to see the information contained in the record. To make information available, the distribution of recorded information must take place as rapidly as possible. Records are distributed internally by filing clerks and messengers (paper based) or electronically using computers.

Records are also distributed externally by either hand, post or courier companies e.g. DHL, Technology enabled delivery include email, social networks e.g. facebook, skype, twitter.

- **Records Use**

Records are created or received and they are further distributed so that they are used to support the business processes in the organizations. The records manager has to ensure that there is fair use of the records, so that individuals do not over delay with hard copies of records preventing access by others. Records will be used for as long as the transaction they pertain to is still being pursued or the accountability to that particular transaction is being required.

3. Storage and Maintenance

For the records to be effectively utilized they have to be maintained. This can include filing, retrieving, duplication, printing, dissemination, storage/filing, retrieval and protection of records.

- **Maintaining** the integrity of the organization's records. Integrity refers to records being current, accurate and relevant to the operation.
- **Protection:** This includes keeping records safe and secure, safe from physical hazards such as fire and floods, and secure to maintain the privacy of the records.
- **Control:** Regulate the use of records within the organization. Only authorized persons should have access to records. Records that are borrowed should be controlled. This includes documenting the records that are borrowed, who is borrowing them, when they are borrowed and when they are due back. It also includes tracking or following up, to make sure they are returned on time.
- **Storage:** In active or historical records must be stored in a safe place and organized for rapid retrieval if needed.



Figure 1: Storage of Archives

- **Preservation:** When a record has been determined to be of permanent value to the organization or community, then it is transferred to the archive for permanent archiving and preservation. If a record still has ongoing value to the agency, it will temporarily be stored either onsite at the agency or offsite with an approved service provider. When the retention stage of these records is reached, permission is sought from the agency or organization for their destruction.

4. Disposal

Disposal in this context is the opposite of retention. Therefore it describes the process of removing the records from the point of retention.

ITQ

Imagine what you throw away in life: how do you pass on what you do not need anymore?

1.3 Stages in Managing Records

The Lifecycle can also be explained in terms of three stages in managing records:

These include:

- Active stage (current stage)

- Semi active stage (semi current)
- Inactive stage

(a) Active Records/Current Records

This refers to the stage when records are referred to very frequently in the conduct of office business. They are also referred to as those records which contain information of immediate relevance to the current activities of the organization.

- Such records must always be easily accessible and are mostly kept in registry or individual offices.
- The active period is when the records are being used on a regular basis and can be based on the calendar or fiscal year or on a consistent event or activity e.g. registration.

(b) Semi-active Stage (Semi Current Records)

This means that the files remain accessible, but they will have to be retrieved from the offsite storage. It also refers to the category of records that are called upon less frequently in the conduct of office business. These are records not subject to frequent use and are stored in less accessible or less costly equipment.

- These are records referred to less than once a month and they must be under the jurisdiction of the registry but may be stored outside the main registry in a place called a Records Centre.

(c) Inactive Stage

- These are records no longer needed for current business.
- In this stage, records are no longer used for the conduct of business and therefore disposed the disposal may either be retention or destruction depending on the kind of value of that particular records.

Glossary of Terms for Study Unit 1

• Records Management

This is the systematic control of all records from the time they are created/received, through their processing, distribution, organization, storage and retrieval to their ultimate disposition.

It can also be defined as the task of ensuring that recorded information is managed economically and efficiently.

- **File**

This is a general term meaning a collection of records or a group of related records.

- **Records System**

A group of interrelated resources (people, equipment and supplies, space, procedures and information) acting together according to a plan to accomplish goals of the records management programme.

- **Archiving**

Archiving is the process by which inactive information, in any format, is securely stored for long periods of time. Such information may – or may not – be used again in the future, but nonetheless should be stored until the end of its retention schedule.

It should be emphasized that archived, inactive data can be made active again, so information should still be readily available if required at short notice.

- **Archival Science**

This is the study and practice of organizing, preserving, and providing access to information and materials in archives.

- **The Archivist**

This is the professional trained staff who work in the archiving facility. Archivists have a direct role to play in identifying and preserving the small percentage of records of enduring value found amid the mass of records generated in the course of daily affairs.

- To fulfill this role, archivists must be directly involved in the management of records throughout their life, as part of a continuum of care.

As well as managing those records transferred to the archival repository for permanent retention, archivists should be involved in the design and implementation of record keeping systems to ensure that cultural as well as business functions are satisfied.

- **Archives Administration**

This encompasses the design and equipping of archival repositories, methods and processes for the repair and conservation of archives, development of access policies, reference service procedures, and the dissemination of archives and archival information.

- **Records Series**

This is a group of records or documents which may be filed and maintained together as a unit throughout the life cycle. Records in a series are related because they result from the same function, the same activity, have the same or a similar form, have similar or related contents, or because of some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use. Because of this, records series are filed together.

- **Records Appraisal**

Appraisal is the process by which archivists determine the administrative, legal, and fiscal value as well as the historical and long-term research value of records.

Once the value of a record series has been determined, a realistic retention period can be assigned to it. Appraisal can take place at any point during a record series' life cycle, but is most frequently done when the records become inactive.

- **Archives Institution**

The agency responsible for selecting, acquiring, preserving, and making available archives; it is also known as an archival agency or archives.

Self-Review Questions (SRQ) For Study Session 1

Now that you have completed this study unit, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. Write your answers in your Study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next Study Support Meeting or Online interactive sessions.

1. A record has a lifespan similar to a biological agent. Discuss.
2. Describe the records lifecycle.
3. Differentiate between a record and a document.