Western Cape Government

Cultural Affairs and Sport

# How to organise, manage and care for your archive:

## A guide for community organisations in South Africa

This guide to archiving for community organisations has been compiled by the Western Cape Archives and Records Service (WCARS) Cape Town, South Africa. This guide has been made available free of charge as part of WCARS public programming activities. It is made freely available for non-commercial use, display, broadcast, performance and distribution. Attribution in the event of copying, display, broadcast, modification or reuse is requested.

June 2024

Western Cape Government

**Western Cape Archives and Records Service**
Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport
72 Roeland Street
Cape Town, 8000
+27 (0)21 483 0400

# How to organise, manage and care for your archive:

## *A guide for community organisations in South Africa.*

**Compiled by:**

**Mary Minicka**
Head of Preservation Section
mary.minicka@westerncape.gov.za

**Helen Joannides**
Outreach and public programming
helen.joannides@westerncape.gov.za

June 2024

# Part One

# How to organise an archive:

**What an archive is, how it acquires materials, how materials are accessioned, sorted and organised, and how to list them.**

**What is an archive?**

An archive is a collection of information, preserved for future generations. The work of the archive is to organise, manage and care for the many materials on which that information is written, printed or recorded on. Archives of all sizes exist all over the world. Some archives are created by official bodies such as governments, businesses or professional organisations, while others are private collections or smaller community-based organisations. No matter the size of the archive, all need to follow similar principles of organising, managing and caring for their records.

The kind of information found in an archive is usually that which is no longer useful on a day-to-day basis to an organisation but is still important and needs to be kept for future reference. These materials are then transferred to an archive to free up space for other documents in daily use in the organisation's office. There are other ways in which materials can come to an archive, including donation, purchase and as "legacy" items placed in the archive simply because they are seen as "old".

**What does an archive keep?**

An archive refers to the documents and other items in its care as "records." Records can take any form, as long as contains information. Traditionally, the kinds of records associated with an archive have been paper-based documents such as letters, reports, minutes of meetings, maps, etc. However, three-dimensional objects can also have informational content. Increasingly, even these traditional types of documents are now in electronic formats, which also require organising and managing.

There are also a number of other non-paper technologies such as sound recordings, and audio-and-visual recordings, that are now part of archival collections. Other kinds of objects such as artworks, textiles, clothing, trophies, and ceremonial awards, can also be found in an archive. Archives usually do not accept published material.

The materials kept by an archive are referred to as records with "enduring value" or "historical significance". This means that records are identified as having information that will be important to future generations. Information that is considered to be important will provide evidence of the organisation's work, functions, activities and impact on the community it serves or represents.

Archives do not keep everything. A selection is made as to what is kept and what is discarded, as there is limited space and resources to create and maintain an archive in the long term. To help the decision-making, a collection policy is useful to spell out what is considered for acquiring by an archive, and what will not kept. This guide will provide more information on how the selection process works that identifies what materials are kept by an archive, as well as information on a collections policy, with a checklist (addendum 2) in the addendum section.

**What does an archive do?**

Archives have four areas of functioning, they are:

1. Collecting and keeping materials

Materials can arrive in an archive in different ways: they can be transferred from elsewhere or from the parent-organisation, they can be donated by people outside of the organisation, they can even be purchased.

Archives are popularly thought to keep “everything”. The reality is that with limited storage space and resources, decisions about what to keep and what to discard need to be taken when material coming into the archives is appraised. Ideally, there is a set of rules or guidelines that will help you to take those decisions in a logical and systematic way (while also having a little bit of flexibility to make exceptions where necessary). These guidelines are usually contained in policy and procedure documents that lay out the focus of the archive and what it will consider for collection.

2. Organising and managing archival materials

Materials need to be organised in order to be able to find information efficiently. The work to organise an archive includes organising unorganised materials (arrangement), separating categories of material into logical groups (for example, photographs and audio-visual formats), integrating new and donated materials into the existing collection (arrangement), compiling and/or updating indexes and finding aids (description), and drawing up a filing plan to manage the overall system for how materials are to be filed in the archive.

Managing materials includes keeping records about what materials are consulted, as well as when they were consulted and by whom (access) and how they are stored and protected from pests and harm (preservation). Keeping a record of records consulted speaks to the relevance of the archive to both staff and researchers. Once you begin to note down the in-person visits, emails and telephonic queries, you may well realise that the archive is much busier than previously thought. Information like this can help justify further and continued investment in maintaining an archive. Tracking use not only helps with recording the use of the archive, but also for security considerations: this ensures that there is no unauthorised removal of materials and that materials are returned to their storage place once they have been consulted. It will also include the documentation and oversight of longer-term usage of materials for exhibition and/ or loan purposes, as well as more unusual usage of the materials (such as for filming and photography).

3. Providing access to information

Providing access to the archival materials may be limited to staff and members of the organisation or may be open to include members of the public and researchers. Access may be physical (i.e., in-person consultation in the organisation’s archive), or virtual (i.e., digitised records placed on the internet of via a secure portal). There needs to be rules and procedures for granting access to records to ensure that there is no unauthorised removal of records, and that no harm comes to records during their handling of them by researchers.

It is useful to draw up procedures for the more unusual kinds of access that may be requested from time-to-time, such as filming and photography for documentaries or other purposes, the loan and exhibition of materials, etc. Though unusual, requests of this nature can happen, and it is always helpful to have some sort of existing guide as to how to proceed so that the archival materials do not suffer loss or harm, and that staff or the functioning of the archives is not unduly prejudiced during these unusual events. These unusual activities include filming and photography for documentaries or other purposes, the loan and exhibition of archival materials by other institutions or organisations. Though unusual, requests of this nature can happen, and it is always helpful to have some sort of existing guide as to how to proceed.

4. Caring and safeguarding

The care of archival materials includes storage, cleanliness of the storage environment and safeguarding from dangers such as pests and mould. Care also extends to how the archival materials are handled and used by both staff and researchers. The umbrella term for all these activities is "preservation." Preservation includes any and all activities aimed at ensuring the continued survival of the archival materials, so that future generations may also benefit.

**Electronic records**

Increasingly, records coming into archives will be in electronic format. The managing and care of these records is a field on its own. In future updates of the guide, we hope to bring you information on this aspect of archiving.

The best advice is to first have your physical records sorted and managed properly before you begin to actively collect electronic records. Once you do begin to receive them, the order and classification of your paper-based records can guide your implementation of a similar electronic system.

**In conclusion…**

There is lots to do in organising an archive. It does not matter if it you are starting something completely new or are starting to organise an archive from piles of accumulated documents or are updating an existing archive. This guide has been designed to show you how to organise an archive, and to show you how the different aspects of archiving all fit together.

The task of organising an archive can seem overwhelming at the start. The important thing to remember is to break the larger tasks into smaller parts and tackle them one at a time. In this way you will begin to see steady and sustainable progress. Rome was never built in a day.

Bear in mind that some things may be easier to achieve than others. Many times, it will seem that the road to your destination is unending. Keep going. Acknowledge and celebrate your victories, both big and small as the come to you. Remember also, to look back from time-to-time and see all that you have achieved and the progress you have made, as it can be all too easy to see the work that remains and not the work that has been done.

## Summary

### What is an archive?

- Where information that is no longer used on a day-today basis is kept for future consultation.
- Information (records) can be both physical (paper and books on shelves) and virtual (digital).
- Information kept in an archive has been identified and selected for retention, as it is of enduring value or is of historical significance.

### What does an archive keep?

- Records identified as being of "enduring" or "historical" value.
- These records provide evidence of the work, activities, functioning and impact of an organisation.
- Primary source material (created in a particular time in the past), not secondary sources (published material).

### What does an archive do?

- An archive collects, stores, organises and cares for archival materials.
- There are four main functions of an archive:
    - Collecting and keeping information/archival materials.
    - Organising and managing information/archival materials.
    - Providing access to information.
    - Caring for the archival materials to prevent harm and loss to information.

### What are the benefits of an organised archive?

- The size and scope of the archive's contents are known (that is, how much and what the information is).
- Information can be found quickly.
- Budget planning and management for the needs of the archive is made easier when the scope (how much there is) and contents (what there is) of an archive are known.
- Audit compliance, and good governance requirements are met.
- Archives are increasingly viewed as institutional assets of the organisation. Assets need to be recorded and maintained for audit compliance.

**How to organise "legacy" materials in an archive: collections management**

"Collections management" is the umbrella term for the many different tasks of organising and managing an archive. The main aim of collections management is to organise all the records so that it is known what is in the archive, as well as where to find it.

For many archives, where materials have built up over the years, starting to organise the existing materials will probably be the most practical way of making a start to organising an archive. The accessioning, organising and management of donated, "orphaned" or purchased archival materials can be dealt with using the collections management approach, but with some adjustments for these materials.

Collections management consists primarily of administrative responsibilities to organise and list the collection, to establish routines for how the collection can be used (access) and how the collection should be looked after (preservation).

**What is collection management?**

Collections management is the systematic and planned process of building, maintaining and preserving archival materials. Collections management is broken up into different components, these are:

- Acquisition, appraisal, accessioning.
- Arrangement and description.
- Conservation / preservation.
- Providing access to information/archival materials.
- Management and administration of the acquisition, arrangement and description, conservation / preservation and provision of access to information work of the archive (e.g., policies, registers of donations, staff matters, etc).

Archives can have more than just records produced by an organisation's administration and correspondence. It can also have library-type materials. Libraries typically have "publications", published works that traditionally have been printed books, magazines and journals which are now increasingly available in electronic format. An archive can have other sorts of collections donated materials and large collections of photographs. All of these different types of "collections" need slightly different methods to organise. This is why we talk about "collections management". But when we talk about the total materials held by an archive, we talk about the "holdings" of an archive.

**The role of policy documents in the organising and management of archives**

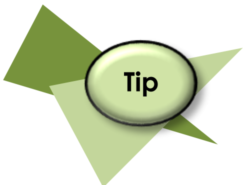
Policy documents guide the functioning of an archive. They spell out in broad terms what the archives will acquire and how the archive will organise, manage and care for their materials.

Policy documents that address the running of an archive are often referred to as a "collections management policy."

With everything that needs to be done to organise an archive, compiling a collections management policy can just seem like extra work. However, a policy that guides the functioning of an archive is important and necessary. A collection management policy is a holistic strategy for determining what to collect and what not to collect. It will also address how the collection is to be organised, cared for and made accessible.

Policy documents are important, even for small archive. They formalise in writing how the archive will acquire and organise materials, as well as how it will care for materials and help people wanting to access the collection for research purposes. Written policy documents provide transparency as to how the archive functions and provides its services. Policy documents help to justify the allocation of resources towards the work on an archive, and also provide a kind of standard that the work of the archive can be assessed against.

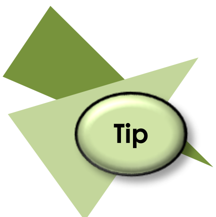
Policy documents do not have to be long. It is possible that one policy document may address all the functions of the archive: acquisition of materials, accessioning, arrangement and description, preservation and the provision of access. Usually, these documents have policy statements addressing the different functions of an archive. However, If one of the areas of an archive's functioning is expanded, it may be necessary to write up an expanded policy for that aspect.




In many cases a written policy is simply the formalising of the work already being done by those working with archival materials. One approach to policy formulation is to simply write down how things are done and use that as the basis for creating a collections management policy.

Policy documents are a standard requirement for auditors and provide proof of good governance. It can also be a way to show just how much work goes into the organising and caring for a collection, as well as helping with queries. They show how much a collection of archival materials is a living and dynamic thing, and not just a storeroom where old documents are dumped.

Policies are usually reviewed every few years to make sure that their provisions remain current and relevant to the functioning of an archive, or after any major change in how the archive functions. Updating policies from time-to-time is important. Policies are never intended to be written in stone; they are intended to reflect the operational realities of an archive.




Policy documents are usually broad statements of intent ("to collect and preserve"). Procedures will fill in the broad detail of policy statements and provide the practical steps to achieve a stated policy goal.

For example, the policy statement that the archive exists "To collect materials related to ABC organisation" may be expanded on with additional policy statements on whether the archive will accept materials through donations, but not purchase. Materials from the organisation will be transferred to the archive, every 10 years (or on some other time scale). The procedures will specify the process for accepting and documenting donations, and materials transferred to the archive.

In addendum 2 on page 80 there are recommendations on what to include in a policy document for your archive. There are also examples of policy documents for archives (and their sister institutions, libraries and galleries) on the internet to look at.

**Some thoughts on family archives and policy-writing**

Policy documents for family archives can be useful, though they need not be as formal as for an organisation. It can still help to write things about the family papers down: what the family papers are about and who they are for, who will keep them and how copies of historical documents will be distributed amongst family members.

A family archive policy can specify how the documents are to be used within the family, for example that digital copies will be made available to school learners for school projects, but not the originals. Or, family members wanting to frame old photographs or documents, can be given digital copies of these documents to display. Displaying original photographs and documents can lead to fading and light-damage over time. Using digital surrogates can help preserve the original documents as well as allowing everyone interested to have their own copy of a photograph or document.

A document that formalises the existing informal arrangements around who looks after the documents can be useful to plan for the future of the family archive. It can create an opportunity for discussion about how the family records should be looked after. Succession, or who will take over the archive or certain documents when a family custodian of archives or documents passes on, can also be discussed. It is not uncommon for family documents and photographs to end up unwanted in bins or in second-hand shops, unbeknownst to other family members who may have had an interest in them.

## Summary

**What is collections management?**

Collections management is the umbrella term for the organising and management of archival materials, it includes the following tasks:

- Acquisition of archival materials
- Accessioning, appraisal_and of archival materials
- Arrangement and description of archival materials
- Preservation of archival materials
- Providing access to information/archival materials

**What is the role of policy documents in collections management?**

- Policy documents outline, broadly, how an archive will go about doing its tasks of acquisition, appraisal, accessioning, arrangement and description, preservation and providing access to information/archival materials.

**What is the difference between records management and collections management?**

- Records management is concerned with the record before it reaches the archive. It plans for the transfer of a record to the archive by identifying those records which will go to the archive ("selection"), and those which will not (i.e., are disposed of).
- Collections management is concerned with the record once it has arrived at the archive. Collections management includes all the tasks to document how the record is integrated into the archive (accession, arrangement and description), how it is used (access) and how it is cared for (preservation).

**Acquiring materials**

Archival materials can come to an archive in different ways:

1. Through planned transfer from the organisation's parent body or administrative section, as part of a records management protocol. Occurring at scheduled intervals. See part four of this guide for more information on records management.
2. Through "legacy" or historic placement in an archive or storeroom over the years. These records may have varying amounts of documentation about their acquisition, or none at all.
3. As "orphan" items, with no information as to how they got there or from whom or where they came from.
4. Through donations from person associated with the organisation, as well as from persons outside the organisation.
5. Items may be purchased.

**Why is it important to know where materials come from?**

Archival materials are not individually arranged like library books. They are also not arranged according to subject matter. Because of the high number of individual items, archival materials are arranged as a collection or group, rather than as individual items. The basic organising principle is called "provenance" – where the materials came from. Materials from the same source (for example, a government department, a chapter of a youth organisation, a congregation, or other type of organisation) are generally kept together and organised as a grouping within an archive's holdings.

When taken as a whole, the documents shed light on the activities of the record's creator. The value of archival materials is in their relationship with one another, rather than as stand-alone items. It is the relationship between the different records that the archive tries to preserve. This relationship provides the context (background information) for the record's creation.

This means that records are organised and stored in the same sequence as that in which they were created. This has two broad considerations:

1. Where they came from (what organisation or department, office, division of an organisation); and
2. When they were created (chronologically, or by date created, also called the "principle of original order").

When it comes to non-paper kinds of records: works of art, clothing, flags, banners, etc. – it is not possible to interfile these items with paper documents, due to the impracticality of the different sized items and items that may damage each other if stored together. Three-dimensional objects are usually stored elsewhere on appropriate shelving, but cross referenced in indexes and finding aids so that there is a record of these item's "placement" in the overall scheme of the archive (as well as information as to where to find the item).

The process of listing archival collection materials is called "archival description". Archival description is the process where the final order of the sorted materials is listed to create an inventory. An inventory, when used as a guide to the archive's records is called a "finding aid."

The finding aid is a tool that helps researchers and staff to quickly find the relevant information and avoids scratching around in boxes of materials (something that can cause damage to the materials from rough handling). The finding aids also help to standardise information about the archival materials, so that the researcher is not dependant on the personal knowledge of the archivist or staff member present.

In archives where there has been no archival description of the materials, or in the case of a large backlog of materials that has not yet been organised, making a very basic inventory can help begin the process of organising records. A basic inventory (or "box list") has the following elements: (1) a title (e.g., "Smith Family papers"); (2) dates that the papers cover; (3) the amount of material in it; and (4) a paragraph about its contents. Please see addendum 1 on page 79 for more detailed information on "How to make a box list" for more information on how to do this. Later, the materials can be more fully arranged and described.

**Final thoughts…**

It is important to know how materials come into an archive. Each has implications for how the materials are processed. Each way of acquiring (or just having-) materials needs to be managed (acquisition) and documented (accessioning).

Accessioning is often a good place to start organising your archive. As new materials enter the archive, they can be processed using updated listing and sorting procedures that you have started to put into place. The backlog of unprocessed or partly processed materials can then be fed into the accessioning process as it expands.

- Addendum 3 on page 85 there is information about how to manage and document the donation of materials to your archive.

**Summary**

**How do materials come into an archive?**

- Planned transfer of records from the organisation's offices.
- "Legacy" collections that have built up over the years.
- Donations
- Purchase
- "Orphan" works with absolutely no information., found in the archive.

**Why is the distinction important?**

- Each has its own administrative procedures to document the materials that have been acquired, and to integrate them into the collection.
- Where materials come from is an important organising principle in an archive (provenance). Materials from the same source (for example, a government department, a chapter of a youth organisation, a congregation, or other type of organisation) are generally kept together and organised as a grouping within an archive's holdings.

**Why is an acquisition procedure important to an archive?**

- It is the process by which the archive takes legal and physical ownership of an item (custody).
- The process needs to be documented (accessioning) to prove legal custody of records.
- It is a good starting point for putting in place procedures to better organise and manage an archive.

**What is accessioning?**

Accessioning is the formal process whereby an archive takes legal and physical custody of archival materials. It is also the process whereby the archive organises the materials and integrates them into the existing holdings (or collection-) of materials.

Accessioning can be applied to both new materials coming into the archive, as well as organising any previously unorganised materials held by an archive.

If an archive does some basic processing work immediately after receiving new archival materials, that material can quickly be made available for consultation by researchers and staff. Basic processing includes compiling a list of contents for of the materials received (listing). A preliminary and basic listing is a great way to do some basic sorting (e.g., identifying duplicate materials or materials that are not withing the collecting scope of the archive), and basic listing of the contents, so that they can be located if needed. More in depth organising of the materials (appraisal and arrangement) can be done later.

**Deciding what to keep: appraisal of materials**

Before deciding what to accept or keep, an archivist will survey the records to determine if the materials will be accepted and kept, what will be better housed in other institutions (like a library or resource centre). "Appraisal" is the word given to the assessment of the contents and their condition and is part of the accessioning process.

Appraisal can be said to begin even before materials are accepted. A collections management policy that spells out what an archive will consider accepting already establishes a guide and helps with decision-making.

Appraisal, once the materials have been accepted, consists of different levels of assessment throughout the accessioning process. There is a preliminary survey of the materials when materials are offered to the archive, or after they are acquired. It may not always be possible to do an appraisal of materials before receiving them, sometimes this happens only after the materials are acquired. For unprocessed materials already in the archive, this can happen long after they have been acquired by the archive. In an archive that still needs to be organised, start where you can and how you find things, working forwards towards appraising materials, listing and sorting them.

Later, there is a more in-depth final appraisal of the materials when the final sorting of the materials happens. You will find information on this final sorting (arrangement) and appraisal on pages 25-27.

**How to begin: doing a preliminary survey of the materials**

When receiving material or beginning to organise unprocessed materials in an archive, it is important to understand the extent (how much there is) and condition (if the materials are damaged or not) of the material.

Questions to ask include: Did what arrive match what was expected? Is anything missing? Are there major preservation concerns: are materials badly damaged or infested with mould?

**Documenting the accession**

The accession will need to be properly documented. See the following section (on page 18) for detailed information about how to do this with the register and accessions record.

See page 22 for more information on accessioning three-dimensional objects in an archive.

**Labelling the materials**

At minimum, label the box with the accessions number. If you have the time, it is a good idea to label the items inside as well. Use a soft pencil to write the accessions number on each item, Do not use a permanent marker or khoki-type pen, the ink of these tends to spread into the fibres of the paper and creates a stain that is difficult to remove. Write on the back of photographs with pencil. Do not use "Post-It" notes or any kind of self-adhesive sticker labels, the adhesives will affect paper over time and the adhesive of sticker-type labels tends to fail with time leading to the loss of the label.

If you label the individual items, now is a good time to begin to make a preliminary list of the contents. List contents of box, as well as condition, and anything that may have been identified for discarding. Note the author of the document (which can be a person or an organisation), date and broad categories of document (e.g., memorandum, meeting minutes, report, publicity material, etc.). Multiple copies of the list may be required, for example one copy goes into the box, another copy is forwarded to the administration office, one copy is put aside for use by researchers to consult, and other is kept for the archive's own records.

See pages 18 in the next section for more information about the accessions register and accessions records to document the accession.

See pages 22 for more information on labelling three-dimensional objects in an archive.

**Rehousing and labelling materials during accession**

A common practise when doing the preliminary sorting of archival materials is to remove them from the containers in which they arrived in and put them into the protective enclosures that the archive uses for its storage. This part of the process is known as "rehousing". The reason for discarding the containers that the materials first came in are that pests and other contaminants can be accidentally brought into the rest of the archive. It can also be that the containers that the materials came in are not good for long term storage of archival materials, or of the type of material stored in the container. The rehousing process is a chance to get a good look at the materials to see if they are damaged in some way and to do a basic sorting of the materials.

Boxes and other forms of housing (e.g. folders, envelopes, etc) are then labelled, allowing for the easy locating of materials. Labels should clearly display the accession number (or another identifier like call number), box number, and title. Labels can be printed or can be clearly written with marker on the outside of the box. Using a standardised table format or template can be useful to keep the language and numbering consistent. Consider creating a standardised approach for where and how labels are attached to individual items and any housings. Keeping labelling consistent is very helpful when several staff members or volunteers are working to bring in and process accessions. Generally, labelling and other marking techniques should not damage any archival materials.

By rehousing, labelling, and preparing the boxes for use at the time of accession, there is less confusion about the contents of the accession, as there has already been a preliminary check and listing of contents made. This means that it is easier to find for later more in-depth processing and researchers will be able to locate contents from the basic list.

## Summary

**What is accessioning?**

- Taking legal and physical possession of an item by an archive (custody).
- It does not matter if the items arrive as a result of transfer, donation, purchase or some other means, all need to be accessioned. Some types of materials may need slightly differing documentation procedures (for example, donations). It is also a process whereby the taking custody is documented and the item(s) are integrated into the existing archive's holdings.
- It can also be a process to formalise the custody of items already in the archive ("legacy" materials), but about which there is little or no information as to how they came to be there.
- Appraisal is part of the accessioning process where it is ascertained what records to accept and/or keep and what can be disposed of. This is especially the case if records coming into the archive have clearly not been sorted in any way.
- Appraisal is also an opportunity to survey the condition of the records, and identify damaged or infested records before they enter the archive.

**What is the accessioning process in an archive?**

- There are two aspects: (1) documenting the process of taking custody, and (2) basic processing work to understand what the items are (what information they contain and what dates they cover in the organisation's history and where they belong in the archive).

**Basic processing work includes:**

- Documenting of the accession (see the next section on page 18, for information on this).
- Checking and surveying the items /contents.
- Compiling a basic box list.
- Rehousing (reboxing).

**Keeping a record: documenting the accession is an important step**

Documenting the accession is an important step in the processing of archival materials. It is a step with important legal implications. Documenting the accession is the legal confirmation of the archive taking ownership of materials (custody). It will provide proof of ownership and serve as a master list of the archive's holdings in the event of a disaster when it must be determined how much of an archive was lost or damaged in the event of a disaster.

Documenting an accession is also an important ethical step for an archive. It transparently demonstrates what the archive has taken responsibility for by deciding to acquire. It implies a commitment in human and materials resourcing on the part of the archive to care and maintain.

Accessions are formally documented using an accession register and an accession record. You will find more information about the accessions record on the next page (page 19).

Consider including photographs in the documentation of three-dimensional objects (see page 22 for more information on accessioning three-dimensional objects), as well as for any important or valuable items. Photo-documentation can be really useful in the event of theft, for a reference picture to provide the police and for insurance purposes in the event of loss.

**The accessions register**

Accession registers are important in three ways:

1. As legal proof of ownership of materials held by the archive.
2. Proof of the extent of materials in the archive's custody. In the case of loss or theft, it is proof that the archives had possession of "x" item.
3. As the basis for calculating for insurance cover, and for good-governance and auditing purposes.

Having separate registers for materials donated and materials transferred through a planned transfer can be useful to distinguish two different ways that materials come into an archive. Collectively, the registers are a record of all materials in the archives' custody.

The accessions register can also be used to record un-accessioned and "orphan" materials that are discovered in the archives. If you haven't already got a register, you can enter your current collections into your new register retrospectively, recording information to the best of your knowledge. Add each new item or collection of items as they are accessioned into your archive.

The register is a bound book or spreadsheet in which accessions are entered as they are received. As important legal and governance evidence, it is critical that they are kept safe and secure. Additionally, duplicate or backup copies need to be kept at a safe location off-site. In the event of a catastrophic loss of the archives, the accession register will be an important proof of what it has in its holdings. In these cases, they will be important in determining how much of an archive was lost in the event of a disaster.

An accession register records much of the information collected in your accession form, starting with the unique reference number of the item or collection of items. The accession number is different to the catalogue reference which individual items will be assigned when you get to the cataloguing stage.

Each register entry records the following information:

- The archive's reference code for the accession.
- The name of the person receiving the records.
- Where or whom the materials have come from.
- The location where the collections or items have been stored, such as a shelf reference number.
- And lastly, if the accession is on loan, there should be space to record the date it was returned.
- When storing the collection, note where you store the new accession – you can use a spreadsheet to keep track of what is kept on each shelf or in each cupboard. If necessary, indicate the number of parts, for example part 1 of 5. This allows you to check if something has gone missing.
- Record the location even if it is going to be temporary. It's good to have location control over your collections in case of an emergency; so that everyone knows where the accessions are stored, not just the person who received it.

**The accessions record**

The accessions record consists of information that documents how the archival materials were acquired, from whom and what they are. The accessions record is therefore, much broader in scope than the accessions register entry.

Information that will typically be included in an accession record includes basic descriptive information about the materials, who the donor or seller is, what is in the materials and how much material there is. Also included is information on whether there are any restrictions on the archival materials acquired. Restrictions can vary from restrictions on access for a certain period, or the requirement to apply for permission form the donor's family /estate for access. Restrictions may also include restrictions on publishing all or part of the donation.

Any restrictions on the materials need to be noted, as does the fact that there are no restrictions the materials. Additional legal and ethical requirements include information on copyright that exists on any of the materials as well as an agreement to transfer copyright to the archive. Measures to protect of privacy and personal information also needs to be included. Information about materials that are not going to be kept by the archive also needs to be documented.

Accessions records are also important to the functioning of the archive and need to be safely and securely stored. Bear in mind that that there is sensitive personal information contained in the documentation, and where restrictions may apply to the access and use of materials donated to the archive, that this information may too be sensitive and not for dissemination.

Accessions records should ideally be copied and stored in a secure off-site location in the event of a disaster.

See also addendum 3 on page 85 for a sample donation form, information for the donation form will need to be included in the accessions record.

## Summary

**Why document an accession?**

- Documenting accession is an important step in the processing of archival materials.
- There are important legal and ethical implications.

**Legal implications of documenting an accession**

- Legal confirmation of the archive taking ownership of materials (custody).
- Proof of ownership and serve as a master list of the archive's holdings in the event of a disaster or loss.

**Ethical implications of documenting an accession**

- Transparently demonstrates what the archive has taken responsibility for by deciding to acquire.
- Implies a commitment on the part of the archive to care and maintain.

**What documentation is used to record the accession in the archive?**

- Accessions register and an accessions record.
- Photo-documentation (photographs of the item).
- Any correspondence with a donor or about the planned transfer of materials also forms part of the accession documentation and is part of the broader record of the accession, even if filed separately from the accessions register and record.

**Accessioning three-dimensional objects**

Three-dimensional objects such as trophies, commemorative plaques, flags, pennants, badges, costume and uniform clothing, etc need slightly different accessioning methods. Unlike books and documents, dates of manufacture, title and name of maker may not be easy to find out. To ensure that objects are correctly recorded, additional descriptive information is needed, and additional historical information should be recorded where it is available.

Protective housing, storage and labelling methods may have to be adapted to accommodate these items in storage.

Just like with paper-based materials, an accessions register entry and an accessions record needs to be created to document the acquisition of three-dimensional objects by an archive. It may be a good idea to have a separate register for three-dimensional objects.

**Tip**

It is good practise to include photographs of a three-dimensional object in the accessions record. Three-dimensional objects are complex items and can be tricky to describe in words. Images are useful when accompanied by a written description. Images are also useful in the case of theft or some other form of loss. Take images of front and back, as well as sides, top and bottom views.

Taking measurements of the item is also a good idea. It gives a sense of the object's size. Measure not only height and width, but also on the diagonal and the circumference. Including a ruler or some easily relatable item for giving a sense of scale can also be helpful.

**Labelling three-dimensional objects**

Just like with paper-based archival materials, objects do need to be marked or labelled with accession numbers and any collection numbering. Each object is individually numbered to identify and distinguish it from all other objects in the archive. All the information relating to an object is filed according to this unique number. An accession record should have a photograph along with the correct accession register number.

Labelling or marking three dimensional objects can be tricky because they are not of a uniform shape or material. Writing a number directly on an object has been the traditional way of labelling or marking objects.

Labels must:

- Be secure – must not be able to be removed by accident.
- Be reversible – even after some time.
- Not cause damage to the object.

- Be discreet but visible - discreet so as not to detract from the object or obscure information but visible to minimise handling.

Some objects cannot have a label applied directly to the surface of the object and still follow the guidelines above. In these cases, attach the label in a secure way so that it cannot be separated from the object by accident.

Examples of different labelling methods:

- Textiles must not be marked directly. Attach a label by either sewing it onto the textile or attaching it with a loop of thread stitched through the textile. Place the label where it is convenient for staff to access. Make sure any labels can be tucked out of the way or are placed on the back of a textile, so that the label is not visible if the textile is put on display.
- Items such as coins, stamps, badges, etc., cannot be marked. Place them in envelopes that are labelled. Specialist collector storage pockets and envelopes can be purchased to help store items such as these.
- If an object consists of different parts or is in pieces (fragmented), all parts of the object must be labelled.

Never remove old numbers. They are part of the history of object. Old labelling tells the history of ownership and of how the archive may have managed its collection materials in the past. Make sure your labelling is consistent, so you know which is your current number.

See addendum 4 page 87 for more informational on the kind of accession record to create for objects.

## Summary

**How to accession three dimensional objects**

- Three-dimensional objects such as trophies, commemorative plaques, flags, pennants, badges, costume and uniform clothing, etc., need slightly different accessioning methods.
- Compared to books, the title and name of maker may not be easy to find out.
- To ensure that objects are correctly recorded, additional descriptive information is needed, and additional historical information should be recorded where it is available.
- Different materials will need different labelling methods.

**Documenting three-dimensional object accessions**

- An accession register entry, and an accessions record needs to be created to document the acquisition of three-dimensional objects by an archive.
- It may be a good idea to have a separate register for three-dimensional objects.
- It is good practise to include photographs of a three-dimensional object in the accessions record.

**Labelling considerations**

- Labelling must not cause damage to the object.
- Labelling must be done in a consistent manner.
- Labelling must be:
    - secure,
    - seversible,
    - discreet but visible.
- Never remove old numbers that are part of the history of object.
- If an object consists of different parts or is in pieces (fragmented), all parts of the object must be labelled.

## Appraising the accessioned material

"Appraisal" is part of the accessioning process. It is the assessment (or appraisal) of the records to determine their subject matter and their condition. During the appraisal process, records not intended to be kept are identified and removed. The kind of records that will not be kept includes any duplicate or ephemeral materials. The appraisal process also separates out materials that cannot be stored with the rest of the materials as its format may cause damage to the paper records (for example, cassette tapes, film on reels, etc.).

During the appraisal process, archival materials are assessed for their legal, evidential, and historical value. Appraisal blends an assessment of the content and subject-matter of the records with an evaluation of materials for their storage needs, while also identifying materials that will not be retained by the archive.

The archivist doing the appraisal will physically sort through and check the content of the records they are sorting. The archivist will also mentally assess and categorise materials into an archival scheme for organising records. Appraisal work is both physical and mental.

Appraisal will help to:

- Know exactly the size (how much there is) and scope (what it covers, including what time period, and what activities or transactions the materials document).
- Get a sense of how much work there will be to further process the materials.
- See how important the materials are to the overall mission of the archives, and if these materials must be prioritised for further processing or set aside for a later date.
- Accomplish some sorting and listing of the materials, which can be used as a basic index to what they contain, if no further processing will happen at this point.
- Identify any materials with preservation issues (such as deteriorating paper, decomposing elastic bands, mould or insect infestations, etc.)
- Provide information when advocating for additional resources (time, people, funds) to complete additional processing.

## Sorting of materials during appraisal

The first step to take is to begin to identify and sort the following materials from each other. This may have already been done when the materials were received, and a preliminary sorting or survey of the materials was done.

If a preliminary sorting has already been done, you can move on to doing the final sorting and ordering of the materials (see section on arrangement), and removal of materials that will either not be kept or kept separately like duplicates.

A basic sorting will identify the following:

- Permanent and historically significant records.
- Identifying types of records that will not be kept: ephemeral and extraneous records
- Identifying duplicate materials.
- Identifying (and removing- any other materials that can cause damage to records (rubber bands, metal paper clips, etc.).

**How to identify the types of records that will not be kept by the archive: ephemeral and extraneous records**

The best place to start in organising archival records, is to sort what will not be kept from what will be kept, before moving onto organising the remainder.

Identify short term (or ephemeral-) records. These are the kinds of records that are only kept for short periods before they are disposed of. Certain types of records can and should be destroyed routinely after a period of three, five or seven years after their creation. These include (but are not limited to):

- Bank statements and cancelled checks
- Invoices and receipts
- Expense reports
- Timecards/sheets
- Meeting planning files
- Duplicates (keep 2 copies of printed or published materials, posters, etc.)
- Insurance records of inactive policies; as well as warranties and instructions for equipment no longer in use.
- Publications, pamphlets, minutes of other organizations (if these may be the only evidence of a defunct community organization, they can be kept in the correspondence or subject files).
- Personnel records (not needed to determine retirement benefits).
- Phone messages
- Unsolicited job applications and curriculum vitae
    - These records have limited time-span administrative value (that is value to the daily operation of the organization) or legal value (that is, a legal requirement that they be retained) only for a limited time. They have little or no long-term historical value. When records are no longer regularly consulted by the organization they become "inactive" records.

Extraneous materials are also removed. Items that are not relevant or that possibly belong elsewhere in the archive. If they belong elsewhere in the archive, they can be set aside for placement where they belong. Certain records may have no relevance to your archive and its holdings. If so, they can be offered to another institution or disposed of.

**Duplicate materials**

Duplicate items that have been identified can be removed. Duplicates can be kept but they are usually stored separately. Duplicates are sometimes kept as "back-ups" in case of the loss of damage to the original exemplar that has been archived. Duplicates can also be disposed of if storage space does not permit them to be kept.

**Identifying (and removing-) any other materials that can cause damage to records.**

Archival materials may have items that can cause damage to the materials. These include metal staples and paperclips that are rusting, bulldog clips that can tear and damage paper, elastics that decompose and stick to archival materials. Thin pink ribbon used to tie documents together can also cause damage by tearing or crumpling paper and should be removed. Inserts like file covers and dividers that are made of acidic materials should also ideally be removed.

To keep records together, metal fasteners and elastics can be replaced with inert plastic clips or file the records in separate acid-free folders. Where metal paper clips cannot be avoided place a slip of paper around the pages where the paper clip is to be placed. The paper will act as a barrier to any potential transfer of rusting stain to the paper from the paper clip.

During this process documents are unfolded and flattened before placing them in storage folders and boxes.

**How to identify permanent and historically significant records**

Some types of records become inactive only after a long time, and then continue to have potential usefulness (or must be retained for legal reasons). These records are permanently retained. These are "permanent" records. They are permanent as the organisation must keep them safe and accessible for the indefinite future. The role of an archive is to be an organisation's memory. An archive ensures that as staff changes and the organisation evolves, its history remains accessible to present and future generations.

Many other records, such as reports, correspondence, minutes, etc., may have long term (or enduring-) value but cease to have administrative value after three to five years. These records also form part of the archival record of an organisation.

Ultimately, an organisation's archive should keep and preserve, in the smallest number of records possible: documentation of its origins, purposes, major activities, significant accomplishments, and most important interactions with clients and / or other agencies.

Designating documents or files for either short-term or permanent retention is the at the core of establishing a records management system for an organisation. The designation of documents for short-term or permanent retention is how a retention schedule for an organisation is created.

## Summary

**What is appraisal?**

- The assessment and sorting of new archival materials, or of materials already in the archive that have not been processed.
- It is part of the accessions process in an archive.
- It identifies records of permanent or historical significance and those which will not be kept.
- It includes identifying and removing any duplicates ephemeral materials and separating if materials that cannot be stored next to each other.
- It is the start of the ordering of new materials (arrangement).

**How to begin appraisal: a preliminary sorting**

- Appraisal can be started by doing a quick preliminary check and list of contents ahead of a more in-depth appraisal of the contents.
- The final appraisal will determine the materials to be kept by the archive, as well as their order.

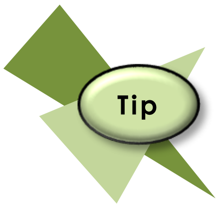
**How to identify materials that will not be kept**

- Ephemeral materials: materials of temporary relevance can be discarded when superseded by other records, e.g., when receipts and quotations are reported in quarterly or annual financial reports, or at stipulated intervals for ephemeral records (for example, after five years).
- Extraneous materials: irrelevant materials, which can be set aside and discarded.
- Duplicates may be kept, in case of loss or damage to the originals – if space permits.
- Materials that can cause harm (e.g., metal clips and staples, rubber bands, etc.).

### What is arrangement?

Arrangement is also part of the accessioning process in an archive. It is the physical arranging or sorting of the materials that will be kept by the archive into their final order.

After doing a preliminary appraisal, a more in-depth appraisal and the physical arrangement of the materials is done to establish the final order. This will create the final order of the materials to be kept. Doing a preliminary appraisal can help to give you a good overview of the materials, before you tackle them for their final sorting.




In many ways the appraisal and arrangement processes are interlinked. The appraisal of the materials can very much happen at the same time as the materials are arranged into their final order and materials that don't belong are removed. In real life, an archivist will work on both appraising and arranging materials at the same time, both are part of the accessioning process. This guide has separated appraisal and arrangement so that we can better explain each to you.

### How to do the final sorting (appraisal and arrangement) of the materials

Once the preliminary appraisal has identified the permanent records and separated the ephemera, extraneous and duplicate materials, as well as any damage-causing items such as rubber bands, the final sorting and arrangement of the remaining items can begin.

The first thing to consider is provenance. Are the materials part of an existing group of materials already in the archive? If so, they can be integrated into the other materials. In this case they are usually documents created later than those currently in the archive (this is called an "accrual"). These can then simply be arranged according to the existing divisions and arranged in order of date (chronologically).

If the materials are a new collection or group, then a grouping scheme with the necessary divisions needs to be devised. Please see page 32 for an example of how a hierarchical scheme is devised. Archival arrangement uses a hierarchical structure to organise the archival materials. This means that the materials are sorted in a way that organises or groups the materials into units of information that works from the "high level" (that is, the broad category like "financial information") to more narrower information categories (for example, procurement / purchasing or annual budget information).

This process can go on until it reached the individual document or item level (for example, purchase orders for procurement /purchasing). Because of the large volume of documents an archive can have, it is quite likely that the descriptive listing may only go as far as the higher-level descriptions and not go all the way to individual item level description.

**Fig 1.**

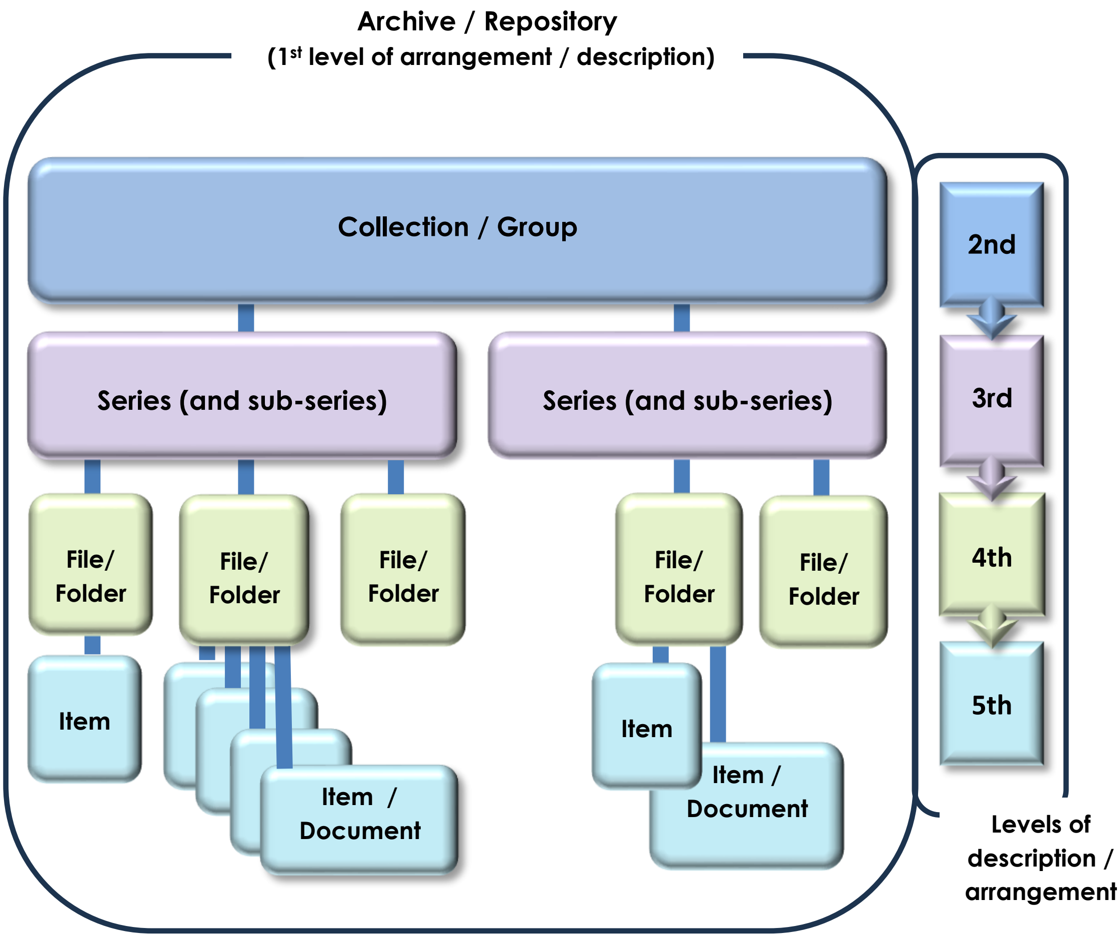
**Diagram showing the hierarchical arrangement of records, or levels of description.**

Archival materials are organised into a hierarchical system. The diagram below illustrates the hierarchical system used to organise information.

The system goes from the broadest possible category (collection / group) to the narrowest possible category of the individual item. Think of it as a template or formula into which to place information.

These categories are also referred to as "levels of description". How much the information is organised and listed, can depend on whether information is organised to level 1, 2, 3, or 4. The finding aids and file plans will reflect a similar ordering of archival materials: from broadest to narrowest category.

On page 32, there is a diagram with an example of how information is put into this template.



This system ensures that information is grouped in a standard way, which makes things easier to find for the researcher, and easier for the archivist to organise and add to as the archive receives more materials.

**Five practical steps to doing the final sorting (arranging) of an archival collection/group**

**Step 1: assess the order in which you find the materials**

First decide if the order in which you have found or received the materials is appropriate. The general rule is to try to keep the materials in the order in which they were originally created.

However, if there is no order – or the original order has been seriously disturbed – you will have to try and determine what the original order could have been. This is where the appraisal process comes in, it gives you an opportunity to assess what the materials are and in what order it needs to be put into, as well as what needs to be removed. It is also why doing a preliminary appraisal helps in determining how much physical sorting (arrangement) may need to be done, before doing the final sorting.

This step can also be done during the preliminary appraisal of the archival materials, a quick look can reveal if materials are jumbled together, or if they are in some sort of order.

**Step 2: begin to establish the hierarchical structure for organising information, by identifying the organisational structure**

Identify the organisation's functions. The functions will give you the broadest possible category of information.

A typical organisation's functions include:

1. Operational, or the day-to-day activities.
2. Administration, includes human resource management, maintenance of buildings and grounds, etc.
3. Financial arrangements, includes budget allocation, procurement / purchasing, etc.

These functions will provide you with the broad "high level" hierarchical structure of an organisation: finance, administration and operational matters (the daily work of the organisation). The daily work of the organisation could be broken up into sub-headings, for example, church services, annual fetes and fundraising activities, community outreach, social events and important festivals.

From the broad "high level" structure (series), you will map out the rest of the hierarchy, working from the broadest category to the most specific. Please see figure 1 on page 30 for an example of how this works.

**Step three: establish and map out the rest of the hierarchy (from series to item level)**

After establishing the organisation's functions (step 2), each function is broken down into "activities". Activities are the major actions undertaken to complete a function. There can be more than one activity associated with a function. For example, the public health promotion function may have activities including: training, reporting, outreach and publishing.

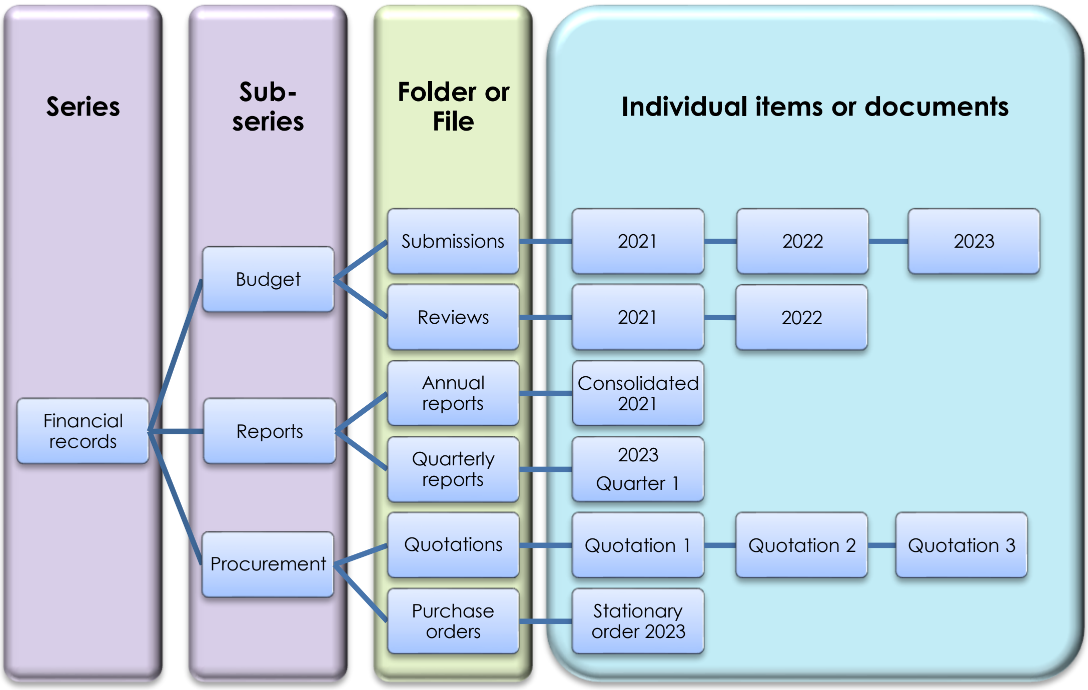
**Figure 2.**

**Diagram showing the hierarchical arrangement of records relating to an organisation's financial records.**

The categories begin the broadest possible category: from "financial records," to more narrower categories, e.g., "budget," reports," etc., and then to the individual items, e.g., annual reports, quotations, etc.

This is how archival materials are sorted, using the broadest to narrowest category (that his, hierarchical order) and then by date (that is, in "chronological order").

A file plan will show a similar ordering of archival materials: from broadest to narrowest category, and then arranged by date from earliest to the most recent.



The management of staff can have the following activities:  managing leave, performance reviews, and professional development. Financial management function may have activities including: budgeting, reporting, purchasing.

Determining the activities, will give you the next level of the organising hierarchy.

Within each level, records are further arranged chronologically, or alphabetically, or thematically, or according to another appropriate order. Archivists normally try to preserve the original order in which the papers were kept by their creator or recipient. For the most part, the original order is seen as the chronological order.

If there are functions that overlap, create a cross-reference (or description note) for each to ensure that information can be consistently organised.

Do not create unnecessarily complicated hierarchies. For small collections and minimally processed collections, perhaps only one series is needed. All collections will be arranged into at least one series, even minimally processed collections.

**Step four:  assign names / titles to each of the organisational functions**

Provide each function with a title / name.  Bear the following in mind when choosing a title or name:

- Choose a name / title that is will be easy to recognise and understand.
- Be as consistent and concise when choosing names /title.
- Choose meaningful names based on standard naming conventions.
- Avoid using abbreviations, names of individuals or ambiguous words such as "general", "miscellaneous", "various", or "other".

**Step five: physical sorting of materials, and practical considerations when doing the final sorting**

To do the arrangement, you will need space and working surfaces that can accommodate lots of materials laid out.  Long tables are ideal, if you can find them.  Camping-type tables that can be folded out for use and then folded up and stowed away work very well for this process.  During the arrangement and appraisal, it can be very helpful to lay out the materials to get a good look at them.

You will need good lighting and a clean area to work in. Do not put materials on the floor, as materials can become dirty, damaged and can be affected by flooding if left on the floor. Place materials awaiting arrangement on shelving or empty tables rather than on the floor.

When eating or drinking, do not take your refreshments anywhere near the archival materials. Spills from drinks and splatters from food can easily mark or damage the materials with stains that are difficult to remove.

You will also need some sort of writing material or computer to make your own notes about the order of the materials and note any unusual or interesting items in the materials that is worth noting (see the following section on creating a finding aid for how you will note these interesting materials).

If you are taking notes by hand, keep the following in mind:

- Always use a pencil when taking notes. Pens can accidentally make permanent marks on paper-based materials.
- Do not write your notes while pressing on the archival materials when making your notes, as the pressure of the pencil can make indentations in the archival materials.
- Sharpen pencils away from the working area, over a bin to ensure no shavings get into the materials.
- The use of a mechanical pencil is now discouraged, as bits of the lead tend to snap off and can get into the materials.
- Clear any eraser rubbings away immediately, so they also do not get into the materials.

During the final sorting (arrangement) of the materials, you may want to write any reference codes on individual items and number the pages of any loose documents. Use a soft pencil to do so. Mark in the upper right-hand corner, and on the back of photographs to do so. For any further labelling advice, please see the section on accessioning materials and accessioning three-dimensional materials on pages 18 and 22.

During the final sorting, the removal of any harmful materials like rubber bands and metal items (staples, paperclips, etc.) can be done, if it has not already been done earlier in the appraisal stage.

**Example**

**How to determine the structure, function, and activities of an organisation**

Looking at the structure, function and activities of the organisation or person can help to make sense of the structures found in collections of archival records.

They show how records are produced by these activities and have a "logical"' order of their own. Part of the tasks of arranging and describing an archival collection to make a list of it, is to find the logical order of the documents. This means looking at the documents and getting a sense of their timeline and subject matter.

For example: A community organisation

- A community organisation has (1) a committee, (2) a support team, and (3) an administrative team. This is the organisation's structure. The structure of an organisation determines the kinds of activities it undertakes.
- The community organisation's activities are (1) fundraising, (2) publicity, (3) community visits, (3) community events, (5) administration. The records the community organisation generates reflect these activities.
- The records generated are: (1) financial records, (2) marketing materials, (3) records of visits, (4) planning, meeting minutes and feedback, (5) correspondence.

**How to determine the structure, function, and activities of person's records**

Looking at the activities of the person can help to make sense of the "logical" order of personal records.

For example: A person (a professional writer)

- Professional writer produces (1) books, (2) articles, and (3) publishing. The nature of their work generates certain activities.
- A person's activities are: (1) writing (that is, their written work) but also (2) administration, (3) publicity, (4) events. A person's activities create the kinds of records they will make.
- A person's records include: (1) working papers, includes drafts, unpublished manuscripts, published items like books and articles, etc., (2) correspondence and diaries, (3) marketing materials, (4) speaking notes.

**Tip**

Following the principle of provenance, a person's papers can remain a distinct group in your archive. For example, a national youth organisation's archive will have the main collection / group being "The National Youth Outdoor Organisation of South Africa" and then it may have the "James Dlamini Papers" as a separate group if James Dlamini was a prominent member of the organisation who donated their papers.

## Summary

**What is arrangement and the final sorting of the information?**

- Arrangement is also part of the accessioning process in an archive. It is the physical arranging or sorting of the materials into their final order.
- After doing a preliminary appraisal, a more in-depth appraisal and the physical arrangement of the materials is done.
- This will create the final order that the records will be kept in.

**How are arrangement, appraisal and description linked?**

- The appraisal and arrangement processes are interlinked, they can be done at the same time. Please see the following section for more information on description.

**How to do the final sorting (appraisal and arrangement) of the materials**

- Step 1: Assess the order in which you find the materials and determine if they need to be further sorted and organised (arranged).
- Step 2: Determine which materials will not be kept and separate them from the rest.
- Step 3: Establish the hierarchical structure for organising information, by identifying the organisational structure.
    - Information (records) are organised in a hierarchical manner.
    - Records are organised from the broadest possible category (collection / group) to the narrowest category (item or document) of information.
    - Begin by identifying the functions or the organisation to determine the broadest possible category of information organisation (classification).
- Step 4: establish and map out the rest of the hierarchy (from series to item level).
    - Determine the activities. These are the smaller actions taken to achieve the organisation's functions, these will give you the next level of information organisation.
    - Information will then further be sorted by date, beginning with the earliest date.
- Step 5: assign names / titles to each of the organisational functions, these will serve as the group (or collection) names.
- Step 6: Physically sort the materials into the final order you have mapped out in steps 3-5.

**What is an inventory?**

An inventory is the finalised list of the group or collection of records. The inventory performs a dual role. It is the record of what is in the archive, and it is also a guide to finding records within the archive. In the role as finding aid it is comparable to a library catalogue as an aid to finding the information and is a record of what a library has in its collection. Unlike books in a library, however, an archive does not catalogue every piece of paper or item in the archive in great depth. For the most part, there is simply too much in an archive to do that kind of in-depth work. Instead, the listing in an archive finding aid is often quite broad, for example: "Voter's roll, Cape Town, 1883".

An inventory is structured in three parts: (1) an introduction that explains history of the materials, where they came from (provenance), what they are about and the period they cover (scope); (2) a synopsis, which is a summary of the larger listing of all materials; (3) the larger list of materials, grouped by category and by date, as they have been sorted and organised (arranged and described).

The inventory's introduction can also contain additional information such as the conditions under which a collection may be consulted, what restrictions there may be on the use of the materials, and if they can be copied. This information is usually presented in the front of the inventory, in the introductory part.

When an inventory is used by researchers in the reading room or consulting area, it is referred to as a "finding aid". In most cases it is simply a copy of the compiled inventory that is used be staff and researchers to identify and locate the records wanted for consultation.

**Why compile an inventory / finding aid?**

Compiling an inventory / finding aid serves three purposes: (1) the description and management of archival materials (records) by the archive, once they have been processed (accessioned) and are now part of the archive's holdings (arranged); (2) assist in providing access to the materials, as information can now be located in the organised materials (appraised and arranged) and have a finding aid as a tool to help in locating the desired information (description); (3) the information content of the archive is now "preserved" in the finding aid.

**How to compile an inventory / finding aid**

The process of creating a finding aid is called "description." It is useful to think of it as making an index or list of materials. Integrating new materials to an existing group and its inventory is called "accrual."

A finding aid has four parts: (1) a title page with the name of the archival grouping that the materials are now part of; (2) an introduction that provides information on the background and history of the materials; (3) a synopsis, which is a summary of the larger listing of all materials; (4) the larger list of materials, grouped by category and by date, as they have been sorted and organised (arranged and described).

The title page will reflect the name given to the collection or group of archival materials, for example, "Ladysmith Women's Agricultural Society", "Wynberg Chapter, Youth Organisation", etc. The title given to the collection or group should reflect the organisation or contents of the records. If there are specific dates of the organisation's existence, then these should be added to the title, for example "Ladysmith Women's Agricultural Society, 1893 – 1953."

The title page will also need the name of the person who compiled the inventory / finding aid and the date it was compiled, along with the date and name of the person who made each subsequent update to the inventory / finding aid. This provides information about when the work of appraisal and arrangement was done at the archive. The dating of this work is important in several respects. It can show that the original work is now out of date or displayed serious biases or omissions in how the archival material was processed, or if subsequent materials received by the archive require a reorganisation of the archival materials as a whole, with a corresponding reworking of the old finding aids.

While you work through the materials during the appraisal and arrangement stages, keep notes about the interesting materials that you have found, the topics they cover, the dates the materials cover, etc. Use these notes to compile the introduction. Any information supplied by the donor or transferring entity can also help to build a good introduction to the materials and what they are about. Any restrictions on usage, access, copying and reproduction will also need to be noted in the introduction. Information about the physical composition of the materials is also good to include. Content warnings about pejorative, racist and misogynistic language, as well as evidence of violence and harm (trauma), in materials may also need to be included.

The synopsis is a summary of the larger list. Once the larger list is completed, take the broad categories of materials and summarise them for the synopsis. It is likely that you will compile the synopsis after you have completed the listing. A synopsis is almost like a contents page, providing a very broad and overall guide to the materials listed in the finding aid.

Once materials have been appraised and organised (arranged) into their final physical order, they are assigned reference codes. Materials are then labelled with each item's reference code. Materials are then listed in the inventory / finding aid in order of their final arrangement.

**Other things to think about when compiling an inventory / finding aid**

Other helpful things to consider when compiling a finding aid include ensuring that pages of the finding aid are numbered so that loose pages do not get mixed up and making sure that the text is large enough to read easily (including by people who may need visual assistance).

Use a font that is easy to read, which usually means a non-serifed font like the one used to write this guide (Century Gothic, 10 point).

Use a software program that works with the format of an inventory / finding aid. An inventory / finding aid is not just a list of numbers, there is also a descriptive introduction at the start of the finding aid. This means that using a software format like Excell spreadsheet is generally not a good idea for compiling an inventory finding aid.

It is a good idea to bind the pages of the completed inventory / finding aids used for researcher and staff use to ensure that pages of the different finding aids do not get mixed up.

**Maintaining a register of inventories / finding aids**

For any archive, there will be a number of inventories / finding aids. The larger the archive, the more inventories will be compiled. A register of inventories needs to be maintained, with each new inventory created. Unique reference codes should be assigned to each archival group, which should be added to the title page of the relevant inventory. The same inventory reference number can be used for the inventories used as finding aids, there does not need to be a separate register for inventories used as finding aids.

**Inventories in times of disaster, damage or loss to archival materials**

Inventories are more than just a tool to locate information in an archive and a record of the contents of an archive. In the event of a disaster, or some form of large-scale loss or damage to an archive, inventories are important tools (and evidence) of what is in the archive's holdings, and the order in which the materials has been arranged in the storage areas. Inventories can help quantify damage and / or loss of materials based on what is missing from the shelf, when matched with the information in the inventories.

Inventories are, therefore, important tools to manage a recovery from loss or damage to an archive. They are part of the essential documentation an archive needs to have on hand to manage a response to a disaster. They should be considered for inclusion as records that enjoy priority in saving during a post-disaster salvage operation. In the event of a disaster, or of loss to an archive, the finding aids are a basis for calculating loss and / or damage to an archive's holdings. The value of inventories as a means to calculate damage or loss means that copies of inventories should be kept somewhere secure, away from the archive. Measures will need to be taken to ensure that the inventories and the information they contain remain secure at the other location, and to ensure that information about the archive's materials does not fall into the wrong hands or is misused.

**Finding aids and issues of security and confidentiality**

The information that inventories / finding aids contain can reveal quite a bit about the materials kept in an archive and where they are to be found. Unfortunately, this means that individuals intent on stealing items or accessing information they are not entitled to can make use of information contained in inventories / finding aids. Information about sensitive or confidential information may need to be redacted or removed, with other arrangements for listing them and providing access to the information for those entitled to access that information. Inventories / finding aids can also inadvertently advertise valuable materials and their location. Heritage collections, including archives, are not immune to crime. Think carefully about the information that is included in a finding aid, especially if these are going to be made widely available.

**Summary**

**What does an inventory do?**

An inventory does three things:

- Describes and manages (or controls) archival materials once they have been processed and are now part of the archive's holdings.
- When used by researchers in the reading room or consulting area, or by staff, an inventory provides access to the materials. When an inventory is used to locate and access information / records in an archive, they are referred to as finding aids.
- Information content of the archive is now "preserved" in the inventory. Inventories are therefore, a useful tool in calculating loss or harm in the event of a disaster.

**How is an inventory / finding aid compiled?**

- An inventory / finding aid is compiled during the process of appraising and arranging the archival materials. During this final sorting process, the final order of materials is determined.
- A list of the final order of the materials is then compiled.
- Added to the lest of materials is an introduction and synopsis (summary of the list).
- Information about who and when it was compiled (as well as any subsequent updates of the finding aid) also needs to be added, either to the title page or somewhere in the introduction.

**An inventory / finding aid has the following parts:**

- A title page with the name.
- Unique reference or source code for the group
- An introduction that provides information on the background and history of the materials.
- A synopsis (summary) of the listed materials.
- The list of materials, as they have been sorted and organised (arranged and described).

Western Cape Archives and Records Service
Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport
72 Roeland Street, Cape Town, 8000
**tel:** +27 21 483 0400
**www.westerncape.gov.za/cas**