

Training on the Multi-Institution Disposition Authorities

Disposition Context

This handout provides background on the evolution of the MIDA concept by considering the historical context which produced the MIDAs and their predecessor, the General Records Disposal Schedules or the GRDS.

The roots of the MIDA approach, indeed the roots of the modern LAC, began in the period just before the Second World War when the Treasury Board issued a minute concerning the destruction of certain classes of documents. The use of a TB Minute emphasized the concept that an official instrument or some type of Authority was needed to dispose of records. The Minute was later amended and stated that institutions were to notify the Dominion Archivist of the intention to destroy certain classes of documents. The Dominion Archivist could object if historical records were involved.

To co-ordinate procedures for the disposition of government records, an Advisory Committee on Public Records was established in 1945 with the Dominion Archivist as a member. One could draw a parallel between this Committee and the current ADM Task Force on Recordkeeping because both sought to improve the state of recordkeeping in the Government of Canada. By the late 1950s, the first records schedule was issued for the Government of Canada; this was a guide and did not have the weight of an Authority.

In 1963 a combined records schedule and Authority to dispose of housekeeping records, known today as the common administrative records, was issued, known as the General Records Disposition Schedules (GRDS). The GRDS identified records on the basis of **subject**. The *Public Records Order of 1966* stated that no department shall destroy records or permit records to be removed from the ownership of the GC without approval of the Dominion Archivist. An Authority form (ARC-170) was developed and GC institutions were to submit the completed Authority form and Records Schedule to the PAC for approval. This gave the PAC an opportunity to identify historical/archival records for transfer. The PAC rejected any schedules whose retention periods were identified as "indefinite" or "permanent retention by institution."

By 1987, a new *National Archives of Canada Act* gave specific instructions to government institutions that no government of Canada record was to be destroyed without the prior approval of the National Archivist of Canada in the form of an agreement. Treasury Board issued the *Management of Government Information Holdings Policy* in 1989 which gave government institutions the responsibility of setting retention periods for their records by explicitly stating that they "must ensure that all information...is scheduled for retention and disposal." (MGIH, s.6). The National Archives then developed and launched its Government Records Disposition Program in 1991 and solidified the Records Disposition Authority as the legal instrument by which institutions disposed of their records. All of these factors combined to stop the Archives' practice of reviewing and approving records schedules and shifted the focus to **functional analysis** of institutions through the macro-appraisal theory and methodology, which is the underpinning of the disposition program.

The Archives also undertook a number of other records disposition initiatives. In 1990, the National Archivist of Canada issued the Transitory Records Authority to be applied throughout the Government of Canada for records identified as transitory. This was a precursor to the MIDA concept because it applied to all government institutions. During the 1990s, the National Archives revamped and refined its disposition approach and began to issue MIDAs. The first group related to records in the Office of Ministers, of Deputy Heads, and media records.

To replace the GRDS, the National Archivist of Canada approved the first MIDAs for records created as a result of Common Administrative Functions in 1998. This reflected the shift away from the former GRDS subject-based to **functionally-based** terms and conditions, in order to ensure the **longevity** of the disposition instruments. Later, other MIDAs were issued for audio-visual records, the Port Authorities, and operational case file records.

Of note: MIDAs for Common Administrative Records take precedence over the GRDS; that is, the MIDAs apply and not the GRDS. Remember to use the MIDAs for Common Administrative Records and **not** the old GRDS which is obsolete.

Significantly, with the issuance of the MIDAs, the Authority to dispose of records and the retention guidelines were not part of the same document, as was the case with the former GRDS. The MIDAs are **Authorities** to be used by institutions under the *LAC Act* for the disposition of certain common records throughout the Government of Canada. There is a separate document called the *Retention Guidelines for Common Administrative Records*, issued by LAC in 2007 and which supercedes the retention periods in the old GRDS.