

Office of Information Affairs

File Plan vs. Records Schedule Quick Guide

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) requires Federal Agencies to utilize NARA approved Records Schedules to ensure proper management and disposal of records, determine which government records should be kept and which may be destroyed, as required by the Federal Records Act (FRA), [Public Law 113-187](#), and related legislation and regulations.

Agency Records Officers, appointed by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the Senior Agency Official for Records Management (SAORM), the Principal Deputy General Counsel, are responsible for their Agency records management practices, including approving and documenting disposition once USDA records and information become inactive.

USDA Personnel* must request [ARO approval to dispose](#) of, destroy, discard, delete, offsite transfer, or accession USDA records and information.

*USDA Personnel are defined as employees, contractors, students, volunteers, interns, Fellows, and Political Appointees.

A Records Schedule is a legal document that tells you how long to keep specific types of records and what should happen to those records when you no longer need them. Agencies must have schedules for their records, and those schedules must be approved by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

A File Plan contains information in the records schedule, tailored to a unit of your office, and contains information beyond that of the records schedule. For example, it may also contain special storage requirements, filing organization instructions, non-records and essential records information.

See page 2 of this Quick Guide for a table comparing the characteristics of a File Plan and a Records Schedule.

For any questions, contact the Departmental Records Program:

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Table 1: File Plan vs. Records Schedule

Category	File Plan	Records Schedule
Record Series Title	X	X
Series Description	X	X
Records Status: Permanent or Temporary	X	X
Retention Period	X	X
Cutoff Instructions	X	X
Disposition Instructions	X	X
Legal Disposition Authority	X	X
Requires Annual Review	X	X
Requires NARA Approval		X
Requires Agency Records Officer Approval	X	
Office/Unit Specific Information	X	
Location of Records (Physical or Electronic)	X	
Records Organization / Filing Instructions	X	
Special Storage / Security Requirements	X	
Essential Records Status	X	
Non-Record Information	X	