**A Guide to Maintaining Records and Identifying
Archival Material for Societies and Organizations**

1. What is archival material?

a. Archives are non-current recorded information, occurring in a variety of media, created by an individual or organization in the course of the conduct of their affairs, and preserved because of their continuing value.

b. It is important for members of a society or organization to identify the need to preserve records at the outset of the creation and incorporation of your organization as a defined group.

c. Recognizing that many organizations "discover" their archives further along their development, archivists offer assistance in identifying and preserving archival material and in establishing a process for future records creation.

d. There are several stages in the evolution of archives:

- Records Creation
- Records Appraisal and Selection
- Records Arrangement
- Records Description
- Records Preservation
- Reference and Research Use of Records

2. Records Creation:

a. The accuracy, clarity, and completeness of information enhance the value of archives; these qualities are best supplied by the officials and staff of your organization at the time in which the records are created.

b. Information management is often facilitated by the adoption of a records-keeping system of file arrangement or grouping of records by type of document.   [See Records Arrangement].

c. To ensure the on-going preservation of your organization's records through successive executives, it is important to develop procedures for the disposition of the records through the by-laws, regulations, and/or constitution of the organization.

d. If possible, members of your organization should be appointed successively to maintain and monitor the preservation of archival material over the lifetime of the organization. Records are often lost, particularly among special interest and non-profit groups who may not maintain a physical office; the tendency is for various executive members to store their records at home. As executives change the records are not necessarily passed on with the position. This particularly occurs with records in electronic format.

e. If an official commitment to the care of the records comes later in the activities of your organization, several questions should be asked as part of the process of regaining control over your records, regardless of format or media:

- Where are the records currently stored?
- Who has been responsible for the records? (i.e. position on the executive, members-at-large, etc.)
- Who within the organization created records in the past and who creates present records?
- Do officers or executive members retain their own records?
- Are there non-current, inactive documents and are these kept separate from the current, active files?
- Are there gaps in the records (i.e. what has become "lost" due to past records retention practices, storage locations, and natural occurrences?)
- Are there long-term members who could provide a "history" of activities of the organization for these years (i.e. recreating your history through the experience of those who played an active part)?
- What is the present physical condition of the active and inactive records? How are they currently stored? Who determines the storage needs and makes decisions about the on-going care of the records? Is there a budget allocated for this activity?
- Are the records in a format which promotes long-term preservation or is transfer to another format required? (i.e. documentary film, electronic records)

f. Minutes are usually the most significant record for an organization. These documents typically include:

- The full date of each meeting (i.e. day, month, and year)
- Where the meeting is held and why
- The readers of reports and the initials or first and last names of individuals in order to identify specific members decades or centuries later
- The issues behind the motions of meetings clearly and fully defined

g. Other records created by the organization and typically of an archival nature (described below) often include:

- The date of creation (i.e. day, month, and year)

- For photographs, the date, names of persons, events, and locations depicted
- Notation of document revisions and/or editions of publications

3. Records Appraisal & Selection:

a. Appraisal is the process of determining the on-going value and thus the disposition of records based upon their current administrative, legal, and fiscal use, their evidential and/or historical research value, their arrangement, and their relationship to other records.

- Administrative value: The usefulness of records to the organization in the conduct of its current activities and business
- Fiscal value: The documentation of financial transactions and/or how monies are obtained, allotted, controlled and expended by the organization
- Legal value: The evidence in records of legally enforceable rights or obligations of the organization
- Historical research value: The usefulness of the record today and possibly fifty or one hundred years from today to persons interested in the history, activities, and impact of the organization on the larger community

b. Significant records typically containing the above characteristics include:

- Constitutions
- Bylaws
- Minutes
- Correspondence
- Briefs and submissions
- Policy documents
- Financial records (usually annual, audited statements, grant proposals, and ledgers)
- Reports
- Membership lists
- Scrapbooks
- Publications (Events programmes, brochures, posters)
- Photographs

c. Records frequently discarded include duplicates, adding machine tapes, cancelled cheques, receipt books, mass mailings, material with temporary value such as notices of meetings, and material collected from other organizations.

d. Whenever in doubt, keep the records!

4. Records Arrangement:

a. If you are appointed records keeper or archivist at the time of your organization's formation, you can plan a cohesive records system for your organization. Very often, however, your task will include that of arranging records which date back in time.

b. Steps to arranging records:

- Identify the types of records which will likely be created by your organization and/or the records that have been turned over to you from past activities.

- If you have records to arrange, you must first sort them. You should take care to determine whether there is an original order to the files and if so, attempt to preserve that order as much as possible, since much is revealed about an organization by the way it keeps or has kept its records.

- If there is no discernible original order (this is more often the case with organizational records), then you should begin by sorting the records into main units/series or aggregations of related items. (i.e. minutes, account books, membership lists, scrapbooks, correspondence…)

c. Ways in which these records may be arranged include:

- By original order: Always maintain the original order where possible. This also allows you to take advantage of any indices or file lists already in existence.

- By alphabetical order: This alphabetical arrangement might include names of individuals, places, subjects, or types of records.

    Example: 1.   Briefs and Submissions
                2.   Constitution
                3.   Correspondence
                4.   Minutes

- By function or activity: Where the organization has several administrative units within it, the arrangement may be according to the office or administrative unit that created the records, and within each series, by activity.

    Example: 1.   Board of Deacons
                2.   Board of Education
                3.   Church Council
                4.   Pastor's Files

- By physical type or medium: Certain types of records might be grouped together according to the form in which the records exist. This type of arrangement accommodates the special storage and preservation needs of different media. It is in many cases very similar to an alphabetical arrangement.

    Example: 1.   News clippings
                2.   Photographs
                3.   Publications
                4.   Sound Recordings

- By subject: An arrangement by subject is not often imposed on records as a whole since it is not archival practice to break up minutes, scrapbooks and/or other series to place them within a subject based system. The subject arrangement, however, is useful within a unit/series where files deal with specific programmes or activities and/or may contain records of various physical types. In many instances, these might be incorporated into your primary arrangement, as "subject files."

    Example: 1.   Fund-Raising Project
                    2.   History Book
                    3.   Member Survey
                    4.   Task Force on Education

- By chronological order: The use of an overall chronological arrangement is usually not feasible, except in instances where the only records generated are related to activities which follow a consecutive process, such as renewing contracts, or where only a single type of record exists (i.e. minute books).

- By numerical order: Filing records according to a numerical system may be cumbersome for small organizations. It is most often applied to large record systems like those of government departments or agencies, or large provincial associations.

- By geographical location: This type of arrangement is most suitable for records that are regional in scope or those reflecting wider provincial, national or international concerns. In many cases, the geographical arrangement is a variation of alphabetical arrangement.

    Example: 1.   Moose Jaw District
                2.   Regina District
                3.   Saskatoon District

d. The basis of record arrangement is best determined by the organization. It is advisable to choose a system which is as simple and straight-forward as possible to implement, operate, and maintain. Most often, several types of arrangements will be applied to the records system.

Example:
1. Board of Directors' Reports
2. Bulletins
3. Correspondence
4. Members
5. Publicity Workshops
6. Sound Recordings

You have in this example, a mixture of alphabetical, subject, functional, and physical type series. Once you have established your arrangement outline, it should be documented and applied as consistently as possible to the records.

e. If you are working at arranging a large collection of records, identified series can be roughly boxed until each unit/series is arranged in turn. Again, this can be done based on any system and may vary from series to series. The chronological arrangement is often most appropriate for correspondence, minutes, scrapbooks, etc.; the subject arrangement for news clippings, brochures, etc.

f. It is important to note the inclusive dates of each series and file. It is often possible to discern missing dates of documents from the context of the files. If this is not possible, the undated documents should be placed together at the beginning of each file.

g. Enclosures can, depending on their size and medium, be left with the document to which they are attached. You may wish, however, to remove large documents such as maps or plans; fragile documents such as photographs or drawings; or documents such as newspaper clippings which stain adjoining materials, to separate files. In each instance, a note should be left in the file, at the location of each item removed to maintain the purpose or context of this document's creation.

5. Records Description:

a. I If in-house listings of records are desired by an organization, the level of description used in identifying the records in your care depends on the complexity of records arrangement, the significance of records content, the available resources to undertake a listing project, and the demand for records use. Listings are often referred to as "finding aids".

b. Finding aids include:

- Checklists: File level listings which usually contain file titles, inclusive dates and the extent of each file.
- Inventories: File level listings which include, in addition to what is contained in checklists, a brief description of the contents of each file (i.e. summary of material related to the file title).
- Indices: At times a subject or name index supplements, but does not replace, the information contained in a checklist or inventory.

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c. Finding aids can be in a variety of forms, as traditional textual records, in electronic form, or as databases. Most finding aids also include a brief administrative history of the organization, which contains details such as the date(s) of incorporation and/or dissolution, enabling legislation, a summary of the organization's primary functions and purpose, and any significant events or activities.

d. Copies of finding aids prepared by Provincial Archives staff to describe records transferred to the custody of the Archives are sent to donor organizations for reference use.

6. **Records Preservation:**

a. Basic preservation techniques include attempting to protect the records from misuse; from damage caused by light, micro-organisms and insects; from extreme temperatures; and, as much as possible from disasters such as floods or fires.

b. Certain measures can be undertaken by an organization to ensure records preservation:

- While arranging records remove staples, pins, paper clips, and elastics. Straighten and unfold documents whenever possible.

- Do not smoke, eat or drink around the records, or use hand lotion prior to working with them.

- Never use tapes or glues to "repair" records.

- Control the use of fragile original documents (use copies, if possible).

- Use appropriate folders, containers and storage boxes to store your records.

- Wear clean cotton or plastic gloves when handling photographs, negative microfilm, audio tapes, drawings, etc.

- DO NOT store your records in basements or attics where there is danger of water damage and/or large variations in temperature and/or insects.

- Check the physical condition of records regularly and take remedial action where necessary.

7. **Reference and Research Use:**

    a. Individuals within the organization and those who are not members may wish to consult the records to learn about past activities, or origins of the more recent focus of the organization.

    b. Always balance the needs of preservation with the needs of the researcher.

    c. Decide whether certain records should have limited access or not be accessible for privacy or organizational reasons, and identify these records.

    d. If at all possible, encourage the consultation of your records in-house. Should materials need to leave the organization's office, keep a detailed borrowers' log identifying the date, the title of the record, the name of the borrower, the initials of the issuer, and the date of the return of the records, with additional notes where necessary (i.e. condition report upon return, etc.)

8. **The Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan:**

The Provincial Archives is an arms length institution established by the provincial government with a legislated mandate to select, acquire, arrange, preserve, and make available, documentary materials in all media – from both private and official government sources – bearing on the history of Saskatchewan.

    a. Qualified staff at the Provincial Archives is available for consultation and advice on general records management practices, on archival techniques and practices, and on the transfer process for records donation to our institution.

    b. If your organization has no suitable or safe place to store its archival records, these records may be offered for donation to the Provincial Archives For more information about the donation process and collection practices at the Provincial Archives, please visit https://www.saskarchives.com/donate-records/FAQs

       Donors should be aware that this involves a transfer of physical ownership to the records; the records become part of the Provincial Archives' permanent holdings.

Organizations should retain their active files. Inactive files may be offered for donation to the Provincial Archives once there is no longer any operational need within the organization.

For further information contact us at https://www.saskarchives.com/donate-records.

9. Additional Sources:

If your organization is considering the formal establishment of an archive, or wishes more detailed information on the disposition of records, general records practices, or the description of archival records in your office, the following sources provide valuable reference:

a. **ARMS 2014: Administrative Records Management System 2014 for Saskatchewan Government Departments, Crown Corporations, Boards, Commissions and Agencies**, Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan. Available on the website for the Provincial Archives (https://www.saskarchives.com/sites/default/files/2023-05/517_ARMS2014_Links_Jan2023.pdf) this manual defines the records retention and disposal system in place for the administrative records of the Government of Saskatchewan. For larger organizations and societies, it provides suggestions for the disposition of many administrative records created by organizations in the conduct of their financial affairs and activities.

b. *Archivist's Toolkit,* **The Archives Association of British Columbia, Vancouver,** https://www.aabc.ca/Archivist-Toolkit