

ARCHIVES CHECKLIST

A quick guide for local A.A. archivists

The purpose of this checklist is to support the work of local A.A. archivists and archives committees responsible for collecting and maintaining archives. The checklist applies to collections of various sizes and of various formats (such as paper, electronic data or digital media) ranging from generating local interest to maintaining a large collection in trust for all A.A.s in the area.

These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive but rather to serve as a starting point for further exploration. For more information on building and maintaining local archives, refer to the Archives Workbook and Archives Guidelines, which go into much greater detail about the breadth of archives work.



What are archives?

Created by individuals or organizations, archives are collections of documents, papers, photographs and other materials that have been selected for permanent preservation. They are unique records assessed for their enduring historical, informational, legal, evidential, fiscal or administrative value. They need to be carefully stored and managed, which is why it is so important to take proper care of them.

In general, archival repositories share the same fundamental goals:

- » to ensure that historical records are identified, collected, organized, preserved, and made available for access and research; and
- » to provide context and information about an institution's history.

Getting Started

A first step in building a repository is evaluating the materials in the archives for relevance to your Mission and Collection Policy. For a sample Collection Policy template, please contact G.S.O. Archives. Following are some questions to address when evaluating your materials:

- What is the Mission and Purpose of the archival repository?
- Do you collect materials that serve the local area, district or intergroup?
- Do you have a Collection Policy?
- What types of materials do you consider important for collecting (minutes, books, audio/film recordings, electronic data, etc.)?
- Do you have a policy to remove or deaccession materials from the repository?
- Are there any materials that may be more suitable for another local A.A. archive?
- What is the overall budget for activities (preservation, exhibits, housing, etc.)?
- Does the archive have plans for expansion or renovation in the foreseeable future?

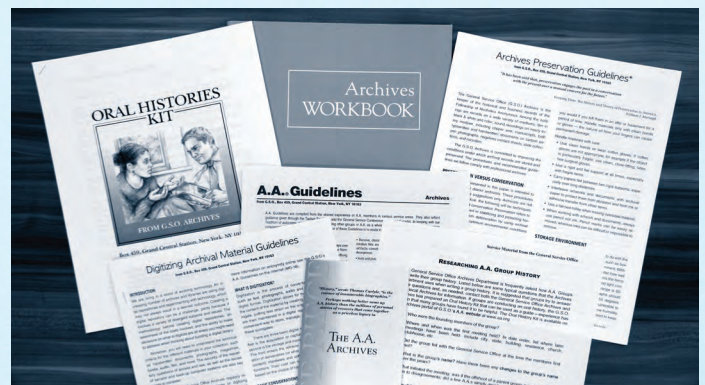
Accession: Establishing Legal, Physical and Intellectual Control

Effective oversight of managing archival collections requires sound legal and intellectual controls. *Accessioning* is the process of transferring legal and physical ownership of material through a documented process, such as a Deed of Gift. To complete an accession, an archive must establish physical custody and legally assume physical and intellectual control over the materials. *Intellectual control* simply refers to the gathering and recording of core information about the materials (cataloging and inventorying). It is the initial step of arranging and describing the materials you have accepted. Following are some questions to address when accessioning materials:

- Does the archive have a clear way of documenting the transfer of material, for example, a Deed of Gift agreement?
- How will the archive document receipt of the collection (e.g., acknowledgement letter, accession log)?
- How will the archive handle material already in the collection that lacks clear accession information?
- Do you have a statement in the Deed of Gift form for accepting electronic documents or external storage devices?
- Did you record information about the nature (various formats) of the collection?

Arrangement and Description

In simple terms, *arrangement* and *description* refer to organizing and listing records. Archival arrangement is the process of organizing and managing the archival records.



When organizing and arranging the records or materials, it is important to maintain original order and establish *provenance*. The principle of provenance provides that archival materials are retained according to their creator or source. Materials from different sources should not be intermingled, even when they share a common subject. Collections of materials may be arranged in different ways, from the very simple to the highly complex, depending on the collection itself.

Archival description is the process of capturing or collating information that serves to identify and locate the materials, particularly for research access. Description is often a complex process incorporating standardized programs, tools and systems, for example, finding aids, inventories, listings and other systems that list and describe the collection. However, basic descriptive information about the collection ought to be recorded utilizing a database or program of your choosing. Some questions to address when describing the collection are:

- Do you know who created the materials or collection, and why?
- What is the date range?
- What is the scope of the collection?
- What are the formats (paper, electronic)?
- What is the physical condition?
- How is the collection arranged?
- What is the volume or size (cubic feet, linear feet, number of boxes) of the collection?
- Where is it located in the archives?
- Are there any access restrictions?

This is not a comprehensive list. For more information about describing the collection or creating finding aids and inventories, contact the G.S.O. Archives.

Facilities, Equipment and Security

Experience shows that A.A. archives are generally housed in either a rented space or in a room that adjoins a central office, intergroup or other A.A. entity.

Regardless of location or size, it is important that access be available to all A.A. members. It is also vitally important



to ensure that the collections are adequately secured. Following are some questions to ask yourself to see if your facility meets minimal requirements for building or room condition (internal and external) and appropriate security controls:

- Is the building or space generally in good condition?
- If there is a history of problems with the space (e.g., leaks, flooding, electrical), have these problems been addressed?
- Is there evidence of rodents, insects or mold?
- Do you have adequate storage shelving units? (Materials should not be placed directly on the floor or too close to ceilings.)
- Do you have an area for researchers?
- Do you have a written disaster plan in place?
- Are you able to maintain a relatively stable temperature and humidity (below 70 degrees F and between 30 and 50 percent relative humidity year-round)?
- Is there a mechanism for proper air circulation?
- How much light exposure do the collections receive (artificial or natural)?
- Who has access to and what are the current procedures for access to the collections by archives committee members (paper and digital)?
- Does the building/room have locks and other security measures in place?
- Are there working fire and smoke alarms?
- Are there fire extinguishers on the property?

Security of Electronic Records

In addition to working with hard copies of materials, digital files present a unique challenge for any archivist. Digital files may include documents, photographs, film and audio recordings. G.S.O. Archives has Guidelines on Digitization that cover basic considerations in planning and managing digital collections. The following checklist provides basic questions when assessing maintenance of electronic collections:

- Who has access to the system and for what purposes?
- How often are passwords changed?
- Is there a record of alterations to any record?
- Are there resources in place for long-term maintenance and care of electronic records?
- Are the electronic records in file formats that are easily exportable?
- Do you have any media that are expected to become obsolete in the near future?
- Are the records backed up on a regular basis and on durable media?
- Is there a plan in place for sudden power failures or network connectivity loss?
- Is there an inventory of all electronic hardware and software systems?

Preservation and Storage

Archivists employ techniques to prolong the useful life of archival materials by improving the physical storage environment. Preservation actions include replacing acidic storage materials with materials constructed of



archival quality (e.g., buffered or acid-free envelopes, folders and boxes), which help stabilize and protect the historical materials from deterioration. If a situation arises where a document or artifact must be treated chemically, seek professional advice from a trained conservator. It is imperative to remember the first rule of archival work: *Do no harm*. Be sure that every action done is reversible. Correct handling of archival materials will also aid in preserving them. Preservation is expensive and time consuming, and it is not always possible to achieve optimal environmental controls; thus, priorities must be set. In general, identify materials that have long-term significance to the collection (i.e., items of enduring value) or that require immediate care. For more information on preserving and handling archival materials, refer to the Archives Preservation Guidelines. The following checklist does not fully address preservation and storage needs, but it is a handy start:

- What types of objects are in the collection?
 - Rare books
 - Scrapbooks
 - Oversize books
 - Historical reference books
 - Diaries
 - Documents
 - Photographs/negatives
 - Framed objects
 - Newspapers
 - Artwork
 - Audio/visual
 - Other
- Are documents stored in limited quantities in archival-quality folders or boxes?
- Are damaging fasteners (e.g., rubber bands, metal paper clips, binders) being used? Where?
- Are folded documents filed or boxed? Can they be unfolded without damage?
- What is the general condition of the collection? Identify materials that are high priority for stabilizing. Look for the following:
 - Water stains
 - Mold
 - Soil and surface dirt

- Acid damage (e.g., embrittlement, deterioration, yellowing)
- Light damage (e.g., fading, discoloration)
- Evidence of poor handling (e.g., torn or missing pages, damaged book spines)
- Other damage
- Are the materials well supported? Are the materials overcrowded on the shelves; are boxes overfilled?
- Are oversize materials stored flat or enclosed in neutral or buffered tubes?
- Are prints and negatives protected from light and environmental extremes? Are they individually enclosed in archival-quality enclosures?
- Are news clippings photocopied onto permanent paper? If original clippings are retained, are they stored in buffered enclosures?
- Does the collection include any film on a nitrate base?
- What is the general condition of film or audio materials? Is there evidence of vinegar syndrome (vinegar smell), deterioration, or evidence of sticking?
- How frequently is this collection to be used?

Reference Services, Access Practices and Outreach

As stated in the introduction, archivists identify and preserve records of enduring value, but, most importantly, they make them available for use. One of the roles an archivist plays in this effort is assisting people in their research and helping to answer their questions. Since the materials that are being referenced are unique and typically unpublished historical records, it is vital that you create sound policies that govern how they can be used. It is equally important and highly suggested that all A.A. archivists and archives committees develop procedures and policies that state the necessity for protecting the confidentiality of correspondence and the anonymity of the correspondents. Researchers working in the G.S.O. Archives are asked to adhere strictly to the Anonymity Tradition — among other things, to list only the first names and last-name initials of all A.A. members, living or deceased. The following questions will help you prepare

and frame policies and procedures that govern use of archival collections:

- Have you developed an access policy?
- Does your policy include information about hours of operation, procedure process, regulations for using the archives, and information regarding copying?
- Does your policy include a clear statement stipulating the researcher's responsibility to determine copyright holder and to obtain clearance to publish copyright materials?
- Do you have a comfortable, working environment for onsite researchers? Is the space in full view of an archives committee member or supervising staff?
- Who is responsible for overseeing the use of the historical records?
- Do you keep a record of the documents accessed by the researcher?
- What activities do you engage in to highlight the activities of the archives committee work? (Exhibits, presentations, open house, publications, film night and other examples accumulated from shared experience are listed in the Archives Workbook.)
- Are facsimiles or duplicates exhibited whenever possible?
- Do the activities support and enhance the mission of your archives?

The section "Tools and Suggested Activities For Archives Committees" in the Archives Workbook is a good resource for activities that will help you get the word out about your archive.





More Questions?

For answers to any specific questions, and lists of additional resources, feel free to contact the G.S.O. Archives at archives@aa.org or (212) 870-3400. Other valuable information is available on G.S.O.'s A.A. website at aa.org.

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