

Identifying Official and Transitory Records Guideline

Data, Information and Privacy Services Division, Data, Information and Records Services Branch

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Guideline Statement

The intent of this guideline is to educate and empower government staff to appropriately identify transitory and official records.

This guideline supports the [Official and Transitory Records Directive](#).

Authority

- [Government Organization Act](#)
- [Records Management Regulation](#)

Scope

This guideline applies to all departments defined under section 14 of Schedule 11 of the *Government Organization Act* and agencies, boards, and commissions as defined in Schedule 1 of the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation](#).

Agencies, boards, and commissions that are not contained within Schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation are encouraged to align with this guideline.

Guideline Description

This guideline is designed to assist Government of Alberta staff (which includes, but is not limited to, employees, contractors, volunteers, appointees, interns, and students working with a public body) with identifying whether a record is transitory or official.

The classification of a record as official or transitory impacts the information management requirements and obligations to which the record is subject—including who is authorized to dispose of the record. Regardless of whether a record is transitory or official, all records must be managed in accordance with government information management policy instruments (e.g., relevant records retention and disposition schedule, etc.).

NOTE: If there is any doubt about the classification of a record, do not treat it as transitory. Contact a supervisor and/or the appropriate Senior Records Officer for clarification where necessary.

For information on the disposition of transitory records, refer to the [Retention and Disposition of Official and Transitory Records Guideline](#).

Guideline Specification

The identification of records as official or transitory is determined by the content of the record, the context in which the record exists (e.g., regulatory requirements, the information management lifecycle stage of the record, etc.), and its business value.

Because the content and/or context of a record can change throughout its lifecycle, it is important to recognize that record classification is not static—a transitory record can become an official record in some contexts. Business areas must establish and maintain processes to ensure that records are managed appropriately if a transitory record becomes an official record.

Government of Alberta Information

What is a record?

As per the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*: “record” means a record of information in any form and includes notes, images, audiovisual recordings, x-rays, books, documents, maps, drawings, photographs, letters, vouchers and papers and any other information that is written, photographed, recorded or stored in any manner, but does not include software or any mechanism that produces records.

Records may exist in a variety of formats, from paper documents, to emails, to video recordings.

All records in the custody and/or under the control of the Government of Alberta must be classified as official or transitory. The format of a record does not determine whether it is transitory or official—the determination must be made based on content, context and business value.

Official and transitory records are:

- considered to be in the custody and/or under the control of the department responsible for the business activity represented in and/or by the record, and must be managed in accordance with government information management policy instruments;
- potentially responsive to active (or reasonably anticipated) litigation; and
- subject to the information access request and privacy requirements of the FOIP Act.

As a means of enabling the efficient and consistent identification of official and transitory records, business areas should maintain an awareness of the records generated in the regular course of their business and the relevant criteria for closure.

Identifying Transitory Records

As per the [Transitory Records Schedule](#), **transitory records** contain information in any format that is of temporary or limited usefulness. Transitory records may be used in the preparation of more complete records such as those that document actions, recommendations, opinions, decisions, approvals, or the creation and modification of policy instruments. However, transitory records are not relied on as evidence of government activities, events or transactions or to understand the delivery of programs or services.

Determining if a record is transitory depends on individual assessment of the value, content and/or context of the record; questions that should be considered when evaluating a potential transitory record include (but are not limited to):

- Does the record capture a decision or approval?
- Does the record capture evidence of a government decision and/or transaction?
- Is the record temporary? Was it created or received for a minor and/or immediate purpose (e.g., newsletters, an email recognizing a colleague’s contributions to a project, etc.)?
- Was the record created or used solely in the process of creating a subsequent record (e.g., audio and video recordings of meetings that have been fully transcribed, etc.)?
- Is the record a preliminary version or draft?
 - Is the draft of temporary or limited use in the preparation of a more complete record (e.g., incomplete drafts not intended for use or reference, etc.)?
 - Is the record a proofing draft (e.g., a draft project proposal is in the early stages of development) provided for informational purposes (e.g., in preparation for a meeting)?

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- **NOTE:** Not all drafts are transitory (e.g., draft legislation, legal documents, etc). If there is any doubt about the classification of a record, do not treat it as transitory. Contact a supervisor and/or the appropriate Senior Records Officer for clarification where necessary.
- Is the record being used for personal reference purposes (e.g., a convenience copy of a draft, a copy of a published policy instrument that has been highlighted, etc.)?
- Is the record kept for easy access to the information it contains as opposed to its intrinsic or evidential value?
- Is the record an exact copy where nothing has been added, changed or deleted?
- Is the record intended for collecting or storing information, but was not used, has been used and erased, and/or has become obsolete (e.g., old letterhead)?
 - **NOTE:** outdated blank forms, cheques and/or tickets have special procedures for disposition. Contact Transfers, Storage and Disposition (TSD) for additional guidance.
- Is the record solicited or unsolicited material received or collected for information or reference purposes only (e.g., course listings, press clippings, external publications, etc.)?

Is it Transitory or Official?

In some cases it may be challenging to identify whether records are transitory or official; appropriately identifying and classifying government records requires discernment. Contact a supervisor and/or the appropriate Senior Records Officer for clarification where necessary.

NOTE: Business areas understand the information they create and the context in which it is used; as such, they should establish internal processes for classifying transitory and official records. The classification of a business area's records should be communicated to business area staff for efficient identification and management of those records.

The flowchart below has been developed to support business areas in identifying transitory and official records.

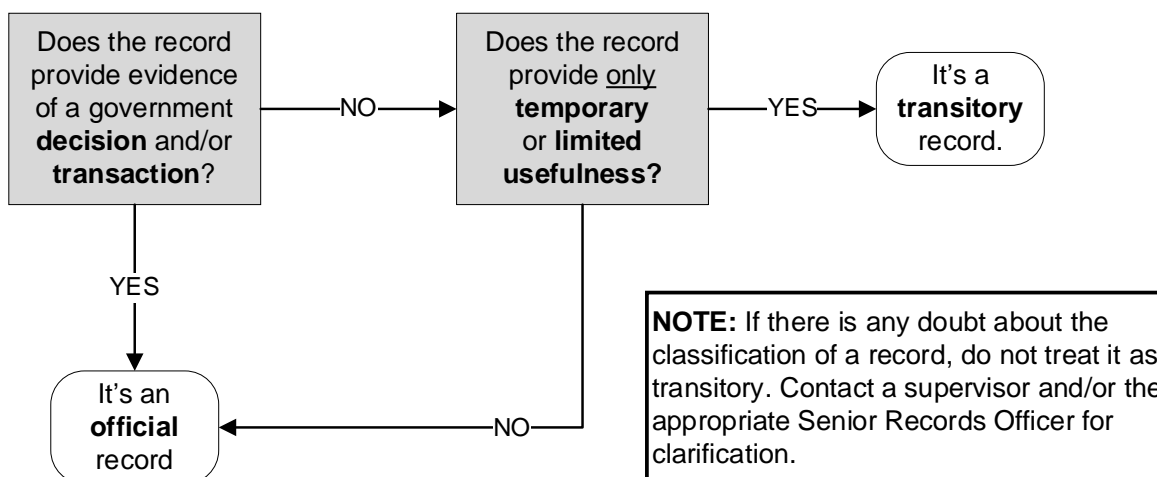


Figure 1: Official and Transitory Records Decision Diagram

For information on the disposition of transitory records, refer to the [Retention and Disposition of Official and Transitory Records Guideline](#).

Managing Official Records

Any record that is not transitory must be managed as an official record.

Official records are required to document actions, recommendations, opinions, decisions, approvals, or the creation of policy instruments and subsequent changes. Official records provide evidence of government activities, events or transactions, and are needed to understand the delivery of programs.

Official records must be retained in official information management systems (e.g., file rooms, SharePoint Online, etc.) and managed in accordance with the government's information management policy instruments (e.g., records retention and disposition schedules). **NOTE:** Microsoft Outlook is not an official information management system.

Roles and Responsibilities

The following is a high-level overview of the primary responsibilities and/or business process contributions of government staff involved in the identification of official and/or transitory records. While the selection of an official or transitory classification is ultimately the responsibility of the information controller, identifying the appropriate classification may involve consultation with the following stakeholders:

- information controller
- information custodian
- Senior Records Officer (SRO)
- Transfers, Storage and Disposition
- Government of Alberta staff

Information Controllers have the responsibility and decision making authority for assigned collections of information, including (but not limited to) regulating and administering use, disclosure, and/or disposition of official records.

Information Custodians have the responsibility for maintaining and/or administering the systems and/or applications in which official records are managed without having responsibility for the official records.

Senior Records Officer (SRO) is responsible for:

- providing advice and guidance regarding the identification and appropriate management of official and transitory records for their respective department(s).
- consulting with various business areas to facilitate activities necessary for records management including (but not limited to):
 - transfer, storage and/or disposition of records in any media (i.e., physical and electronic);
 - litigation support activities; and
 - interpretation and/or application of records retention and disposition schedules.

Transfers, Storage and Disposition is responsible for:

- Transitory Records Program (e.g., transitory grey bins);
- dispositioning eligible official records that have met their retention period; and
- consulting with SROs as required (e.g., active litigation holds, FOIP access requests, relevance of active retention schedules, transfer of records' custody, etc.).

IDENTIFYING OFFICIAL AND TRANSITORY RECORDS GUIDELINE

Government of Alberta Staff are responsible for:

- identifying whether records are official or transitory;
 - This may require consultation with the information controller and/or the appropriate SRO.
- routinely dispositioning transitory records as soon as their business use has ended; and
- ensuring official records are managed in an official information management system (e.g., file rooms, enterprise content management systems, etc.).

Compliance

Consequences of non-compliance with this standard could result in the loss of information, damage to Government of Alberta's reputation, exposure of Albertans to harm and/or incurrence of unnecessary costs (including the risk of not being able to respond appropriately to a claim in court). Depending on the severity of non-compliance:

- either informal or formal requests and/or follow-ups may be made by Data, Information and Privacy Services Division, Corporate Internal Audit Services, Cybersecurity Services, Office of the Information Privacy Commissioner, Office of the Auditor General and/or Public Service Commission, and
- legislated disciplinary action (i.e., *Public Service Act*) may be taken.

Supporting Resources

- [Retention and Disposition of Official and Transitory Records Guideline](#)
- [Data and Information Security Classification Standard](#)
- [Safeguarding Government Information Guide](#)

Contact

Subject	When to Contact	Contact
Information Management	If you have inquiries on how to manage government information.	Senior Records Officers Contact List
Information Access and Privacy	If you have inquiries regarding personal information and/or the protection of privacy.	FOIP Office or Coordinator Lookup
Cybersecurity Services	If you have inquiries regarding information security.	Sector Information Security Officers Contact List
Transfers, Storage and Disposition	If you have inquires about records transfers, storage and/or disposition.	Transfers, Storage and Disposition Contact