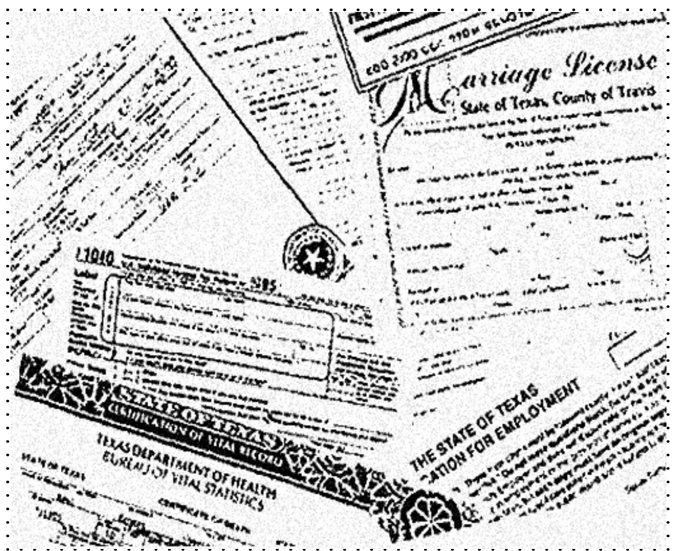
Forms Management

Introduction

The cost of managing forms increases each year, not only due to increasing personnel costs, but because more services are being demanded of state agencies. These increased costs and services often require increased paperwork. A large percentage of any agency's administrative staff time is spent reading, completing, processing, transferring, referring to, and filing forms created or received by the agency.



Forms are the most widely used type of business publication.

Forms are an important part of operations that aid in the collection and transmission of data, or that provide a record or a report necessary for the continuance of an agency's business. These forms must be well designed and well managed. This section of the *Texas State Records Management Manual* will define and recommend practices to aid in the design and management of an agency's forms.

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Definition

A form is a tool used in the operation of an agency's business. It is a document, on paper or electronic media, which is carefully designed to gather and transmit prescribed information. Generally, a form does one or more of the following:

➤ Initiates an action.

➤ Records a transaction.

➤ Reports something.

Statutory Requirements

The Texas Government Code §441.180 defines the responsibilities of agencies for records management to include "control over the creation and distribution of forms, reports, and correspondence." The guidelines presented in this part of the manual have been adopted as the basis for the management of forms and the reduction and simplification of paperwork generated by state agencies. Agencies should implement their forms management programs according to the procedures outlined in this chapter.

Implementing Forms Management

Forms are the most widely used type of business publication. They are the primary means for communicating information in a methodical and standardized way. Forms provide records of fixed as well as variable data. On paper or in automated format, constant information is preprinted, and only the variables are written, entered, or typed.

By design, forms often guide the flow of work through an office or a series of offices in an agency, between agencies, or between the public and an agency. To centralize control of forms, each agency shall establish a forms control program within the overall records management system. An efficient forms management and control program includes procedures for designing, ordering, storing, distributing, analyzing, reviewing, and disposing of all the agency's forms.

Forms are usually easier to prepare than reports, letters, or almost any other format used for the transfer of information. Even though a small amount of time is required to fill out a single form, large amounts of time are wasted when many people use redundant or inappropriate forms. The uncontrolled use of forms is expensive in terms of inefficiency as well as actual cost.

The cost of producing forms includes not only printing, which is in fact only a small percentage of the total cost, but the expense of creating and processing as well. The cost of processing and handling forms has been estimated at twenty times the cost of paper and printing.

It is essential that agency forms be well designed so that they are easy to use. Imperfections in the design and use of forms are usually a result of designing forms without concentrating on the information actually needed. Other deficiencies are usually due to one or more of the following factors:

- The form requests unnecessary information.
- The form is difficult to complete.
- The form is not suited to the method or circumstances in which it must be completed or processed.
- The form duplicates or overlaps information requested in other forms.
- The form is obsolete.
- Too many copies are requested, made, or kept.
- The instructions are vague or contradictory.
- The form does not follow design standards.

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The primary purpose of the forms management program is to reduce labor, material, and storage costs. Four specific objectives for accomplishing this purpose are:

1) Only needed forms, supplying needed information, are approved and used.

2) All forms meet design standards.

3) Forms are used to achieve more efficient procedures.

4) Forms are printed, distributed, and replenished economically.

These objectives can best be achieved by establishing a forms management program that includes all the necessary elements to improve operating efficiency, thereby supporting better agency services.

Program Elements

Consider the major elements of a well-organized forms management program:

Planning and training—As with any developmental change or project, the forms management program must have support from agency management. This calls for planning the program, establishing goals, and developing understanding of the program by all personnel.

Planning should include:

➤ Scope of the project.

➤ Personnel to be involved.

➤ Projected costs of implementing the program.

➤ Resources needed.

➤ Staffing requirements.

➤ Time requirements.

Training must be included in the planning. The two main objectives of training within the program are:

1) To encourage participation in the forms management program.

2) To provide technical instruction and guidance for the originators of forms.

Coordination—In most agencies, many employees have an interest in forms management. They have good ideas about what the role of forms should be, especially those forms needed for their specific department or division. In administering the forms management program, you will need to decide how to best take advantage of this collective expertise.

You will also need to provide coordination with other service areas in or outside the agency such as reproduction, supply, and distribution. There should be coordination with the staff responsible for documenting procedures since the procedures for the new program will have to be incorporated into the overall agency activities. Many agencies find it useful to have a forms representative or liaison in each department.

Procedural analysis—A request or proposal for a new, revised, or reprinted form should be analyzed with regard to the procedure the form addresses. Evaluate the content of the form, and study its effect on work methods. View every item on the form and determine the need for each entry. (This process will be discussed in more detail later in this part of the manual.) Some agencies may decide to spend little time reviewing low cost forms, saving the detailed analysis for forms which have greater usage and higher cost, but it is important that each form receive some degree of evaluation.

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Standardization of design—Standards for layout and construction are essential to good forms design. Standardization will be one of the products of your analysis of forms as you find the most efficient way of putting information together.

The content should be arranged in a format that will aid use and processing. The layout should be spaced and designed to accommodate the desired entries and to meet the needs of the writing, transmitting, interpreting, and filing methods. (More on design later in this part of the manual.) In designing forms you will need to determine form size, typography, paper weight or automated template design, color, carbons, and other design elements accordingly.

Registration and identification—Each request for a new, revised, or reprinted form should be channeled to a central point (in many agencies, the records management officer will fulfill this role) to be recorded and assigned to analysis. Essential data on numbering and identification, previous or proposed form revisions, volume, use, production, and distribution should be maintained at this central control point. Title, number, and edition date are assigned here as identification.

The title links the form to its function, and the form number and edition date show that the form has been authorized for use.

Procurement and reproduction—Agencies need to develop specifications and procedures for economical procurement and printing, and ensure coordination among the units performing these functions. Those departments requesting specialty forms or special bindery operations such as punching, perforating, stapling, padding, and folding should be required to justify these extra expenses.

Distribution and storage—Procedures should be developed, with both originating offices and supply facilities, for the effective storage and distribution of forms. (The State Records Center cannot store blank forms or paper stock for agencies because these are not records.)

Methods should also be established for determining current supplies, setting minimum and maximum stock levels, designating minimum order requirements, disposing of obsolete forms, and setting distribution controls.

Administration and Personnel

Throughout this part of the manual, references will be made to the agency records management officer as the person responsible for the forms management program. It is understood that in some agencies, the records management officer may not have these duties in the scope of his or her position.

Organizational structure varies among Texas state agencies, as does the role of the records management officer. The procedures and methods presented in this section are to be carried out under the direction of each agency. The administration of the program and the assignment of responsibilities within the program are to be determined by the agency.

The agency records management officer and records management department staff are critical to the success of the forms management program. Not all agencies have a records management department, but all do have an appointed records management officer. No form should be sent for printing without the approval of the records management officer or an approved designee.

In addition, it is often helpful to have one person assigned in each department as a representative to work with the records management officer to coordinate forms control. This representative should have a thorough understanding of the paperwork within the department. A forms representative becomes even more valuable in the evaluation process, communicating needed changes to the user and the analysis staff. The operational knowledge of the representative can speed analysis and the acceptance of changes and improvements.

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Control of forms in the agency is best accomplished by centralizing the responsibility for planning, coordinating, simplifying, and auditing. The records management officer must have the authority to operate across organizational lines. A successful forms management program is as dependent on all employees in the agency as it is on the records management staff and the department representatives. The roles of the different groups involved in the forms program are described in the following pages.

Management Support

Regardless of how well you plan the program, your objective will not be achieved without management support. The direction taken by the program, as with any program that cuts across all segments of the agency, must have the stated sanction of top management. All agencies are required to comply with the law regarding forms management, but the specific applications will be defined within each individual agency. You can greatly help to maintain management support by keeping management informed of the procedures and resulting benefits of the forms program. Here are several areas which are usually of particular interest to agency management:

User reaction—In developing the program, devote some time to interviewing the users of the forms about the positive aspects and the shortcomings of the forms they are using. Users should not be pressured to prove their criticisms, since you are collecting information on attitude, not forms design, at this point. If the users of the form are members of the general public, consider the improved public relations (and reduced burden on the taxpayer) that attention to user reaction may bring.

High use forms—Management should know which forms have high annual usage. Benefits from improving or eliminating them will be greater than from low usage forms.

Forms waste—Forms may become obsolete yearly or sooner depending on organizational changes. Often, personnel hesitate to order a small amount, such as 50, so they will make the order for 500. To help avoid this tendency, note how current the form is and evaluate the actual use of the form.

Relationships—As stated earlier, coordination is very important to the forms management program. Agency management should be aware of poor teamwork. This can take the form of the originator not giving the forms analyst enough time to review a form, the analyst reviewing forms too slowly, or the originator not notifying the records management officer of changes in usage requirements.

Forms Analyst

In some agencies, the records management officer will be handling all functions within the forms management program. In others, additional personnel will carry out some of the duties. Regardless of the title assigned, the person fulfilling the forms analyst role has an important job in controlling the creation of forms. The forms analyst will deal with all forms used in the agency and in doing so will gain a working awareness of all related functions. The forms analyst is often able to suggest improvements that did not occur to the originator.

If possible, the forms analyst should have knowledge of standard forms as well as agency-wide practices and be sufficiently detached to see procedural aspects of tasks which those closer to the operation may not see. The forms analyst will often also be the forms designer, incorporating the analysis and forms design techniques to develop the most efficient and easy to use form structure.

Originator

The originator is the person or department responsible for the creation of a particular form and for dictating its need. If a great number of copies of a form are used in a year, or if the form requires a long time (more than 30 minutes) to fill out, the originator should study the entire procedure for which the form is required. Consider the input and output required of the procedure as well as the processes in between.

The originator should gather facts and information about the procedure, the purposes for which the form is needed, and the circumstances in which the form will be completed, filed, sorted, and handled. Where relevant, obtain information such as the cost of operations, the incidence of error in form completion, queries and difficulties, and the scope of possible improvements.

Consumer

The consumer is the person who initially fills in the form, providing the data requested on the form. The consumer should be provided with headings or captions that are easy to understand, instructions that are correctly placed and clearly written, a logical sequence of items to read and complete, and sufficient writing space for the entering of data. The forms improvement role that the consumer takes is to advise the forms management staff (or the records management officer) of problems encountered in completing a form.

By reviewing completed forms already on file, you can determine whether the consumer has sufficient space to write or type the entries. Spaces consistently left blank may indicate that such items are unnecessary or inadequately explained. Information written on the form in areas intended for another purpose may indicate that additional fields need to be included for this data. The consumer, as the primary user of the forms, is in the best position to analyze and report on these conditions.

Processing User

After a form has been completed, the next step usually consists of someone reading the entered information. This person is referred to as the processing user and in most cases is expected to take some action pertinent to the form. The effectiveness of the information on the form in facilitating the action is a key consideration of the form's worth. If the information presents or creates processing problems, the form cannot be considered an effective tool regardless of how easy it is for the consumer to enter the data.

The processing user should be especially interested in the organization of the information and in uniform design of related forms. The role the processing user takes in forms improvement is to notify the forms management staff (or the records management officer) of processing difficulties a form is creating.

Procurement Personnel

Stocking of forms includes procurement, reproduction, storage, and distribution. These tasks are often assigned to the publication or supply departments. By supplying accurate specifications, you can aid these departments in establishing efficient stocking procedures. An important aspect of the relationship between the forms program and the supply department is the method of handling stock replacement orders. You can avoid costly over-orders or short supplies by working with the supply department on agreed stock minimums and maximums, which are determined by the usage rate of the form.

Forms Creation Control

Before a form is created, determine the need for its creation. Chart the entire life cycle of the form, from initial use, through all processes required, to final disposition. The person creating the form should be charged with these responsibilities:

- Prove the need for the form.
- Identify the purpose for which the form will be used.
- Specify how the form will be used.
- Determine the number of copies needed for the procedure.
- List the titles of personnel (not just the department) who will receive copies.

- Specify how the copies will be prepared.
- Specify how the copies will be distributed.
- Identify where the record copy and working copies will be retained.
- Determine how long the record copy and working copies will be retained.

Many forms are originated by agency officials. The officials know how the forms are used and how their use affects other operations, although they may not be aware of changes that require revisions to the forms.

If a form is to be revised, that official usually must approve the final revisions. It is natural for this manager, supervisor, or administrator to feel that the daily responsibilities of the job are enough to handle without worrying about the analysis and improvement of forms. As a result, agency officials may be overlooking that unsuitable forms, or the need for more or fewer forms, may actually be causing operating problems in the agency.

Supervisors should be aware of the time they and their staff spend both in studying forms for possible changes and in handling problems caused by inefficient forms. Suggestions arising from these problems should be forwarded to the forms management staff (or the records management officer) for a detailed forms analysis.

Many forms travel from the originating office to other departments for preparation and use. In the majority of agencies, most forms are administrative, and the various departments have similar operations. This often results in forms from the different departments being similar or redundant. The analyst can assist with standardization of these forms or with the elimination of needless forms.

Control Files

The use of forms control files can be very effective in controlling the creation of unnecessary forms. Forms control files are also a basic part of the overall forms management program. The two most common types of forms control files are the numeric history file and the functional classification file.

Numeric History File

This control file provides a complete profile of each form from its creation to its current status. A number assigned to each form indicates that it has been approved for use, and the numbering system should be as simple as possible. The numeric file consists of copies of each form used by the organization, arranged in numerical order so that forms can be easily located. A numeric file folder for each form should eventually contain the following:

➤ A copy of the current edition of the form and any previous editions.

➤ Drafts showing only significant stages of development and pertinent correspondence.

➤ A copy of any directive authorizing use of the form.

➤ The original request for approval of the form and any requests for revisions.

➤ A list of all departments using the form and the rate of use.

➤ Final official agency approval for the printing, reproduction, and distribution of the form.

➤ Cross reference to the functional classification file.

The numeric history file must be consistently reviewed and updated. Remove files for discontinued and obsolete forms, annotate the folders accordingly, and place in a separate discontinued numeric file for the amount of time specified by your agency records retention schedule.

Functional Classification File

This control file brings together forms dealing with related subjects. Classify one copy of each form by its purpose and place it in the appropriate subject title folder. For example, in the "Hospitalization" folder will be the forms for hospitalization claims, hospitalization premiums, surgery forms, and so on. This classification can also group forms that serve similar areas in the agency, such as payroll, personnel, and purchasing. Each of the classifications can then be subdivided as you determine appropriate. The main purpose of the functional classification file is to accomplish the following:

- Avoid the creation of new forms that are very similar to existing forms.
- Revise existing forms to serve changing needs.
- Detect those forms that could be eliminated or consolidated.
- Single out those forms that should be standardized for agency-wide use.
- Identify forms that should be analyzed and redesigned.
- Generate studies of forms in their relation to their specific systems and procedures.

An important benefit of maintaining a functional control file is the detection and elimination of unauthorized forms that have been designed or reproduced outside of the established forms management program. By knowing which forms are approved for use within the agency, personnel can eliminate those forms which should not be used.

The functional classification file can be difficult to develop, but it is an excellent type of control file to use in analyzing the agency's forms and their use.

Forms Analysis

Forms analysis involves the investigation and evaluation of the nature and reason for every form, its relation to other forms already in use, the utility of the form as an information processing tool, and the method for reproducing copies. In effect, you are challenging the need for every form, each item on every form, and each copy of every form.

It is possible, and usually predictable, that you can improve agency processes through forms analysis; however, it is too big an undertaking to analyze all forms in the system at once. The best way to approach forms analysis in the agency is by analyzing all the forms used in a specific process.

Every form is involved in a business process and it is often the tool that sets an activity into motion. It is easier to approach analysis of the forms for a specific process because the forms will most likely have a similar or related purpose. Forms analysis will help you discover why each form is used and how it moves through the process. This analysis is not done just once. After the initial analysis, each agency process and its related forms should be examined periodically.

Guide for Basic Analysis

Questions to ask to get the facts and make improvements:

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Need

- What does the form accomplish?
- Is the information necessary?
- Does the cost of gathering the information exceed its worth?
- Is there a better source?
- What other forms are related to or duplicate (wholly or in part) the information requested?
- Are there problems with the form? For example, are some fields consistently misinterpreted or left blank, or does a staff member need to collect additional information after the form is completed?
- Can the form or any fields on the form be:

  Combined?

  Eliminated?

  Simplified?

  Arranged in a more logical sequence?

People

- Who requires the data?
- Who enters the information?
- Who retrieves the information?
- Can the work be assigned to other agency areas to simplify the work or combine its handling?
- If several forms are required in a process, can they be used in a more logical sequence to simplify the entering or retrieving of information?

Place

- Where is the form completed and used within the agency?
- Can the completion and use of the form be combined with similar work done in another agency area?
- Where is the form sent?
- Where is the form filed?
- Does the design of the form aid in its filing, retrieval, storage, and disposition?

Time

- When in the process is the form completed and used for agency business?
- Are the various processing steps taken in their proper order?
- Can the peak load times be regulated by better scheduling of the form's flow?
- When is the form filed?

Method

- How or in what style is the form written?
- Can the writing method be changed to improve clarity or brevity?
- How is the information in the form processed?
- How is the form or the information transmitted?
- Can the routing or mailing method be improved?

- How is the form filed?

- Has the form been designed for the processing and filing equipment used with it?

In addition to identifying the facts, by using forms analysis you will see the reason for the forms use, any source documents needed to complete the form, and how many copies of the form are distributed.

User Interview

By being familiar with the background information of the process and its related forms before discussing them with the people who prepare and use them, you will be able to:

- Ask relevant questions and interpret the answers in context.

- Gain cooperation by demonstrating interest and knowledge in the area.

- Shorten the time spent interviewing.

- Gain most, if not all, of the needed information in one interview.

You can probably obtain most of the necessary background information by researching sources within the agency, such as:

- Agency directives or administrative manuals which describe functional responsibilities.

- Organizational charts showing the relationships between agency departments.

- Reports of previous studies concerning problems in using or preparing the forms.

- Functional and historical control files; from these you can review the history of the form, identify any similar forms, and see how often and in what quantities the forms are reproduced.

- Completed forms on file, showing types of errors made in filling out the forms.

Interviewing of agency personnel in any procedural study should not be done without preparation. Many forms analysts find these steps useful:

- Explain the purpose of the study to the supervisor of the person to be interviewed and have the supervisor make the initial contact.

- Plan for short interviews, no longer than one hour. Consider the workload of the person and arrange a time that least interferes with the other activities of the job.

- Arrange your questions and points of discussion in a logical sequence.

The two groups of people most likely to have the information you seek are those involved with entering the data on the forms and those concerned with extracting or summarizing data from the forms. Other sources are the people involved with other phases of processing the forms, such as those who audit, transmit, or file them, and personnel who participated in earlier studies of the forms. When more than one copy of a form is required, different groups of agency personnel may deal with the processing for each copy.

The following steps may be useful in planning and conducting the interview:

- Determine the responsibilities of the person you are interviewing in relation to a particular form.

- Discover which copies are prepared for this person's use, and ask if each item, form, and copy is needed.

- Discuss each step in the process and how it is carried out by each person working with the form.

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- ➤ Make a note of the supplies and equipment used, how often one person handles the form, and the average amount of time spent on each process.

- ➤ Pay special attention to any form from which, or to which, information is copied as part of processing the form.

- ➤ If possible, go to the department where the form is used and watch the processing steps.

Forms Design

Forms design is the outgrowth of forms analysis. Only after you have established the need for the form and determined the procedures affecting its use can you realistically decide on the right design. The design comes about as you integrate the needs of the people completing the information requested, the people processing the data, and the people involved in mailing, filing, and any other disposition of the form.

Forms analysis tells you *what* the form should do, and forms design carries the analysis to the decision of *how* to best arrange and present the information. The design of a form is one measure of the degree of efficiency with which a system functions. Design helps you determine whether it must take 30 minutes to complete a form, or whether it can be done in less than 15 minutes. A properly designed form will help an agency save money, reduce administrative and clerical time, minimize miscommunication, and increase efficiency.

Principles of Design

Good principles of design will result in a form that is easier to read and understand, to fill in, and to file.

There are five parts to almost every form:

1) Heading—includes a title and a form number.

2) Instructions—explain how to fill in the form and what to do with the completed form.

3) Introduction—explains the purpose of the form.

4) Body—consists of the sequenced items requesting the desired information.

5) Closing—provides space for approval signatures.

See *Figure FM-1* (page 22), an example of a simple form using these five parts.

The application of the following design rules for simple forms will usually result in an efficient, easy to use product:

➤ Study the purpose and use of the form and design it with the user in mind.

➤ Keep the design simple. Use a minimum of type fonts and sizes; eliminate unnecessary information and lines.

➤ Include a form number and name on each form.

➤ Use standard sizes of paper (or screens, if automated) where practical.

➤ Use standard terminology in wording instructions.

➤ Arrange items in a logical sequence.

➤ Arrange items in the sequence in which the information will be extracted during processing.

➤ Preprint constant data (such as agency name) so as to keep variable data to a minimum.

➤ Allow sufficient spacing for the method of completion (manual, typewriter, computer).

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1 Heading
2 Instructions
3 Introduction
4 Body
5 Closing

FIGURE FM–1

1

RMD ACCIDENT REPORT—TSL WJ 12 (5/90)

Routing: Copy 1—Personnel
Copy 2—OSHA
Copy 3—Injured

2

Texas State Library, Records Management Division
INSTRUCTIONS: Complete form in ink or type. File report within three (3) working days from date of injury.

THIS FORM IS TO BE USED FOR REPORTING ALL ON-THE-JOB INJURIES 3

4

Name of Injured		Date of Injury	
Date of Birth	Social Security No.	Sex	Time of Injury
❑ Employee ❑ Visitor ❑ Other ________	Department	Injured's Title or Job Position	
Address of Injured			
Injured's Statement			
Injured's Signature		Today's Date	
This portion to be completed by the Reporting Individual			
Was First Aid Administered at Scene?	❑ Yes ❑ No	If Yes, Administered By Whom? ________	
Was Injured Moved to a Hospital?	❑ Yes ❑ No	If Yes, What Hospital? ________	
Nature of Injury			
Witness (Name and Position or Title)			
Where Did Accident Occur?			
How Did Accident Occur?			
Identify Conditions and Possible Causes That Led to Accident			

5

Reporting Individual's Signature	Name of Supervisor	Date
TSL WJ 12 (5/90)	COPY 1	

Identification

When using a form for the first time, a person reads the title first, in order to gain an idea of the purpose of the form. Some kind of identification is needed to make the purpose and function understandable to the user. In addition to the title, identification will include:

➤ Agency name.

➤ Form number, date of edition.

➤ Any supersession notices ("This form replaces RMD 101").

➤ Any internal control symbols.

Different users will pay attention to different parts of the identification. A member of the public is interested in the agency name and form title; a stock clerk is interested in the form number, edition date, and supersession notice; a file clerk is primarily interested in the form number. Place the identification information on the form to make it accessible to all users, no matter what their emphasis.

Title and Subtitle

Where the title is placed can be determined by how the form is used. Top left is often used when the upper right corner is reserved for filing data. Or the title can be centered across the top to increase its visibility in filing equipment or to eliminate a break in typing sequence. A subtitle is helpful, especially if the form is used by the public, to explain or qualify the main title. If there is more than one type of a category of form, for example, "Daily Contact Report," each form should be distinguished by a subtitle under the main title, such as "Requests from Field Offices" or "Shipments."

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Organizational Name

The agency name should appear on all forms. If the form is to be filled in by the public or by personnel from other agencies, definitely include the agency name to avoid confusion and aid routing.

Form Number

The best place for the form number is either the lower right or lower left margin of the page, for the following reasons:

- ➤ Prevents tearing or obliterating the number if the form is stapled at either upper corner.
- ➤ Permits the number to be readily seen if the forms are bound at the top.
- ➤ Serves as an aid in stocking forms, especially when forms are stocked in small quantities in supply cabinets.

When a form consists of several pages (or screens), put the form number on each page. Similarly, if a form is printed on the back as well as the front, have the form number appear on the back side as well.

Edition Date

Edition dates are valuable in determining that the current form is being used, in disposing of obsolete stock, in showing how long it has been since a form has been changed, and for reference when writing procedures. Place the edition date adjacent to the form number.

Page Identification

When a form consists of two or more pages which are folded, stapled, or bound, page numbers help to:

➤ Aid the printer in assembling and collating.

➤ Aid instructions in the use of the form, i.e., "Turn to page 2 if changing claim status."

➤ Identify the form, especially if pages are separated for processing.

The page number is usually placed in the upper right corner. If the number of continuation pages is unknown, number the pages with a "Page ____ of ____." The page number and total number of pages can be filled in by the person completing the form.

Supersession Notice

It is a good forms management practice to have some way of notifying users and those in charge of supplies when a form has been revised, or when an existing form is being replaced by a new form. The supersession notice does this, and it is usually placed near the form number. Some ways of wording the supersession notice include:

1) When revising an existing form, use:

   a. Previous editions are obsolete.

   b. Previous editions may be used until supply is exhausted.

   c. Existing stocks of (form number and edition date) will be used.

   d. Existing stocks of (form number and edition date) will not be used.

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2) When replacing an existing form with a different number, use:

   a. Replaces (form number and edition date) which is obsolete.

   b. Replaces (form number and edition date) which may be used until supply is exhausted.

Instructions

Place brief instructions at the top of the form below or near the title to tell the user how many copies are required, who should submit the form, and where, when, and to whom copies are to be sent.

If detailed instructions are included elsewhere, such as on the reverse, direct the user to that area (i.e., "See reverse for instructions.") Short instructions that relate to a specific section should be placed at the top of that section.

Longer, more involved instructions are placed:

- On the front of the form if there is enough room for both the instructions and the fill-in data.
- On the back, if there is not sufficient space on the front.
- On a separate sheet or in a booklet.
- In an administrative directive or agency operations manual.

Routing

You can significantly simplify the handling of forms by incorporating effective routing and mailing design techniques. These techniques can also reduce the chance of errors and speed the delivery of the mail.

When possible, make the form self-routing, eliminating the need for a routing slip or transmittal letter. This can be done in several ways, such as:

➤ A "to/from" line or lines which the user fills in.

➤ A routing name or address preprinted, for constant routing.

➤ A preprinted multiple arrangement of departments, with instructions to route in the order listed.

Arrangement

The arrangement of the items on the form, other than the identification data, should facilitate the entering and retrieving of information. There should be a discernable sequence of the fields or items, so the user does not have to move from one area of the form to another and back again to either complete or interpret the form. Three basic arrangement factors are involved:

1) Grouping data.

2) Establishing item sequence.

3) Aligning data.

Grouping data—If different people are to be entering data on the same form, have the item arrangement match the sequence of the processing steps so that the last person to enter data on the form is entering it at the bottom or on the last page of the form. This eliminates the need for backtracking or searching the form for the correct entry area. If the form is used as a source document to collect data on different types of materials, group the related items together.

It is helpful to identify the groupings either by numbering or lettering. You can identify subgroups the same way you would in an outline, with letters following numbers in the progression of importance.

Establishing item sequence—After you have grouped related items, put them in a sequence that will allow the user to move from one to the next without having to look back up the page. This can aid the person filling in the form as well as the person transcribing or reviewing the information. Numbering the items can inform the user that there is a prescribed sequence to follow.

Aligning data—Arrange the items to follow people's visual habits, from left to right and from top to bottom. By arranging the form in this manner, you can relieve the user of wasted motion. If the information is to be entered using a typewriter or computer, help the user by aligning items vertically to reduce the number of tabular or marginal stops.

Paper Size

Sizes of paper stock are standardized. The most common sizes are letter (8 1/2" x 11"), legal (8 1/2" x 14"), and ledger (17" x 22"). Reduced paper cost is not the only reason for choosing standard sizes. Greater cost savings are to be found in using equipment and supplies which have also been standardized. Each time a nonstandard size form is used, it forces the use of nonstandard equipment, and costs rise.

State agencies are required by Texas Government Code, §2051.021, to reduce the use of legal size paper for any application, including forms. Careful consideration should be given any variation from the established paper sizes.

Margins

Some space should be allowed around the text area of a form for utility as well as appearance. Some printers and reproduction shops require margins as working space for the sprocket holes that permit machines to grip the paper during printing, or for trimming the paper when several copies of a form are printed on larger sheets. Allow at least 1/3 inch at the top, 1/2 inch at the bottom, and 3/10 inch at the sides. If using card stock, allow 1/8 inch on all sides.

Sometimes it is necessary for the image on the form to extend to the edge of the paper, for example, if the form consists of several pages put together in an overlapping configuration to indicate comparative or cumulative figures. Printing the image to the edge requires printing on a sheet of paper larger than the finished form size, then trimming the printed page to the finished size. This process is called *bleeding,* which means to run off the edge of the trimmed printed sheet. If the form is designed for offset printing, a good practice is to draw lines beyond the image size. When trimmed, the lines will bleed off the edge of the paper, leaving a clean edge. Because of the extra handling and trimming, bleeding can be expensive, so use it only if you need it for making a form more effective.

Spacing

Space requirements will be determined by the amount of fill-in data needed as well as the amount of printed material such as captions, headings, and instructions. The writing method (hand, typewriter, computer or other office machine) determines the amount of space you should allow for fill-in data, and the number of characters per inch of typeface used determines the amount of space needed for printed matter.

Horizontal spacing is based on the number of characters written per inch and is determined by the writing method. Vertical spacing is based on the number of writing lines that can be written per inch. Many forms are typewritten, some are handwritten, and a small percentage combine the two methods. Since most forms created on computer for computer entry are designed to be compatible with the machine spacing, incorrect horizontal or vertical spacing is rarely a problem.

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Typewritten Spacing

Horizontal spacing—There are 12 characters of elite type and 10 characters of pica type to the horizontal inch on standard typewriters. Accordingly, when counting horizontal spaces, allow 1/12 inch for elite and 1/10 inch for pica type; 1/10 inch accommodates either elite or pica type and allows maximum entry space. Whenever possible, add a minimum of one extra space to the required number of characters to prevent crowding.

Vertical spacing—There are six vertical lines per inch on the standard typewriter, elite or pica. Accordingly, 1/6 inch, or a multiple of 1/6 inch, should be allowed for each line of typing. By measuring spacing this way, you require the user to adjust the form in the typewriter for the first line of typing only, after which no further adjustments are needed.

Handwritten Spacing

Horizontal spacing—Provide 1/10 to 1/6 inch per character to avoid crowding or excessive abbreviation.

Vertical spacing—Provide 1/4 inch to 1/3 inch per line. When using a box design, allow 1/3 inch. Otherwise, 1/4 inch is usually plenty of space for handwritten entries.

If a form is filled in by both typewriter and handwritten methods, determine the horizontal space by hand fill-in requirements and the vertical space by typewriter requirements. The 1/3 inch vertical spacing will accommodate either method of entry.

Establishing Standards

Standards are important to the success of the forms management program. They are the means by which the various principles of forms design and control can be consistently applied. By establishing standards in your agency's program, you can:

- Facilitate the task of entering information on forms.

- Facilitate the usefulness of the information after entry.

- Reduce error, both in entering and in employing the data.

- Reduce paperwork and printing costs.

A forms management program can increase efficiency of forms design, application, replenishment, and processing. By establishing and maintaining the program, an agency can realize the four main objectives of forms management:

1) Only needed forms, supplying needed information, are approved and used.

2) All forms meet design standards.

3) Forms are used to achieve more efficient procedures.

4) Forms are printed, distributed, and replenished economically.

Assessing Progress

In order to assess the effectiveness of the state's paperwork reduction and simplification efforts, agencies must track and document the progress of their own forms management programs. This does not require accumulating a great amount of data on the daily activity of the forms program, but it does require each agency to capture before-and-after information such as:

- Clerical and printing costs.

- Number of forms in use before and after implementation of the program.

- All cost savings recognized from changes in forms and procedures, especially savings realized by members of the public who are required to complete (fill in) forms.

An agency that employs the guidelines set forth in this part of the manual should realize an overall improvement in the development and utilization of forms. By maintaining accurate and complete data on the progress of the forms management program, an agency can demonstrate the benefits realized from the program's implementation and provide justification for continuing improvement of the program. The effective management of forms by agencies will also result in the simplification and reduction of paperwork within state government.

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