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MAIL MANAGEMENT

Mail management should be planned to provide the most direct and immediate flow of mail to the point of action. Mail operations include mail handling methods and procedures such as receiving, opening, sorting, time stamping, routing, recording, all controlling and following up. Amont factors influencing mail handling arrangements are size and complexity of the agency, volume and type of mail and location of buildings.

Consolidate mail and file operations -- If possible, the mail and files of an office should be consolidated and physically located together. Benefits which will result are: (1) routing will be more accurate, (2) searching service will be faster and more efficient, (3) any need for maintenance of duplicate locator files will be avoided, (4) the assignment of file symbols will be more accurate, (5) combined operations will require less space, equipment and personnel, (6) experienced personnel can be shifted more readily from task to task to meet varying work loads. No piece of mail should be controlled at more than one point in an agency.

Coordinate routing -- All mail both incoming and outgoing should be fully coordinated by routing it to all interested offices. At the same time, it is important not to circulate materials unnecessarily to offices that have no real need for the information

Use Special equipment -- Under the right circumstances the use of special equipment will greatly expedite mail handling and increase the general efficiency of the mail and file unit. Large agencies may find it economical to use such labor-saving devices as the following: envelope opening machine (automatic), envelope sealing machine (automatic), sorter (leaf type and pegeon hole type), addressing machine (and related equipment).

In each case the estimated benefits to be gained through use of the equipment must be weighed against its cost. This evaluation should be based on actual workload and should take into account: (1) the initial and maintenance costs of the equipment (2) the volume of the work, (3) the speed with which this work must be processed. If the result indicates that the equipment will materially benefit operations, its purchase is justified.

Plan adequate space layout -- A good space layout is as important in the mail and file unit as in any other office or shop. The unit should be so located that heavy mail sacks and packages can be conveniently carried in from postoffice trucks. In addition, it should be located as near the center of the agency's offices as possible in order to be readily accessible. This will also promote more efficient messenger service.

The flow of work within the unit should be carefully planned, and the equipment layout arranged accordingly. If possible, there should be two doors to facilitate the entrance and exit of messengers. The work flow should beso arranged that incoming mail is at a point clost to one door and the mail processed for dispatching near the other door. Furniture, and equipment should be laid out so there is little or no backtracking in the flow of mail and transportation distances are cut to a minimum.

Maintain periodic reviews -- When mail and messenger operations have been studied revised and installed, the administrator or supervisor should not consider that his task is completed. Periodic reviews by a responsible official are necessary to ensure that these operations continue to function on a sound basis giving satisfactory service at a reasonable cost.

CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT

Plain Letters

Simplicity must be the greatest virtue of all plain letters. But a good plain letter must have too this 4-S badge of honors (1) shortness, (2) simplicity, (3) strength, (4) sincerity.

For shortness, there are two tests for telling whether a letter is too long. One is whether it says more than need be said. The other is whether it takes too many words for what it must say.

In applying the formula for shorter letters it is well to remember that letters can also be too short. Information that will give the reader a clearer understanding does not add length and words that lend countesy of tone are not useless. Hereunder are five rules of shortness:

1. Don't make a habit of repeating what is said in a letter you answer.
2. Avoid needless words and needless information: true brievity of expression consists of saying what is worth saying and avoid tedious details about things every man can supply for himself.
3. Be aware and watch out for nouns and adjectives that derive from verbs.
4. Beware of roundabout prepositional phrases - replace roundabout prepositional phrases with single prepositions.
5. Don't qualify your statement with irrelevant "ifs."

For simplicity these rules must be followed:

1. Know your subject so well you can discuss it confidently and naturally.
2. Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs: short words made letters more talkable, short sentences make them more readable.
3. Be compact. Don't separate closely related parts of sentences.
4. Tie your thoughts together so your reader can follow you from one to another without getting lost.

Use these rules for strength:

1. Use concrete, specific words
2. Use more active verbs: The ways to strengthen letters and at the same time to shorten sentences are to use fewer passive verbs and more active words. The word passive suggests that too many verbs of this form weaken letters while the word active suggests that verbs of that form make them stronger.
3. Don't explain your answer before giving it. Give answers straightaway; then explain if necessary.

4. Don't hedge - hedged statements lose forcefulness. Besides the reader may get the idea the writer does not know what he is talking about.

Rules for sincerity.

1. Be human -- write in human terms if you want your sincerity to shine through your letter. Use personal pronouns, the proper names of the people you write about and names that stand for human beings.
2. Admit mistakes -- The writer who admits mistakes in plain language is surer of convincing others of his sincerity.
3. Don't overwhelm your reader with intensive and emphatics. Useless emphatics give your reader the impression we are laboring to put our facts across. They may even lead him to believe we are trying to convince ourselves.
4. Don't be obsequious or arrogant -- the sound of a letter is pleasing if it is simple, dignified and friendly.

Form Letters

A form letter is a letter printed or otherwise reproduced and stocked in advance of its actual use. There are certain standards that all form letters should meet. When a form letter falls below these standards, we get poorer quality and higher cost. When it rises above them we get a quality of saving bonus for exceptional performance.

A form letter is appropriate if (1) it is about a rountine business or informational matter, (2) it is not in fact a personal matter, (3) it is not a message that will bring grief or keen disappointment to a reader.

If we want people to read form letters, and read them easily, we must aim at this standard (1) short sentences averaging not more than 21 words (2) short words not more than 165 syllables to 100 words, and (3) it is good to use personal references about four personal references per 100 words.

A letter must be designed in a number of ways that are attractive as well as considerate of the typist. There are six standards designs for form letters. (1) plain: for letters that will not require fill-ins in the body, (2) alined fill-in: for arranging fill-ins that fall in the body of the letter in the left margin alinement, and (3) itemized fill-in: for grouping fill-ins, such as names, dates and amounts, in one place under column headings, (4) check list: for optional statements, (5) reference number: for optional statements printed on the back of the letter, and (6) form like: for letters which are part box type form.

Form letters are usually reproduced in standard letterhead sized. The standard sizes for (1) letterheads and memorandums: 8" x 10½", 8" x 7" and 8" x 5¼" (2) postal cards: 3¼" x 5½".

A form letter is a sharp device for cutting correspondence costs. Hence all administrative employees responsible for the program should look for means to stimulate the use of form letters.

When a form letter becomes inactive or obsolete announce the fact to the staff immediately and see that the surplus is removed from supply cabinets and desks.

Guide Letters

Guide letters are drafted in advance of their actual use but they are not printed. They are typed to look and read exactly like individually dictated letters. They are useful when printed letters are impractical or when typed letters are more appropriate than printed ones.

Guide letters are often useless or impractical and are no help at all for those unusual or unforeseeable questions which are always plentiful enough to keep us in practice on our dictation. Moreover, when it comes to routine business correspondence, they are seldom as practical and economical as printed form letters.

But when printed letters fail because of variations in subject matter, guide letters can be turned out with endless combinations or paragraphs and are more economical than printed ones.

Developing a guide letter system: We can develop a guide letter system by following these seven steps:

Step 1 -- Collecting -- Have one extra copy made of each typed letter and memorandum. Collect the copies long enough to get a fair sampling.

Step 2 -- Sorting -- Make up a short list of "key" subjects like the principal subjects in a filing system. Sort the collection of copies accordingly.

Step 3 -- Inventorying -- Take one key subject at a time and list the repetitive letters by their specific topics.

Step 4 -- Organizing -- Take the topics from the inventory and make an index to the letters.

Step 5 -- Drafting -- Take the repetitive letters on each topic and draft guide letters or paragraphs to replace them.

Step 6 -- Testing -- Find out how well the guide letters work by trying them out in actual practice.

Step 7 -- Packaging -- Put the guide letters together in a compact desk file where they can be easily found and followed.

How good a guide letter system is, it will not operate smoothly and profitably without adequate supplies and adequate training. To put guide letters to work follow these suggestions: (1) set an installation date on which the new system will begin to operate, (2) see that there are enough letter files for each letter, typist and reviewer to have one of his own, (3) plan a simple work procedure and put it in writing, (4) conduct training classesfor the people who will use the letters (5) announce who will be responsible for keeping the guide letters up to date, (6) design a simple form for work reporting to be prepared weekly every two weeks or once each month, (7) finally ask the official responsible for the subject matter to introduce the new system with his endorsement and his appeal for its full utilization.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Each Federal agency is required by the Federal Records Actof 1950 to establish and maintain a records disposition program to keep its records moving out of high cost office space and filing equipment as rapidly as desirable.

Such a program includes two chief elements: the retirement of non-current records to economical storage and the disposal of records not warranting further preservation under even the most economical storagé conditions.

Transfer to centers, however, merely involve a transfer of custody or a new location of files. The only way to avoid perpetual expansion of record storage space and constantly increasing masses of records lies in vigorous disposal of unneeded records.

The key to an effective records disposition program is the agency records control schedule which lists and describes the records of the agency, and shows when they shall be retired to a center or other storage space and when those not warranting indefinite retention shall be disposed of.

Even the best records control schedules however are of little value unless they are systematically applied to the record of the office.

When records become inactive in the regional office they shall be transferred to the nearest Federal Records Center. Records are considered inactive when they are referred to less than once a month per cubic foot of material involved, i.e., if we have two file cabinets (16 cubic feet) and they are referred to only twice a week then they are sufficiently inactive to transfer to a Federal Record Center.

Normally it is recommended that eligible records normally be transferred or disposed of once a year. Deviations for such a timetable may be advisable if records accumulate very rapidly.

In summary, the exact time of actual disposal or transfer of particular records should depend on two factors: (1) regardless of schedule authorizations agency personnel should not dispose of records if such records are still needed by the agency for administrative, legal or fiscal purposes, and (2) the cost of handling records for disposal or transfer should be kept at a minimum.

Careful timing of disposal and transfer action will hold down the costs of handling the records. Technically, additional records become disposable or transferable every day of the year but to take action so often would be uneconomical and inefficient. To avoid this several factors must be considered: (1) records should be disposed of and transferred during slack periods if possible. The guide rule should be to interfere as little as possible with current operations. (2) It seldom pays to dispose of or transfer records in very small quantities. This is the reason records should not be disposed of or transferred more often than once a year. (3) Files should be cut off periodically so as to make their disposal or transfer as easy as possible. (4) In order to dispose of a block of files, it may be necessary to remove from the block certain documents or folders of continuing value. Such extraction of documents or folders from larger files is called screening. It is extremely uneconomical to screen on a paper-by-paper basis and normally savings in space or equipment are not sufficient to justify screening because there are more economical alternatives: transfer the file intact to a records center where they can be retained until they are disposable as a whole or microfilm the file intact if the records to be retained are of permanent or very long time value.

When records have been identified as eligible for transfer or disposal, the transfer of disposal may take place in one of severals ways. Transfer may be to an agency holding area, records center, or depository, a Federal Records Center, or under very unusual circumstances to the National Archives. Disposals may be by sale, salvage, donation or destruction.

FILES MANAGEMENT

The process of putting papers into the files should be so planned and practiced that it will be accomplished without waste motion. Proper file drawer labelling should enable the file clerk to go directly to the drawer where the first paper is to be filed. These steps should be studied for economy of motion. (1) The filing shelf with paper already attached should be hooked onto the handle of the nearest file drawer to right or left of the one to be used. (2) Note the file designation of the top paper to be filed. (3) On opening the file drawer, note guide cards to determine approximate location. (4) Note folder labels to determine specific location. (5) If papers are fastened between cover sheets, lift folder halfway out of the drawer, tilting the folder at an angle. Spread open the folder with one hand, remove contents with other hand, leaving folder still in its tilted position. (6) Transfer contents to filing shelf and add papers to be filed. (7) Jog contents on edge to align them if loose filing isused. (8) If papers are fastened to file folder, remove folder from drawer only after the folder in back of it has been tilted to mark the spot for replacing.

A contribution to ease and speed filing is the proper use of file drawers. Their sequence of use, exterior identification of contents, and volume of contents, in relation to capacity merit attention. The most current records should be maintained in file drawers which provide the most direct natural access. Under this arrangement records of previous years (mornally less active) will be in the less accessible file drawers. Types and status of records, subject categories and date breaks should be shown on drawer labels, and sufficient room should be provided inside file drawers for anticipated expansion and ease of reference.

Selection of types of folders should be governed by particular needs. However, to ease, speed of filing, these principles apply: (1) Folder labels should be uniform, both as to kind and the size and type of file identifications shown on them. (2) Folder tabs should be indirect lines rather than in staggered positions. (3) Folders should be placed in a conspicuous, uniform position. (4) Folders should contain no more than the maximum amount of papers for which they were designated.

As with folders different styles of guide cards exist for various types of files. Those for subject files usually need to be arranged according to the particular files involved and must have labels. Those for alphabetical filing may be obtained in expandable sets ready for use. General uses for their arrangement and use should be as follows: (1) Guide card insetts should be uniform. (2) Guide card tabs should be in direct lines from front to back of file drawers rather than in staggered positions. (3) Guide cards should be provided only in the amount needed, since too many actually slow down reference.

Special articles of equipment and supply can further speed up the getting of papers into the files. Filing shelves free both hands for filing and hold papers next to the file drawers being used. Filing stools lessen the awkwardness and fatigue of filing into lower file drawers. Colored signals can be used to distinguish current year file folders. Small supplies of new folders, fasteners, dividers and cover sheets, rubber stamps, etc. should be placed so as to be conveniently at hand to the maximum number of users.