

The Records Section: Space, Location, and Layout

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THE objective of record maintenance is to receive into custody and to organize and maintain record material so that it will be kept safely from physical hazards, securely against unauthorized access, and conveniently for ready reference use. Records are tools for the purpose of facilitating or limiting some main function. If these tools are not put to use, they are but a needless expense, with the additional disadvantage that they are a constant expense for maintenance whether used or not.

No plan fixing the physical location of records activities can be applied successfully to all organizations.² Whether the activities are to be centralized, decentralized, or partially decentralized will depend upon the functions, size, volume, and character of the work of the organization. There are three basic plans for the organization of records activities. Regardless of the factors involved, all records activities will be organized in accordance with one of these three plans. In planning your activities, the problems involved should be studied, then the plan best suited to your space, location, and requirements should be selected.

CENTRALIZED ACTIVITIES

This plan centralizes all records activities of an organization in one location, establishes responsibility for their efficient operation, and provides one place of reference for all records. All material on one subject is brought together regardless of origin. Such a procedure results in economy of space, filing supplies, equipment, and labor, and may be successfully used in small organizations. This

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² Olive R. Surgen, *Current Records Management Handbook* (Pan American Sanitary Bureau, 1949).

plan, however, is not recommended for large organizations in which there are considerable distances between the records section and the operating offices. In such cases there is a tendency within operating units to withhold from central files important records for convenience of reference, and this results in incomplete central files. Physical centralization is advisable only when the following conditions exist:

1. The same papers are used frequently by more than one subdivision within the organization; that is, each subdivision must have immediate access to the records of actions taken by other subdivisions on the same transaction or subject.
2. The records section can be so located as to be readily accessible to all operating offices.
3. The volume of records in each office is not sufficient to warrant the waste of labor, cabinets, and floor space that would result if each operating unit maintained separate files.

DECENTRALIZED ACTIVITIES

This plan may be used when it is necessary to locate the records at the point of use. It eliminates duplicate record keeping, and papers can be arranged to meet the special needs of an office. Service is rapid, but more space, equipment, and supplies are required than for a central files. Furthermore, a central point for the receipt and distribution of mail and telegrams will be required in any case. Decentralization is advisable only when the following conditions exist:

1. The work of the subdivision is specialized and complete in itself; that is, the records are used only by that subdivision.
2. Offices are widely separated and inaccessible to a central records location.
3. Sufficient volume of records is present in the subdivision to use personnel, space, equipment and supplies economically.

PARTIALLY DECENTRALIZED ACTIVITIES

This plan establishes decentralized specialized records with a central administrative control coordinating the location, maintenance, service, and disposition of all records of an organization. This plan is operated on the assumption that all matters of general interest will be handled at the top organizational level and that material of this type will be filed and found there.

LOCATION AND LAYOUT

Proper layout is a necessity for the effective performance of work. Good layout assists in accomplishing work efficiently; poor arrange-

ment can seriously retard the work output. Adequate space must be provided and must be properly utilized, for too much or too little space can make for inefficiencies. Too much space means that needless energy is wasted in such things as messenger service and the flow of work through the office. When too little space is provided, the resultant crowded conditions not only interfere with the work output but also encourage employee complaints and are reflected in low morale. The physical layout affects all other factors of efficient management.

The records section should be centrally located in relation to the action offices to be serviced and should be near an elevator or stairway. The flow of work should determine the layout.³ The arrangement of the furniture and equipment within the unit should be such that the work flow is continuously forward.

To obtain maximum results with minimum effort, equipment should be placed to make efficient use of the space and to permit materials to pass over a series of desks in a continuous straight line. Just as the production-line units are placed carefully in a factory layout, so should a records section be provided with proper working space and conditions to obtain the best production. Desks and tables should be placed so that the persons seated at them receive all possible benefit from natural light.

The chief aim in properly locating the records section is to save space as well as records users' time. Proper location will contribute to coordination of related records so that better working relationships between departments, sections, and units with interlocking functions will be developed.

SPACE SELECTION⁴

Selection of space for records sections should be based upon many considerations. Records rooms with irregular walls or with partitions dividing the space required are not suitable for the economical layout of filing equipment. Unpartitioned floor space may be used by forming an operating unit or enclosure with the filing equipment itself, using tall cabinets on three sides and counter-height files on most of the fourth. At either end of the latter, space should be provided to permit access to the enclosure, and any necessary desks should be placed one behind another within the enclosure.

³ George R. Terry, *Office Management & Control* (Richard D. Irwin, Inc., Chicago, 1952).

⁴ On this topic, see Margaret Odell and Earl Strong, *Records Management & Filing Operations* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1947).

The factors in space selection are the following:

1. The floor space available.
2. The files to be centralized.
3. The control to be exercised over the files.
4. The departments originating and using the material that goes into the files.
5. The volume of records and the frequency of filing operations.
6. The provision made for expansion — not less than one future year.
7. The number of cabinets in the present records section and the number of cabinets in storage space outside it.
8. The size and kind of cabinets for each planned file, such as letter, legal, check, voucher, and tabulating files, with outside dimensions of each kind of cabinet.
9. Vault or fireproof facilities.
10. The weight of filled cabinets and safes.
11. The number and size of desks, tables, and chairs.
12. The number of devices used in the records section, such as sorting equipment, typewriters, duplicators, and photographic equipment.
13. The bookcases or shelving required.
14. The proximity of freight elevator, dumbwaiter, tube, or other carrier.
15. Quiet surroundings.

The weight of a filled cabinet must be known for the safe location of the records section. The weight given by the manufacturer is for an empty cabinet; to this should be added the weight of the contents (the correspondence, guides, and folders in a four-drawer letter-size cabinet weigh between 300 and 350 pounds). Blueprints or other plans for a records room should be examined to determine if the floor space can physically house the number and weight of cabinets concerned. Failure to consider this may have tragic results such as the buckling or breaking down of floors.

Five-drawer cabinets should be used where rentals are high or floor space is limited. Many offices are changing from four-drawer to five-drawer cabinets to conserve floor space.⁵ After such a change, four cabinets will hold the contents of five and save 20 percent in floor area.

In large records sections, where additional space is costly or unavailable, it may sometimes be necessary to use stacked, superimposed, or interlocking drawers (six or eight drawers high) with ladders. Ample space, however, must be allowed between the ceiling and the top drawer so that the records can be easily filed or

⁵ Remington Rand Co., *How to Save Space in Your Crowded Office* (leaflet LBV465, [1954?]).

removed. Also, space wide enough for aisles to permit the moving of ladders must be left between the rows of cabinets. If such storage methods are used, every precaution must be taken for the safety of personnel.

Counter-height cabinets are often used so that the public, while remaining outside the operating records section, may be served quickly and conveniently over the tops of the cabinets. Counter-height cabinets are also used to separate two operating departments without obstructing the view or ventilation. Four or five-drawer cabinets are used to enclose the records section and also to separate two departments where light and ventilation are not affected by the height of the cabinets. Fire exits must be planned in the layout for large records sections. In long rows of cabinets space must be left after every tenth or twentieth cabinet, to permit cross exits for emergencies. A receiving desk or table should be placed near the entrance of the records section for receiving records to be filed.

The floor layout of the filing cabinets and other equipment should be planned to furnish the best light and ventilation and at the same time to take into consideration the flow of the work and the receipt and dispatch of records. Naturally, the layout must be planned to conform to the plan for the files and to the records section operation. Too often the layout is planned merely to accommodate the file cabinets in the space. Layouts should be made so that the filers can do their work without passing the backs of chairs used by classifiers, thereby annoying them and decreasing their efficiency. Aisles should be as nearly as possible open to the view of the supervisor. An efficient layout of a records section demands careful consideration and precise planning.

The layout of the file cabinets should be from left to right in logical and convenient sequence. When the cabinets are separated by an aisle, keep the sequence on the same side to the end before crossing over. This saves walking and facilitates shifting drawers during expansion. (See illustration no. 1, below.)

The cabinets in the records section should be arranged so as to avoid any traffic interference with clerks working in the files. The arrangements of cabinets in aisle formation, with desks at the end of the aisle, provides a good operating arrangement for control, accuracy, and speed in filing and finding in some offices. To provide good circulation of air and maximum natural light, the cabinets should be arranged with the open end of the aisle toward the windows.

When centralized groups of controlled files are not located in a

separate office, the layout of the cabinets should provide for a shut-off so that only the records clerks have access to the files. In such a layout, the cabinets are arranged in rows, face to face, with an aisle between the desks or railing at each end to form a separator from the rest of the office. The preparation of records for filing is performed in this space. A variation of this plan is to have the cabinets start at the wall and extend out in rows. The square arrangement of files makes it possible for the clerk to work in a space at the center equally distant from all cabinets. Different types of layouts are shown in illustrations nos. 2, 3, and 4.⁶

Although not strictly a detail of layout, the arrangement of the materials in the drawers themselves can make filerroom procedures easier and more efficient. As a general rule, the records of the current fiscal period and of the period just past are kept in the active files. References to the records of the previous period are quite heavy, especially during the first part of the new period. Records for the two periods are kept in separate drawers, with the active or current records in the most accessible position. Inactive records may be placed in the top and bottom drawers of five-drawer cabinets, in the bottom drawers of four-drawer cabinets, or in cabinets next to walls, where access is more difficult.⁷

MODULAR FURNITURE ⁸

In recent years, office furniture of "unitized" or modular construction has been placed on the market. Through the use of a combination of separate furniture units, a more functional workplace can be constructed for any office position. The privacy available with modular units has made them a popular substitute for the more space-consuming private office.

Modular office furniture is supplied in interchangeable units which are formed into L-shaped arrangements. This arrangement, found to be efficient in production shops, leads to the conservation of floor space in the office. Perhaps of even greater advantage is the decrease in unnecessary motions made possible by a proper study of the work performed and the selection of the proper units to fit the work requirement.

⁶ From Odell and Strong, *Records Management*, by permission of the McGraw Hill Book Co., New York, 1947.

⁷ Remington Rand Co., *Effective Housing for Inactive Records* (leaflet LBV488, [1954?]).

⁸ See Globe-Wernicke Co., *Techniplan* (1952-53): Form A-73, Form A-56, Catalogue T-352 and Supplement No. 1, and Office Layout Sheet.

SHELF FILING⁹

This is the record housing method based on the filing of active or inactive records on a series of shelves instead of in drawer equipment such as filing cabinets or transfer cases. It can save up to 50 percent of floor space, is more economical than first quality filing cabinets, and is more accessible. Material is shelved upright in horizontal rows. For this kind of filing, divider-type adjustable shelving is ideal because folders and guides are supported by a series of dividers spaced on 3-inch centers. Shelves are easily adjustable and removable at any time without the need for tools.

SPACE FOR WORK AND PASSAGE¹⁰

File clerks usually stand to the side of a drawer while filing so that space in front is not absolutely necessary. To save space in storage areas where *inactive* material is filed, the aisles need not be wider than one drawer depth, or about 30 inches. This is true even where file cabinets face each other, because two facing cabinets will seldom be open at the same time.

In the case of *active* files, however, if the file cabinets face each other, the minimum space allowance between the two facing cabinets would be twice the drawer length plus 18 inches. Experience has shown that a 3-foot clearance between the two facing open drawers provides still better spacing for normal work and passage.

SUMMARY OF HINTS FOR FILEROOM LAYOUT

1. Allow enough room for working in the files and also for traffic in the area.
2. Arrange the cabinets to form an enclosure if a separate room or suitable partitioning is not provided.
3. Place a cross aisle every 25 feet if the rows of files are long.
4. Do not situate the cabinets so that the drawers must open on a traffic aisle.
5. Place the clerks near the files assigned to them.
6. Arrange desks, chairs, and equipment utilized by clerks so that traffic does not pass directly behind them.

⁹ On this topic, see Remington Rand Co., *How Shelf Filing . . . Saves . . . Cost, Saves . . . Floor Space, Minimizes Filing Errors* (leaflet LBV626, [1954?]); and Alice Beaulier, *For Medical Records — Modern Filing System Cuts Time, Space, Cost, Error*, leaflet reprint from *Hospitals Magazine*, vol. 27 (Feb. 1953).

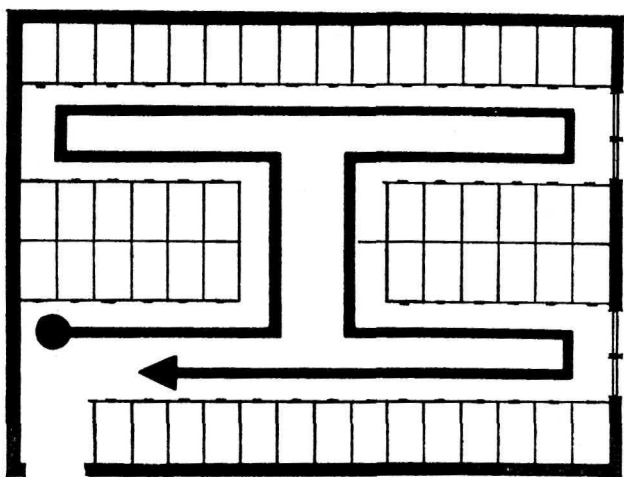
¹⁰ On this topic, see National Stationery and Office Equipment Association, *How to Plan Your Office Layout* (Washington 5, D. C., 1953). Illustration no. 1 of this paper is taken from this pamphlet.

7. Do not permit unauthorized access to files. The use of counters will help control this problem.

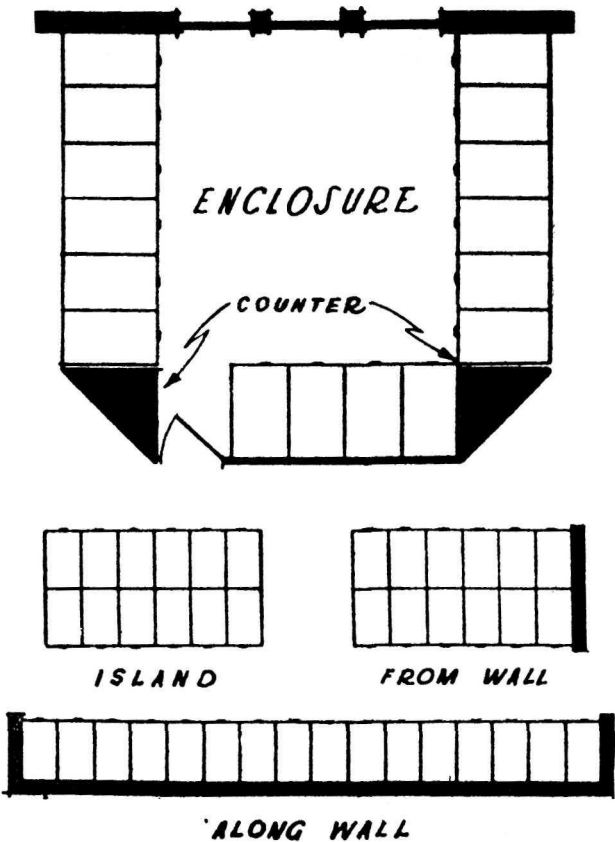
8. Always provide facilities such as desks, tables, and chairs for authorized personnel to use records for reference without taking them out of the records section.

9. Plan your layout with expansion in mind and use space and equipment accordingly.

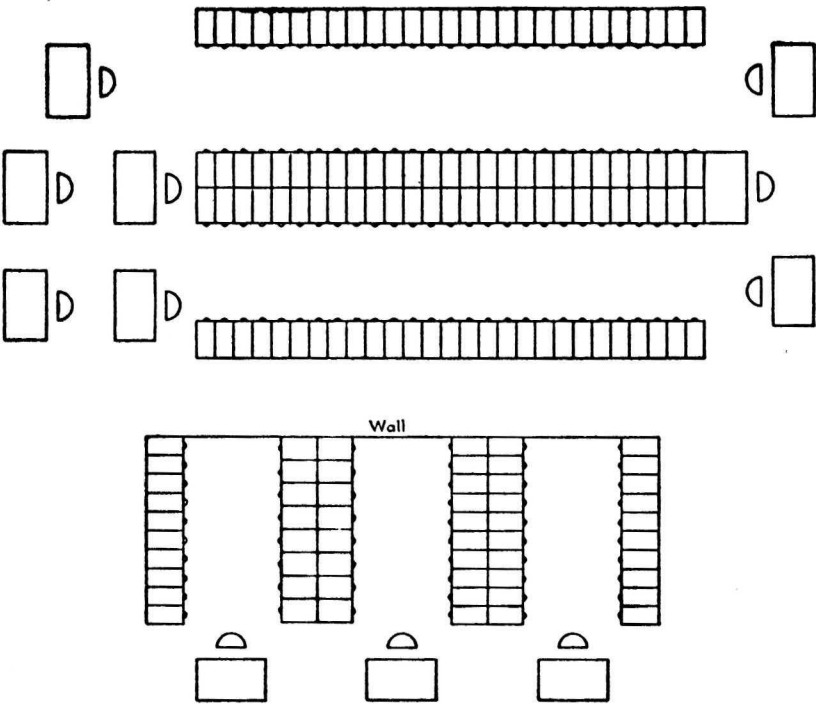
10. Watch out for those 2-drawer file cabinets. If space in addition to that provided with the desks is needed, four- or five-drawer cabinets should be used to conserve floor space.



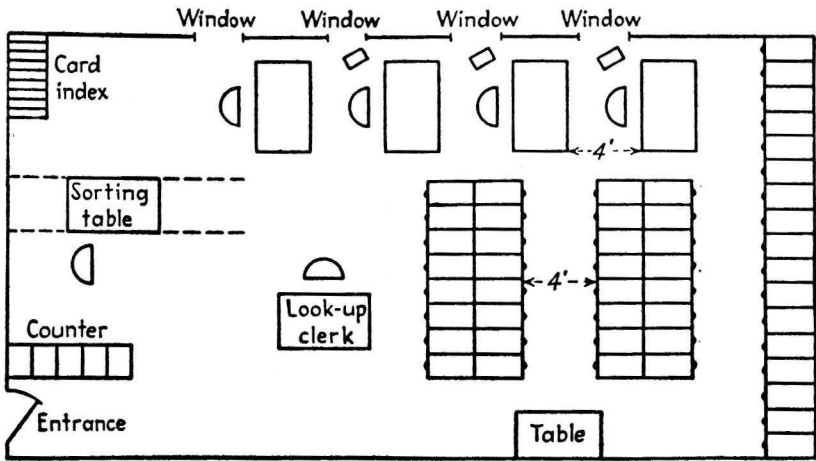
1. File Cabinet Layout, Left to Right, in Convenient Sequence



2. Layouts of File Cabinets



3. Layout of File Cabinets for Centralized Files in Open Space



4. Arrangement of File Cabinets and Desks for Maximum Natural Light