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INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT OUTLINE

The Subject Outlines provide the information needed to organize and correctly label official subject files. Even though subject files comprise roughly only twenty percent of all Agency files, a knowledge of the Subject Outlines is indispensable in establishing and maintaining these files.

The Subject Outlines are made up of subject file codes (e.g., ADM, EDU, PRC), which are the primary codes. There are also secondary code breakdowns (ADM-1, EDU-12, OR PRC-4) with file classification captions such as Health Education, Administrative Management, etc., followed by a narrative description for each code and classification. Together, these comprise a system that provides offices with a smooth and efficient means of filing and retrieving information.

How then are the Subject Outlines used to select the proper subject codes and classifications? To illustrate, suppose the record to be filed is the minutes of a USAID meeting on 'weed control'. The user goes to the Table of Content of the Subject Outlines and selects the major subject area most likely to contain the topic, in this case Agriculture. Reading through the narrative descriptions leads to the file code and classification that encompasses "seed control"--AGR-4, Crop Production.

Future papers dealing with the same subject will be filed together in that folder. The file code AGR-4 will distinguish it from papers dealing with other agricultural subjects (e.g., AGR-2, AGR-6), all of which are grouped under the parent classification "AGR", Agriculture.

Together, the files in the AGR group constitutes a separate entity from the files in the other major subject groups such as BUD (Budget) or PER (Personnel), providing for an orderly division of subjects within the office filing system.

An alternate means of finding the subject file code is to use the Index to the Subject Outlines. In the example on weeds, looking under "Weed Control" would have led directly to AGR-4. Even looking under the entry "Meetings" would have led eventually to AGR-4, since the entry advises to look under the appropriate subject.

As mentioned in the introduction to this Directive, the Subject Outlines are no longer tied to retention periods for the categories used, as they were in the previous edition of this Directive. Instead, retention periods are addressed separately in the Records Disposition Schedules.

Another feature that is new to this edition is the streamlined coding scheme, allowing individual offices more freedom in developing codes that suit their particular needs. Previously, categories were broken down to a third level, with subject codes such as HLS 9-7 and FPC 2-1 representing subdivisions in the larger categories. That function has now been relegated to individual offices. For example, an office dealing with energy programs could subdivide the category SCT-21, Energy into SCT 21-1 for Geothermal Energy, SCT 21-2 for Solar Energy and so, arbitrarily, to best reflect the energy subjects of interest to that particular office.

In general, offices will select a few major subject codes that pertain to the program functions of the office, such as Food for Peace (FPC), Loans, Guaranties and Private Enterprise (LGP), Transportation (TRV). In addition to subject codes that reflect the program functions of the office, almost all offices will have codes and classifications for files dealing with general administrative office matters such as Administrative Management (ADM), Personnel (PER), and Budget (BUD).

The new Subject Outlines and Index should constitute a tool that is easy to use, and be a welcome aid in establishing and maintaining office subject files.

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