

Using Records Retention Schedules: What are Personnel Files?

Purpose: Provide guidance to local government agencies about appropriate retention of records filed in “personnel files”.

Personnel files are a convenient way to keep together a variety of records with different functions and purposes, all relating to a single employee. As each agency determines its own filing system(s) based on its unique business needs, there is no set standard governing which records may be found in a personnel file.

What records to file in a personnel file is an important agency decision *entirely separate* from the legal retention requirements for the individual records *within* the file.

Records retention schedules provide legal disposition authority based a record’s **function** and **purpose**. They do not provide disposition authority for filing *places* (such as folders, drawers, cabinets, or files).

With that in mind, the *Local Government Common Records Retention Schedule (CORE) Version 4.0* no longer contains a records series entitled “Personnel File”. Rather, it contains records series that provide legal disposition authority *by function* for all of the records routinely/commonly placed in a personnel file, including:

1. **Employee Health Records (Routine) (DAN GS2017-015)** (6 years after created or received and no longer needed for agency business);
2. **Employee Medical and Exposure Records (DAN GS50-04B-30)** (30 years after separation from agency);
3. **Employee Pay – History (DAN GS50-03E-15)** (4 years after end of fiscal year and no longer needed for agency business *[including retirement benefit verification]*);
4. **Employee Work History (DAN GS50-04B-06)** (6 years after separation from agency and no longer needed for agency *[including retirement benefit verification]*).

Washington State Archives recommends that agencies carefully consider what records to place in their personnel files. Each record should be analyzed (and, perhaps, organized) based on its **function** and **purpose**, keeping in mind each individual record’s:

- Minimum retention period(s);
- Confidentiality or level of “restricted access”;
- Disclosure status relating to the *Public Records Act* (chapter 42.56 RCW).

The Municipal Research and Services Center ([MRSC](http://mrsc.org)) has many examples of local government agency policy and procedure [manuals](http://mrsc.org/Home/Explore-Topics/Personnel/Local-Rules-and-Policies/Personnel-Policy-Manuals.aspx) covering personnel records and files. <http://mrsc.org/Home/Explore-Topics/Personnel/Local-Rules-and-Policies/Personnel-Policy-Manuals.aspx>.

**Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from
Washington State Archives:**

**www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov**