Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit

GUIDELINE 5:
Adapting and Implementing the PARBICA Administrative Record Plan

PARBICA
Pacific Regional Branch International Council on Archives

CONTENTS

WHAT IS A RECORD PLAN?

A record plan is a system for developing titles for files. Good file titling is important for efficient public administration and good decision-making because it makes government information easier to find and use.

Record plans specify how records are to be organised and provide a kind of 'roadmap' to the records of the agency. They describe the types of files an agency has and provide guidance on how staff should title and organise those files. A good record plan is one of the essential components of a recordkeeping system. It will help you to:

- document your activities effectively;

- identify records consistently;

- retrieve records quickly; and

- decide which records are no longer needed.

A record plan gives part of the title of each file, but lets staff, in consultation with records management staff, choose file titles that suit the topic of the file. This should mean that staff do not need to put lots of unrelated material on the same file. Instead, they can create a file that is more specifically about the work that they are doing.

This Record Plan only covers administrative actions that all government departments carry out, such as managing staff and finances. As well as using this Record Plan for its administrative files, each government agency will also need to develop an additional record plan for its core business areas that no other agency carries out. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will need to develop a record plan for files about diplomatic relations with other governments, as no other ministry is responsible for this area of government work. The Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA) has produced guidelines on developing record plans for core business areas, which you can find on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

This Record Plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the PARBICA Disposal Schedule. The Disposal Schedule will provide guidance on how long governments may need to keep the types of administrative records they create. Using this Record Plan to give titles to administrative files will in turn make it easier to make decisions about how long to keep those files using the Disposal Schedule. You will be able to find the Schedule on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD FILE TITLING

Official recordkeeping systems often fall into disuse when they are too difficult for staff to use. If staff cannot easily find the file they need, they may not be able to access information about past activities to inform their decisions. They may also be reluctant to place current papers on files if they are unsure that they will be able to locate the information again. Poor file-titling systems can also make it difficult for staff to find the correct file on which to place information, meaning that the record of a particular activity is fragmented across a number of files and cannot be easily pieced together.

If government officers can find files quickly, they can be more efficient and not waste valuable time looking for the information they need. Good file titling makes it easier for staff to see if there is already a file on the subject they need. This leads to better decision-making because officers have access to all of the information they need to make the right decisions. It is also easier to make sure that all of the information about a topic is in the one place, so that you have the whole history of the process on one file.

If everyone understands the file's title, it is easier to make sure that staff do not create new files when the right file is already available. One method for making filing systems simpler to use is to create a record plan that describes the activities documented in the filing system in a consistent fashion, using language that is familiar and meaningful to the staff who will use the system. This Record Plan is designed to help all agencies to create titles for their administrative files so that everyone can understand what each file is about.

A record plan can help government agencies to operate more efficiently and accountably. Well-described records are more easily located, providing efficiencies in administration because less time is spent locating vital records. Decision-making is often more effective because officers have access to relevant information about past actions and decisions. Agencies can also be more accountable because full records of their administration of a particular function or activity are able to be kept and used.

Good file titling also helps organisations to make good decisions about which records they need to keep and which ones they no longer need. The PARBICA Administrative Record Plan is designed to be used with the PARBICA Disposal Schedule. A disposal schedule provides a transparent and accountable system for making decisions about how long records need to be retained for administrative, legal or historical purposes. The Disposal Schedule uses the same system for describing records as the one used in the Administrative Record Plan. By using both the Record Plan and the Disposal Schedule, it can be easier for government agencies to identify which records they need to keep and which ones are no longer needed.

WHO IS THE PARBICA RECORD PLAN FOR?

PARBICA has developed this Record Plan to provide a starting point for Pacific Islands governments and other organisations that wish to implement new or update existing file-titling systems. It was drafted in consultation with a working group, which was made up of representatives from the following countries:

- Australia
- Cook Islands
- Fiji
- Nauru
- New Zealand
- Palau
- Papua New Guinea
- Samoa
- Vanuatu.

This Record Plan should be considered a draft. It covers all of the kinds of administrative records that most government departments are likely to create and use. Each country that uses the Administrative Record Plan will need to make changes to some parts of the text to make sure that it fits in with its own legal, administrative and cultural requirements. PARBICA has also produced additional guidelines on how to tailor the Record Plan, and on how to implement it in your own organisation. You can find these guidelines on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

This Record Plan does not include information about the records of the core business of government departments. The core business of a government agency is the work it is responsible for which no other part of the government does. For example, only the Ministry of Health manages hospitals, and only the Ministry of Education runs schools. Each ministry or department will need to produce its own record plan that gives instructions on how to develop titles for files about these types of work. PARBICA has produced a guideline on how to develop a record plan for core business, which you can find on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

Once you have developed a record plan for your core business activities, you will also be able to develop a disposal schedule for those records. A disposal schedule provides a transparent and accountable system for making decisions about how long records need to be retained for administrative, legal or historical purposes. PARBICA is developing guidelines on how to develop disposal schedules for core business records. You will be able to find these on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

HOW TO ADAPT THE RECORD PLAN FOR YOUR GOVERNMENT

The Administrative Record Plan has been developed by government officers from a range of Pacific Island countries. You should think of this Record Plan as a draft. It covers all of the kinds of administrative records that most government departments are likely to create and use. However, each country that uses the Administrative Record Plan will need to make changes to some parts of the text to make sure that it fits in with its own legal, administrative and cultural requirements.

A record plan is designed to reflect:

- the work an organisation does;
- the way that it does that work; and
- the words it uses to describe the work.

When you use this Record Plan you might find that some of the headings do not fit with the way your government works, or some of the words that are used may be unfamiliar to you and your staff.

It is important that your record plan is as simple to use as possible. If staff do not understand how it works they may not use it. If they do not use the record plan they may not file their documents correctly, which means that the organisation may not be able to find important information when it needs it.

There is one important thing to note, however, before you decide to make changes to the Administrative Record Plan. The Record Plan is designed to be used with the PARBICA Disposal Schedule. The Disposal Schedule provides guidance on how long governments may need to keep the types of administrative records they create. Using this Record Plan to give titles to administrative files will make it easier to decide how long to keep those files using the Disposal Schedule. You will be able to find the Disposal Schedule on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

If you make changes to the Administrative Record Plan, it may no longer match exactly with the Disposal Schedule. This may make it harder for staff to decide which records they need to keep. If you make changes to the Record Plan, the file titles staff have used to describe their records may not match up with the descriptions of similar records in the Disposal Schedule. PARBICA is producing guidelines on developing disposal schedules and you may wish to read them before you make any changes to the Administrative Record Plan. You will be able to find guidelines on developing disposal schedules on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

There are two main ways that you can make changes to the Record Plan. One is by changing the language that it uses to describe files. The other is to change the structure of the Record Plan or the way the headings are grouped together.

Language

Because the Administrative Record Plan has been developed by people from many different countries, it may use words to describe some parts of government business that are different to the way you would describe them in your country.

One example is under the heading 'Financial Management – Budgeting'. In some countries, the documents agencies use to ask the government for extra money as part of the budget process are called 'new policy proposals', while other countries might call these same documents 'new spending proposals'. In other places they might be called 'budget bids'.

Another example can also be found under the heading 'Financial Management – Budgeting'. In some countries, the process of moving money from one budget allocation to another is called a 'financial transfer', while in other countries this might be called a 'virement' or an 'intersubhead transfer'.

You should try to adapt the Record Plan so that it uses words that officers in your government will understand. If staff do not understand the descriptions in your record plan they might file documents in the wrong place, and it may be very hard to find them again.

You can also make changes to the words you use in the headings of the Administrative Record Plan. For example, the Record Plan uses the heading 'Personnel and Establishment'. There are, though, many different ways of describing how governments manage their staff. In your country you may prefer to call this section (and the files that you will title using it) something else, such as:

- 'Staff Management';
- 'Human Resources Management'; or
- 'People and Structures'.

The golden rule is to make sure that you use words so that people will be able to understand what each heading means, and that they will not be confused about which heading they should use to title their files.

It is also important to avoid confusion by making sure that you do not use the same word to describe two different things. For example, under the heading 'Financial Management', the Record Plan includes a secondary heading called 'Accounting', and another one called 'Evaluation and Reporting'.

The word 'account' can also mean a kind of report. It would be confusing, though, to use one word to describe both the accounting records of an agency and the reports it sends to the government. When you choose words to describe the activities in your record plan, make sure that they are clear and that people will understand what you mean by those words.

If you find that some headings are still a little bit confusing, you can add notes to the Administrative Record Plan to help people understand which heading they should use. For example, there are notes under the secondary heading called 'Audit', which appears under the primary headings of both 'Financial Management' and 'Strategic Management'. These notes help staff to decide which is the right heading for them to use.

Structure

The other way in which you might want to alter the Record Plan is to change its structure. That is, you might want to:

- add new primary headings;
- remove some primary headings;
- add new secondary headings;

- remove some secondary headings; or

- move secondary headings so that they appear under a different primary heading.

Adding primary headings

You may want to add new primary or first-level headings so that you can describe the work that each heading relates to more clearly, or so that you can keep the files about different types of work separately. For example, the Record Plan includes the heading 'Asset and Resources Management', which covers things such as managing buildings, vehicles and furniture. You may prefer to split these areas into their own headings so that, instead of having one heading called 'Asset and Resources Management' you might have one heading called 'Fleet Management', another called 'Property Management' and another called 'Equipment and Stores'.

The advantage of having many headings is that you can make sure that your files are very specific and only cover one matter at a time. The disadvantage is that you will have many more smaller files, and staff may find it difficult to choose which of the extra headings is the right one for them.

If you add any primary headings to your record plan, make sure that the language you use is clear so that staff understand what the heading should be used for. Also, do not leave anything out. If you are taking away the heading 'Asset and Resources Management', make sure that you add headings that cover all of the things the existing heading can be used for, such as vehicles, buildings, computers or equipment.

Removing primary headings

You may want to remove primary headings if they relate to functions that not all agencies in your government do. For example, the Record Plan includes the heading 'Personnel and Establishment'. In some countries, all agencies have a responsibility to manage their staff and keep records about them. However, in other countries, all staff management is done by one department, such as the Public Service Department. If this is the case, you may want to remove the heading 'Personnel and Establishment', as most agencies do not need to use this heading.

Remember, though, that it is likely that some part of government is responsible for the work that is described by the heading you are removing. If you take a heading out of the Administrative Record Plan, chances are that you will need to put it into the core business record plan of one of the agencies in your government. PARBICA has produced a guideline that provides more information on creating record plans for core business. You can find this on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

Adding secondary headings

You may want to add new secondary headings under a primary heading if there are extra steps in the way your government manages some processes, or if you want to keep some types of records separate from others. For example, the Record Plan uses the heading 'Publishing and Printing'. The process of producing a publication can be quite complicated, and may start with writing a draft, editing, having a design created for the cover, and selling the final product. If your organisation does lots of publishing, you may prefer to have separate files for each of these steps so that it is easier to find the file you need. If this is the case, you may want to add extra secondary headings that cover things like 'Drafting', 'Design', and 'Editing', as well as the heading for 'Publishing and Printing'.

The advantage of having many headings is that you can make sure that your files are very specific and only cover one part of the process at a time. The disadvantage is that you will have many more smaller files, and staff may find it difficult to choose which of the extra headings is the right one for them.

Removing secondary headings

You may want to remove secondary headings if they describe processes or parts of processes that are not carried out in your government. For example, the heading 'Audit' appears under the heading 'Financial Management' as well as 'Strategic Management'. Almost all governments carry out financial audits, and it is likely that you will need to keep the heading 'Audit' in the 'Financial Management' section of the Record Plan.

However, some governments also have something called a 'performance audit', which can look at the way agencies do other parts of their work such as managing their assets or making decisions about grants. These kinds of audits are covered by the heading 'Strategic Management' because they are about more than just looking at the government's accounts. If the Audit Office in your government does not carry out these types of 'performance audits', you may prefer to take the heading 'Audit' away from the primary heading 'Strategic Management'.

In other cases, you may wish to remove a secondary heading because you believe it will be simpler for staff to use a heading that is already in the Record Plan for documents about that activity. For example, the Record Plan has a heading called 'Financial Statements' under the heading 'Financial Management'. Financial statements are a very specific kind of report, and they are also a specific kind of accounting record. As there are already headings for 'Accounting' and for 'Evaluation and Reporting' under the heading 'Financial Management', you might choose to remove the heading 'Financial Statements'.

The advantage of this is that it is easier for staff to choose a file title as there are fewer options available. The disadvantage is that it might be harder for you to find the agency's financial statements because they will be mixed in with files about all of the other types of financial reports and accounting records.

If you do choose to remove headings, always make sure that there is another place for staff to put the records that might have gone under that heading, and that there is a clear explanation for staff about where each type of record should be filed.

Moving secondary headings to another primary heading

Sometimes the 'border' between one heading and another is not always clear. The people who will be using your record plan may think it makes more sense for a secondary heading to be under a primary heading different to the one used in the Administrative Record Plan.

For example, the Administrative Record Plan includes the heading 'Intellectual Property' under the heading 'Information Management'. However, staff in your organisation might think of intellectual property as an asset that the government owns, rather than as a type of information. If this is the case, you may wish to move the heading 'Intellectual Property' so that it is included under the primary heading of 'Asset and Resources Management' because this is where staff in your organisation will expect to find it.

Before you move a secondary heading, think about whether or not it will make sense under a different primary heading. For example, in the Record Plan the heading 'Occupational

Health and Safety' sits under the heading 'Personnel and Establishment' because it relates to keeping people healthy and safe. It may make sense to move this heading to 'Asset and Resources Management' because often we have to maintain buildings and equipment to keep people safe. However, it would not really make sense to move this heading to 'Financial Management', as health and safety do not have very much to do with how the organisation manages its money.

IMPLEMENTING THE RECORD PLAN

If your organisation has decided that it would like to use the Administrative Record Plan to title its administrative files, there are a few things you will need to think about to prepare for implementation. As with any new system or procedures, you will need to have a plan for how you will make the change from an old system to a new one.

In particular, there are three areas you will need to think about. They are:

- file numbering;
- file registration; and
- transitional arrangements.

File numbering

It is important that each file your organisation creates has a unique identification code. Most of the time giving files a number is the best way of doing this, although for some types of files, such as personnel files, using the name of the person the file is about makes more sense.

Giving numbers to files helps to keep them in the right order so that people can find them again. It is important that each file has a unique number – that is, you need to make sure that you do not give the same number to two different files. If two files have the same number, it can become confusing for users and they may not always know which is the file that they need to use.

There are many different ways you can allocate numbers to files. If you are using the Administrative Record Plan, PARBICA recommends that you use a multiple number system.

Multiple number systems

To use a multiple number system with the Administrative Record Plan, you will need to allocate a number to each of the headings in the Record Plan. It may be easiest to allocate numbers like this:

Number	Heading
01	Asset and Resources Management
02	External Relations
03	Financial Management
04	Information Management
05	Personnel and Establishment
06	Strategic Management

Using this system, all the files your organisation creates using the heading 'Asset and Resources Management' will start with the number 01. All of the files your organisation creates using the heading 'External Relations' will start with the number 02, and so on.

You will then need to allocate numbers to each of the sub-headings under these main headings. These numbers will then become the second part of your file number. For example:

Number	Heading
01	Asset and Resources Management
01/01	Acquisition
01/02	Consultation and Advice
01/03	Disposal

Number	Heading
02	External Relations
02/01	Ceremonies, Events and Visits
02/02	Conferences, Seminars and Workshops
02/03	Complaints and Feedback

Using the Administrative Record Plan, each time a new file is created a staff member will need to decide what the third part of the file title will be. This should be a running number.

So, the first file the organisation creates using the headings 'Asset and Resources Management – Acquisition' will be numbered 01/01/01, the second file using these headings will be numbered 01/01/02, the third one will be 01/01/03, and so on.

Using this system, your list of file numbers and titles might look like this:

01/01/01	Asset and Resources Management – Acquisition – Photocopiers
01/01/02	Asset and Resources Management – Acquisition – Vehicles
02/01/01	External Relations – Ceremonies, Events and Visits – Official opening of Ministry Building
02/01/02	External Relations – Ceremonies, Events and Visits – Visit by Prime Minister to local schools

Some governments also put letter codes that relate to the name of the agency the file belongs to in front of each file number. For example, the Ministry of Home Affairs might have file numbers that look like this:

MHA01/01/01   MHA01/02/01   MHA01/03/01

Unique numbers

As already mentioned, it is important that each file number is unique and is not repeated anywhere. This means that if you produce a record plan for your organisation's core functions, you will need to give the headings in that record plan numbers that are different

from the one you have used in the Administrative Record Plan. The easiest way to do this is probably to give the first heading in your core record plan the number 07, the second heading 08, and so on. You can find guidelines on developing a record plan for core functions on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitIntroPage.htm.

File registration

Registering files involves making a formal record of the title of each file the organisation creates, the number allocated to the file and the date it was created. Registering files is important in complying with the *International Standard on Records Management* (ISO 15489). Registering files:

- helps the organisation to know what files it has; and

- helps staff to find out if there is already a file about the matter they are dealing with.

Registering files is particularly important if you are using a record plan system. Because staff will be creating file titles according to the type of work they are doing, it is not possible to know in advance what files the organisation will create. File registration is also important for keeping track of what numbers have been allocated to each new file so that you do not give the same number to two different files.

It is very important that the organisation gives the responsibility for creating and registering files to one area or one person within the organisation. If no one has responsibility for file registration, it is likely that no one will do the job. This means that staff throughout the organisation may create many different files about the same work, and the organisation as a whole will have no idea what files it has or where they are. If more than one area of the organisation has responsibility for registering files, it will be very difficult to keep track of what files have been created and what numbers have been allocated to them.

Every organisation should appoint a records manager who is responsible for creating and registering all files, and for keeping the file register up to date.

PARBICA has created a checklist that organisations can use to see if they have in place all of the things they need to manage their records properly. Assigning responsibility for records management is one of the key tasks on the checklist. You can find the Recordkeeping Capacity Checklist on the PARBICA website at http://www.parbica.org/Toolkit%20pages/ToolkitGuideline1.htm.

Transitional arrangements

Just as with any new system, you will need to plan for how you will change from your old file-titling system to using the PARBICA Record Plan. Here are some things to think about:

- Have a plan for implementing your record plan. Think about setting a date for everyone to start using the new plan and the instructions you will need to give to staff.

- Staff will probably need some sort of training to help them use the new system. Think about who needs this training and how you might be able to give it to them.

- It is usually not a good idea to change the names of old files when you move to a new system. Instead, close all of your old files and write a note on them that tells staff what the title of the new file for that action is in the new system. Most file covers

include a section where you can write this kind of information. Staff can continue to refer to the old files if they need to, but they should only put new papers on a new file using the new record plan system.

- It is also usually better not to change file numbers on old files. This is sometimes called 'top-numbering'. Instead of giving new numbers to your old files, consider closing all of them and writing a note on them that tells staff what the number of the new file for that action is in the new system. Most file covers include a section where you can write this kind of information.

- It is important not to have two files with the same number. If your old filing system uses a numbering system similar to the one suggested for the Administrative Record Plan, consider starting the numbering of your new files with the number after the last number in your current system. For example, if you already have files that start with number 05, you might want to make the 'Asset and Resources Management' heading in this Record Plan number 06. The 'External Relations' heading would then be number 07, and so on.

- Similarly, if you are adding a core record plan to the Administrative Record Plan, give the first heading in your core record plan the first number after the ones you have used for the Administrative Record Plan. For example, if the number for the heading 'Strategic Management' is 06, the first heading in your core record plan would be number 07, the next heading would be 08, and so on.

- It is possible to start using the Administrative Record Plan without creating a record plan for your organisation's core functions. This might mean removing headings from your old file-titling system that relate to administrative functions, and instructing staff to no longer use them. They can still, though, use the old headings that relate to your core functions. If you do this, make sure that you have thought about the way you will number your new files so that they do not overlap, and make sure that you provide some instructions for staff so that they know when they should use the old system and when they should use the new one.