



DIRECTIVE R3

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS TO A FILE PLAN

**National Archives and Records Service of South Africa
June 2003**

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE COMPILER OF A FILE PLAN

1. The instructions should be kept in the same sequence as they appear in the prototype.
2. These are standard instructions and only the following paragraphs may be adapted as indicated below:

Par. 1

In the open space in this paragraph the complete name of the body to which the filing system is applicable must be given, eg. Department of Home Affairs, Head Office or Municipality of Bentville, Town Secretary.

Par. 2

Insert the year of implementation of the file plan after 1/.... and 2/....

Par. 3

The official title of the person in charge of the file plan must be indicated here. According to section 12 of the National Archives Regulations this person should:

- a) be in possession of an appropriate university or technikon qualification and/or have appropriate professional experience;
- b) have successfully completed the National Archives and Records Service's Records Management Course;
- c) possess a thorough knowledge of the body's organisational structure, functions and records systems; and
- d) be responsible for promoting effective, efficient and accountable management of the body's records and ensuring, by inspections and other means, the body's compliance with the provisions of the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act (No. 43 of 1996 as amended) and other relevant legislation.

Par. 12

The date on which the file plan is implemented must be indicated here.

Par. 13

The example given here should, if possible, be taken from the relevant file plan.

Par. 16

When the file plan is only for head office, use the first paragraph and delete the heading Head Office. When it is also applicable to regional/sub offices, use both paragraphs as indicated.

3. The first page of the file plan should contain the index. In this index a complete description of the name of the body/office concerned and the various components of the file plan should be given.

DEPT OF _____

HEAD OFFICE

FILE PLAN

INDEX

- a) General instructions
- b) List of main series
- c) Subject classification
- d) List of series of separate case files
- e) Annexures

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS TO FILE PLAN

NAME OF OFFICE

1. This file plan is for the use of..... and it may not be applied to any other bodies/offices without the prior approval of the National Archivist.

REPORTING

2. All amendments and additions (the omission or insertion of an underlining is an amendment as well) should be submitted regularly to the National Archivist for notification and formal approval. In cases where the amendments/additions are circulated by means of circulars, it will suffice if a copy thereof is forwarded to the National Archivist. For easy reference and effective control the notifications should be numbered each year starting at number one, eg. 1/...., 2/...., etc. It is advisable that in cases where major amendments and/or additions are required, the prior approval of the National Archivist should be obtained before covers for new files are opened. (For unclassified correspondence see par. 16 of these instructions. For secret files see par. 22).

CONTROL OF FILE PLAN

3. Control of the file plan is assigned to No amendments/additions to the file plan may be made, without the approval of this official. The duties of this official comprise inter alia the following:

- a) He/she should scrutinise the body's/office's daily file regularly to ensure that all correspondence is dealt with on the correct files.
- b) He/she must ensure that paragraphs 5 and 6 of the instructions are strictly adhered to by scrutinizing the relevant files regularly to ensure that they are used correctly.
- c) He/she must keep the master copy up to date. (See also par. 9).
- d) The efficiency of the file plan should be examined regularly to ensure that the necessary amendments are provided. When new functions are acquired, new files should be created and when necessary, existing files should be broken up or combined as the case may be. Parent files (i.e. headings which are subdivided but also used as files) should be examined regularly to prevent them from becoming general files and where necessary further sub-files should be created.
- e) Attention should be paid to cases where correspondence starts on one file and where the emphasis then passes on to another aspect, that the matter be dealt with on the appropriate file.

- f) For duties i.r.o. descriptions on file covers and unclassified correspondence, see paragraphs 13 and 16 further on.

(These duties should be reflected on the official's job description/performance agreement.)

ACCURATE FILING OF CORRESPONDENCE

4. All officials conducting correspondence should be supplied with a copy of the file plan. Officials must be conversant with the series with which they work and should ensure that all correspondence is dealt with on the correct file. Incorrect filing should be rectified immediately to ensure that valuable material is not destroyed and to prevent the retention of ephemeral documents.

POLICY FILES

5. Provision has been made for policy files. These files are identified by the symbol "P" as the last component of the reference number, eg. 1/P, 1/1/P, etc. All matters concerning policy, rulings, instructions, procedures and directions, should be dealt with on these files to ensure easier reference. It must be noted that the term "instructions", as used above, indicates instructions regarding the work of a section and not instructions to officials.

Until such time as disposal authority is issued on the file plan and a case arises where a policy matter is decided on a subject file, the Records Manager will decide whether copies of the correspondence as a whole or a copy of the decision only, should be placed on the relevant policy file. Once disposal authority has been issued, copies of the final decision taken on an A20 file should be placed on the policy file with a cross-reference to the file on which the case was finalised. If a decision is taken on a D file, copies of all relevant documents should be placed on the relevant policy file. Where a bulky document, eg. a report, contains a policy decision or ruling, only an extract of the relevant section of the report should be placed on the policy file.

Correspondence dealt with on policy files should be limited to that relating to the formulation and/or revision of policy.

THE FOLLOWING CORRESPONDENCE SHOULD NOT BE PLACED ON POLICY FILES:

- (i) Enquiries regarding policy that do not result in the formulation of new policy or the amended interpretation of existing policy.
- (ii) Dealings with individual cases which do not result in the formulation of new policy or amendments to existing policy.
- (iii) Cases concerning the main or sub-series as a whole, but which are not policy matters, as well as individual aspects of the particular subject for which no file exists. In such cases suitable files should be opened.

ROUTINE ENQUIRIES

6. At appropriate places in the file plan files for routine enquiries have been provided. These files are identified by the symbol "R" as the last component of the reference number, e.g. 1/R, 1/1/R etc. These files are for enquiries of an ephemeral nature which require no further action subsequent to the normal reply. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES MAY IMPORTANT MATTERS BE FILED HERE.

REPORTS AND RETURNS

7. In the main series for REPORTS AND RETURNS provision has been made only for those reports and returns which cannot be dealt with under the other main series. Where files for reports and returns have been provided in the other main series they are to be used only where the relevant report or return cannot be placed on a subject file under that main series.

ASPECTS NOT SEPARATELY PROVIDED FOR

8. Sometimes it is necessary to provide files for subjects about which in the beginning sufficient correspondence is not received to warrant separate files being opened for each subject. These files may, however, not be used as general files. When the Records Manager notices that a specific subject generates sufficient correspondence to justify creating a separate subject file, such a file must be provided for in the file plan.

MASTER COPY

9. The master copy is that copy of the file plan which contains all approved subjects and which indicates how files are to be opened and filed. No file may be opened unless the file description has already been recorded in the master copy and the approval of the Records Manager has been obtained. Individual case files which are opened according to notes in the file plan are not recorded in the master copy. They should be recorded in a register of files opened (see par. 10). The Records Manager must ensure that all amendments and/or additions are recorded in the master copy immediately.

REGISTER OF FILES OPENED

10. The purpose of this register is to keep a complete record of ALL files opened. A loose-leaf binder is recommended as it enables the insertion of extra pages which are usually required for case files which form part of the subject classification. The register is maintained in the same form as the file plan and files are entered in the same consecutive order. An extra column should be provided opposite the file descriptions in which to note the date of opening (date of first document) next to the file title. The first page of the register should indicate the name of the body/office to which the file plan is applicable as well as the date of implementation. (For secret files, see par. 22).

DESTRUCTION REGISTER

11. A register of closed D files should be drawn up as soon as disposal instructions have been obtained. This register is divided into years, eg. 2005, 2006, 2007, etc. When a volume is closed, its reference number should be entered under the year in which it will be destroyed. A volume which is closed in 2002 and for which the disposal instruction is D3 will therefore be entered under the year 2005, thus making it easily apparent which files are to be destroyed in any particular year. The use of a loose-leaf binder is recommended as it is not possible to determine the number of pages needed per year beforehand. (For disposal see par. 18).

IMPLEMENTATION

12. This file plan will be implemented on and thereafter no correspondence may be dealt with on the files of the old file plan with the exception of current case files if written approval was obtained from the National Archivist. All old files should be closed on the day prior to the date of implementation, and no original correspondence should be transferred from the old to the new file plan.

OPENING OF FILES AND DESCRIPTION ON FILE COVERS

13. Files should be opened only when required. Care should be taken that the numbering and description of the files, as indicated in the file plan, are strictly adhered to. In cases where file descriptions are too lengthy, certain components which do not form an essential part of the file description, may be omitted. Where, for instance, the complete file description reads as follows: Publications and Publicity, Publications, Own Publications, Sale and Distribution, Free Distribution List, the following may be omitted: "Publications" and "Sale and Distribution". Although certain components may be omitted, the title of the main series must always be given and the file description must be sufficiently complete to describe the content of the file. In order to assist the registry staff, the Records Manager should indicate which components may be omitted in such cases. Titles should be printed in indelible ink. The dates of the first and last correspondence as well as applicable disposal instructions, when available, should be indicated on the file cover. Worn covers should be replaced regularly.

UNDERLINED DESCRIPTIONS

14. All underlined descriptions indicate subject headings only. Subdivisions must be made under these subject descriptions BUT NOFILES MAY BE OPENED FOR ANY UNDERLINED DESCRIPTIONS.

EXPLANATIONS IN BRACKETS

15. The explanations in brackets under the subject headings or file descriptions are intended as a guide and should not be entered on file covers.

UNCLASSIFIED CORRESPONDENCE: PROCEDURE

16. Head Office

When correspondence is received for which no file is provided, the Records Manager should be approached immediately to indicate on which existing file the correspondence should be placed, or which new file should be opened.

Regional/sub-offices

When correspondence is received for which no file is provided, such correspondence should be dealt with provisionally on file An application should then be submitted to Head Office on file for approval for the opening of a suitable file. Full information in respect of the nature of the correspondence, as well as recommendations regarding the placing and description of the file required, should be submitted. As soon as approval for the opening of the new file is obtained, all regional/sub-offices will be informed and their file plans should be changed accordingly. The correspondence on file should then be transferred to the new file.

ANNEXURE FILE COVERS

17. An additional cover must be opened where necessary for storing bulky literature, etc, which would otherwise result in the unnecessary increase in the volume of a file. No correspondence, may however be filed in such a cover. The cover should be marked clearly with the correspondence file reference number and "Annexure File" written on the outside cover. Every document contained in the Annexure file should bear a cross-reference to the relevant correspondence on which it was received.

DISPOSAL OF FILES

18. Once disposal authority has been issued such instructions are reflected opposite each file in the disposal column provided in the file plan. The disposal symbols indicate the following:

- A20 : Keep for eventual transfer to the appropriate archives repository if a period of 20 years has elapsed since the end of the year in which the record came into existence.
- D : Destroy (after the lapse of number of years which is indicated by the number following the letter D) after closure of the record.

Files should be disposed of regularly, but at least once a year. The prescribed disposal certificate should be submitted to the National Archivist.

THICKNESS OF FILES

19. Files should not exceed 3cm. in thickness. On reaching this thickness a file must be closed and a new cover should be opened. The number of the new volume (eg. vol. 2) must be indicated on the outside of the new cover. A sheet of paper with the wording "Closed, see volume...." should be filed as the last item on the closed volume.

CLOSURE OF IMPORTANT FILES

20. The following procedure should be followed when A20 files are closed:

- (a) Every page of the correspondence should be examined in order to rule out any misfilings. A sheet of paper with the words "Closed, see volume ..." written on it, should then be filed as the last item in the file cover.
- (b) Worn file covers should be replaced.
- (c) The files should then be stored in cartons especially used for this purpose.

CASE FILES

21. Case files which form part of the file plan are to be opened in accordance with the instructions appearing at the appropriate places in the file plan. For particulars regarding case files which do not form part of the subject classification, see the LIST OF SERIES OF SEPARATE CASE FILES at the end of the subject classification. (See also paragraph 9.)

SECRET FILES

22. Regarding secret files the following procedure should be followed:

- (a) Secret files may be opened for any main series, sub-series or file appearing in the master copy of this system. These files are distinguished from the ordinary files by the addition of a capital letter S to the existing reference number.
- (b) Should a secret file be needed for a subject for which a suitable main series, sub-series or file does not exist, an appropriate heading should be provided and should be reported in the usual way to the National Archivist. It is not necessary, however, to indicate when the addition is reported, that it is intended for secret correspondence.
- (c) Secret files are not indicated as such in the master copy and are also not recorded in the register of files opened for ordinary files. A separate register of secret files opened should be kept along the same lines as set out in paragraph 10 of these instructions.

- (d) Separate arrangements for the safe-keeping of secret files must be made and should not be incorporated as a part of these instructions.
- (e) The disposal instruction for all secret files is A20 and they should be dealt with accordingly.