

# Fact Sheet

# 1a

## Archival Principles, Series and Consignment

*This fact sheet has been created to provide agencies with background information about archives.*

*This fact sheet will help you understand the concept and the processes under which an archive operates and by which records are managed.*

Archives are used to store and preserve records so that they are able to be accessed in 50 or 100 years time and far into the future. PROV's collection contains Victorian Government records, starting from the mid 1830s with the establishment of the Port Phillip District. Emphasis is placed on preserving records in the same way they were maintained and used by the agency.

PROV manages its collection using the Australian Series System (see below). This system, created by the National Archives of Australia, is used by archives throughout the country and is based on the archival principles of provenance and original order.

### Archival Principles

The archival principles of provenance and original order focus on making sure that records are maintained in the manner in which they were created and used. This ensures integrity of the record is upheld so that it can be taken as evidence of decisions and actions.

*Original Order:* involves maintaining records in the order in which they were kept in their original recordkeeping system. This applies equally to digital and physical recordkeeping systems.

*Provenance:* involves identifying the original creators and users of the record as well as gathering information on the individuals and agencies that accessed and controlled the records after they ceased being used for their original purpose.

### Series

A series is a collection of records that belong together. They are classified by "the same identifiable sequence or that result from the same function or activity."<sup>1</sup>

The records series is important as it is the classification by which PROV manages records. It is also the classification on which catalogue entries are based.

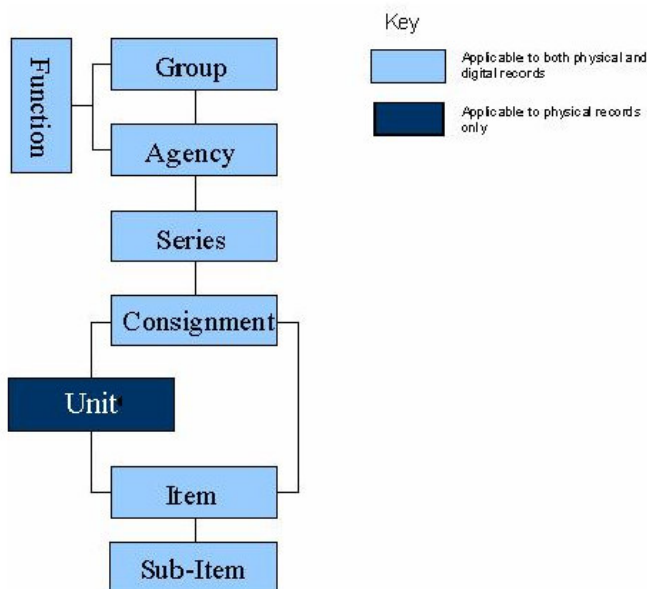
In order for records to be correctly entered and to enable search enquiries via PROV's online catalogue the records series needs to be identified.

Please note: a records series is not a disposal class in a Retention and Disposal Authority. In fact it is possible that records within a particular series may fall under a number of different disposal classes.

### Types of Series

There are a variety of different record series types, these are:

*Sequential Series:* These series comprise of records that have been arranged in a single numerical, alphabetical, chronological or other identifiable sequence.



PROV aims to preserve the integrity and context of Victorian Government records. Maintaining the integrity and context of archival documents allows researchers and successor agencies to correctly interpret the meaning and significance of records.

*Accumulative Series:* A series of records that have a similar format, function or information content that have been placed together in the same filing or accumulation process.

*Single Item Series:* When a single item is located that does not belong to an identifiable sequence and has not been accumulated and filed with other items it may become a series in its own right. (It is important to undertake research to ensure that the record in question was not part of a larger series at an earlier date before deciding that a record is a single item series).

*Previous Series:* A series that records a similar function to another series that it immediately precedes.

*Subsequent Series:* A series that records a similar function to another series that it immediately succeeds.

## Consignment

The contents of a series may not be transferred at the same time. A series may be transferred to PROV in a number of parts, known as consignments, over a number of years. One example of this is: probate files.

A series consignment comprises of record items belonging to the one series which are deposited into the custody of PROV as part of the one physical transfer. A

series consignment may consist of the whole or only part of a series.<sup>ii</sup>

Consignments may be purposefully created, for example, when dealing with records that have closed access.

Consignments are sometimes created to deal with series that contain multiple records formats. For example, plans where roll and flat plans would be separate consignments.

## Unit

A unit is a storage container that holds the records. A unit may be a box, tube, or drawer. A unit may also be a single volume.

## Item

An item is a single record. An item could be a registered file, manilla folder or bound report. Within a series there may be only record item or there may be several hundred or more.

PROV staff can assist agencies in deciding whether a record should be classed as a unit or an item.

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<sup>i</sup> Bettington J, Eberhard K, Loo R and Smith C, eds. *Keeping Archives*. 3rd edn. Australia: Superfine Printing Company, 2008;19

<sup>ii</sup> Public Record Office Victoria. *Master Glossary*. version 6.0.