

Washington State Archives Collection Development Policy

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“Washington is blessed with a world-class State Archives, including a Digital Archives recognized as a pacesetter. With painstaking, old-fashioned attention to detail and cutting-edge technology, the Archives is preserving the continuing story of a vibrant and innovative people and their state and local governments.

Schoolchildren, attorneys, maritime history buffs, and genealogists are among those who appreciate the treasure trove of records, images, maps and much more – much of it available online. These resources, the raw and unfiltered original historical record, are not just preserved and locked away in vaults - they are used and they enrich our lives!

We are indebted to our dedicated staff in Olympia and around the state. We greatly appreciate our essential partnership with local governments and state agencies that transfer their documents and other items to state and regional Archives for safekeeping and public access and use in workshops.

We are also thankful for the hundreds of volunteers who help in ‘crowd-sourcing’ the intake of documents, including the resources that are so important to those who love to do family history research.

Altogether, the State Archives is a lasting legacy for the people of Washington – and beyond.”

Kim Wyman, Secretary of State

Attributions and Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and thank the Florida State Archives and the Queensland State Archives for the use of their published collection policies listed below. This publication relies on them for structure and content, especially the Florida State Archives.

Florida Department of State, Division of Library & Information Services. [Collection Development Policy](http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/archives/collectionPolicy.cfm) (<http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/archives/collectionPolicy.cfm>)

Parts of the [Queensland State Archives' Appraisal Statement](http://www.archives.qld.gov.au/Recordkeeping/Pages/Publications.aspx) (<http://www.archives.qld.gov.au/Recordkeeping/Pages/Publications.aspx>) are used under a [Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/>)

Purpose

To establish a policy for collection development in the Archives. This policy sets forth at a high level the documentation goals and objectives of the Archives. The policy will:

- Define the scope and content of the collections;
- Provide a framework for appraisal decisions;
- Establishes standards to ensure consistency in the selection of archival materials for continued preservation.

In order to reflect changing research trends, archival resources and collection strengths and weaknesses, this policy will be reviewed annually.

Mission, Processes, and Policies

Organization

The State Archives is a program of the Office of the Secretary of State. The State Archives has statewide responsibility to promote the economical and efficient management of public records as defined in chapter 40.14 RCW, and to preserve those records having long-term historical value. The Archives provides services and technical assistance to state and local governments, as well as the public, to effectively manage and preserve records.

Authority and Mission

Washington's archival records are among the most important legal, historical and cultural resources belonging to the people of the State. These unique, irreplaceable records are essential to ensuring the rights of citizens and organizations and to understanding the responsibilities and limitations of government. They offer insight into our diverse heritage and history; provide government officials the perspective they need to manage responsibly; and supply valuable information for historians, genealogists, teachers and students from across the state and beyond.

The Washington State Archives' mandate is to preserve and make available the important legal and historical public records from state and local government entities. The Archives' specific mandates are found in chapter 40.14 RCW, which authorizes the State Archives to:

- Manage the archives of the state of Washington;
- Centralize the archives of the state of Washington;
- Make them available for reference and scholarship;
- Ensure their proper preservation;
- Ensure the maintenance and security of all state public records and establish safeguards against unauthorized removal or destruction;
- Provide for the proper retention and disposition of records created by state and local agencies.

Appraisal

Appraisal is the process the Archives uses to determine whether records and other materials have permanent (archival) value. Public records are identified and appraised through the Division's records scheduling and disposition process and on-site visitations.

There are two categories of public archival records in Washington State, Archival (Permanent Retention), and Archival (Appraisal Required). In all cases, records designated as archival are reviewed by professional staff to ensure an appropriate appraisal. Archival (Permanent Retention) records will be preserved in the Archives, as is. Archival (Appraisal Required) records will be reviewed and in some cases records

may be sampled, or weeded out of the collection.

The Archives only collects materials related to Washington and places a special emphasis on materials for collection areas that are under documented and have strong informational value and content.

The Archives accepts records in a wide variety of formats, including paper originals, photographs, magnetic recordings, film and electronic formats. In general, though, the Archives does not collect newspapers, three-dimensional artifacts, publications or private donations that do not enhance the understanding of government. Unlike museums and libraries, the Archives does not have the proper storage space and shelving to store artifacts, newspapers and publications, nor does the Archives have curatorial staff trained in the proper care and preservation of such collections.

In order to ensure that newspapers, three-dimensional artifacts and manuscript materials are housed in the most appropriate institution, the Archives works closely with the Washington State Library, Washington State Historical Society, tribal governments, and other allied cultural organizations. However, the Archives will accession artifacts that must be maintained and stored on the Washington State Capitol Campus, such as state gifts, commemorative items and artifacts of note to the Capitol.

Accessioning

Accessioning is the process the Archives uses to take legal and physical custody of a group of records or other materials. Accessioning involves formally documenting receipt of the records in a register and database, as well as arranging and describing the records to ensure accessibility.

All public records accessioned into the Archives are scheduled through the records retention scheduling function and are subject to the “Transfer of Custody Agreement” listed on the Archives Records Transmittal and Box Content List (See Appendix 1). Records transferred to the Archives come under the physical and legal control of the Archives.

All non-government records transferred to the Archives are subject to the conditions outlined in the “Washington State Archives, Deed of Gift” (See Appendix 1) form. The Archives will not accept materials unless they are accompanied by the completed Deed of Gift form.

Collections

State and local government public records are the core of the Archives’ collections. These records are termed “public records,” which are defined in RCW 40.14.010 as

including any paper, correspondence, completed form, bound record book, photograph, film, sound recording, map drawing, machine-readable material, compact disc meeting current industry ISO specifications, or other document, regardless of physical form or characteristics, and including such copies thereof, that have been made by or received by any agency of the state of Washington in connection with the transaction of public business, and legislative records as described in RCW 40.14.100.

Although state and local government records are the core of our collections, the Archives does hold a small percentage of manuscript collections, or non-governmental records. A special collecting emphasis is placed on records that represent, highlight, clarify or further explain government, its functions and its actions.

The Archives places an emphasis on collecting records containing information related to the interactions between Washington's citizens and its government, as well as records that document the environment, natural resources, the Legislature, social services, the courts, economic development, land use, property ownership, transportation, ports, social services and vital records.

The Archives collects records in the following areas:

- Records designated by law as having long-term or permanent value, such as vital records;
- Records that document and provide information about the origins, functions and activities of an agency;
- Records showing the formation of policy, development of programs and administration of agencies;
- Records of continuing value that are critical to the operations of an agency because the information contained in them is administrative, legal or financial in nature;
- Records that have intrinsic value based upon the physical form of the record, its uniqueness or other factors arising out of its creation or use;
- Records with extended and unbroken time spans offering uniform and comparable information on the operations and programs of an agency;
- Records that provide the most accurate and understandable source of information to researchers;
- Records documenting historic events;
- The private papers of legislators, justices and other former executive-level public officials;
- Significant collections of individuals, families or organizations that enhance existing public records regarding social, civic, economic, educational, military or political history of Washington;
- Private papers and records that complement existing public records in the Archives or that fill in gaps in under documented collection areas;
- Political ephemera of candidates and ballot propositions.

State Government Records document the history, organization, and functions of Washington state government; its influence and impact upon the lives of its citizens; and the protection of their civil rights. This collection consists of records from the territorial period to the present and from all branches and agencies of government, including the executive, judicial and legislative branches.

Typical archival State Government Records include executive-level correspondence and policy documents, annual and biennial reports, legislative files, meeting minutes, studies and research reports, public affairs files, court case files, land management files, maps, vital records, pollution clean-up documents and administrative procedures.

Local Government Records document the history, organization and functions of the many local government agencies found throughout the state, including county offices such as the Auditor, Clerk, Treasurer, and Board of Commissioners, as well as municipalities, school districts and other service districts.

Typical archival Local Government Public Records include executive-level correspondence and policy documents, vital records, annual and biennial reports, probate files, agenda packets, meeting minutes, resolutions, ordinances, land ownership files, studies and research reports, court case files, voting records, plats and surveys, newsletters, tax records and administrative procedures.

Manuscript Collections (Non-Government Records) are comprised of records of legislators and private individuals, as well as organizations that augment government records collections or otherwise shed light on government policies or activities.

Typical archival Manuscript Collection (Non-Government) records include diaries, scrapbooks, research, correspondence, meeting minutes, journals, maps, photographs and other related materials.

Security and Storage

All public records and manuscript materials acquired by the Archives are accessioned, described and preserved according to established professional standards. Even with these best practices, however, all records deteriorate. To counter and slow this process, the Archives employs several preservation strategies. Among these strategies are:

- Storage of the records in special temperature- and humidity-controlled facilities and vaults;
- Monitoring the environment to ensure there are no extreme fluctuations in temperature or humidity;
- Minimizing the impact of light fading the records by using motion-controlled sensors;
- Diminishing the risk of fire by using heat and smoke detectors;
- Using multiple layers of security to reduce the threat of theft;

- Maintaining an integrated pest management program to prevent harm from insects and vermin;
- Rehousing records in archival boxes and folders;
- Reformatting records to ensure the long-term survival of the information in the records;
- Practicing migration strategies, redundant storage and the physical dispersal of copies to ensure indefinite long-term access of electronic records.

By implementing these strategies, the Archives can increase the records' lifespans many times over.

Access

The Archives makes its collections available to a wide variety of researchers, including government officials, lawyers, historians, students, genealogists, the public and others interested in Washington's government, its people and the events that have shaped its history. Materials in the Archives' collections are available to all researchers on equal terms of access; the Archives does not grant privileged or exclusive use to any person or group.

Research in the Archives' collections is supported by a variety of finding aids, guides, indexes and websites. The Digital Archives (www.digitalarchives.wa.gov) hosts the collected electronic records of the Archives, the majority of which are searchable at the item level. The Archives' online catalog (www.sos.wa.gov/archives/search/) is designed to assist researchers in locating information about public records and manuscript collections in the Archives. The Archives also provides printed collection descriptions, subject guides and automated indexes for selected collections.

Restrictions on Access and Use

All public records transferred to the custody of the Archives are open to inspection and examination by the public unless specifically prohibited by law. Access to non-public manuscript and photographic collections donated to the Archives may be subject to restrictions placed upon them by the donor.

Records transferred or donated to the Archives must be used and copied on-site at the Archives, with the exception of electronic records that are made available online. Records may not be removed for any purpose unless special arrangements have been made or they are subpoenaed into court. Any record in the Archives' collection can be certified if needed in court.

The Archives maintains a separate policy guiding public access to restricted records.

Digitization of the Collection

In addition to the management of the physical collections in the State Archives, there have been substantial efforts by staff and partner organizations to create digital versions

of important records from the collections. These efforts were initiated to:

- Increase the number of records available online;
- Reduce wear and tear on the original records;
- Provide access to records that are too fragile or damaged to be accessed in their original format;
- Improve services to customers consistent with their evolving expectations;
- Contribute to open and accountable government by promoting access to government information.

Deaccessioning and Disposition of Materials

Recommendations for the disposition of accessioned public records may be made as a result of archival re-appraisal. Such disposition of public records will be made only after prior approval of the originating agency and with the authorization of the State Archivist. Individual records may be weeded, or sampled, without notification of the agency of origin or the State Archivist.

Manuscripts and other non-government records that are determined to have no permanent value or historical interest will be returned to the donor or otherwise disposed of according to the wishes of the donor as stated in the “Deed of Gift.” If no provision is made, the Archives will use its discretion in disposition of unwanted materials and may attempt to locate a more appropriate institution. The Archives does not sell unwanted materials as a means of disposition.

Replevin

Replevin is the action of recovering property that has been improperly or illegally taken. Replevin is frequently used to describe efforts to recover public records that are in private hands. Fortunately, most citizens return state or local government documents once they realize that the historical documents are lost or stolen. They realize that democratic societies require a clear record of government actions and decisions for accountability purposes and to ensure that citizen rights and equities are preserved.

When identified historical government documents are not returned willingly, the Archives has the legal authority to retrieve them in court through a legal action called replevin. Washington’s Replevin Law, [Chapter 7.64](#) RCW, enables state and local government agencies to recover public records that are in the possession of a person, organization or institution not authorized to possess those records.

Temporary Storage of Materials

As a service to cultural institutions in need, the Archives will offer space for the temporary short-term storage of materials. This storage is provided at the sole discretion of the State Archivist and is dependent upon the availability of space. There

are no costs associated with the storage, but all access to the collections will be provided by the institution in need, without exception. At the time of storage, the Archives will require a signed contract indemnifying and holding the Archives harmless for all damages to the materials.

Loans of Materials

The Archives will only loan original materials from its collections with the authorization of the State Archivist and a completed Loan Agreement Form (See Appendix 1).

Tax Appraisals

The Archives cannot appraise donated materials to determine their fair market value since the Archives is considered an interested party in the transaction. Such evaluations do not meet the IRS definition of “qualified appraisal.” To qualify as acceptable for income tax use, the appraisal must be performed by an objective, qualified appraiser, unconnected with either the donor or the institution, hired for this purpose by the donor.

In addition, the Archives cannot provide tax advice or interpretation of the tax laws to answer individual questions. Donors should consult an expert tax advisor for answers to specific questions on the use of gifts of property for charitable contribution deductions.

Donors interested in monetary appraisal of manuscripts should contact the [American Society of Appraisers](#) to help locate a manuscripts appraiser in their area.

Copyright

As stated on the “Deed of Gift” form, all materials transferred to the Archives become the sole and absolute property of the Archives. All rights, title, and interest in and to these materials, together with all literary property rights held by the donor(s), are transferred to the Archives. The Archives, as owner of literary rights transferred by the “Deed of Gift,” may exercise or transfer to a third party the right of quotation or publication.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine the status of copyright in the records he or she uses. The researcher is liable for any copyright infringement in use of the records.