

Guidelines for Organizations: accumulation and storage of archival material

1. Archival material tells the story of your organization. Minutes, specifically-addressed correspondence (rather than bulk mailings from a head office), memos, planning notes, membership lists, invitations, posters, programs, financial reports Bank statements are not archival material, as they are merely numbers; annual financial reports are good (for the 'facts'), and treasure's reports are terrific, for the personal touch.

Note: if you are a branch or chapter of a national or international organization: keep the focus on material that reflects local activities and initiatives. This may include participation in regional or other activities, but it is presumed that the head office is keeping track of their own history.

2. 'Archives' doesn't mean 'storage' or Records Management. Anything that may still be needed for the operation or function of your organization should not be archived.

3. When possible and applicable, keep the original not a photocopy.

4. If you have a mock-up and a finished product, keep both if it's reasonable. If something has gone through several versions, use discretion before keeping more than the final one. The reality is, space is limited ...

5. re: digital records. They count, but a) they sometimes degrade (think brittle cassette tapes) and b) there's no way of knowing whether or not the technology to access them will be available in the future. Be prepared to check them regularly* to make sure they still play (or open, in the case of digital files) and also be prepared to maintain whatever is needed to access the information (video / cassette / disc player, computer software, etc). If and when the technology changes significantly, the data may need to be migrated to the new format. (This should be considered every 5 years.) Archival computer files can be stored on an external hard drive.

When possible, consider making a hard copy of anything you think might be significant and keeping it instead, with a note on it saying that it was printed from whatever format on such-and-such date.

*"Regularly" means different things when applied to different formats. Audio and video cassette tape should be checked every 2 years; CDs and DVDs should be checked every 2-5 years; digital files every year.

6. When you are creating your organization's documents, whenever possible include the date (including on brochures, posters, memos, etc) and make sure people are referred to by full name, rather than by initials or nicknames. Documents can be stored in plastic sleeves – many readily-available brands are designated "acid-free" or "archive safe".

7. re: photographs. Weed ruthlessly. Prints that are blurry, grainy, dark or over-exposed are generally not worth keeping. Small, identified (or readily-identifiable) groups are best. A given event is best represented by 3 or 4 photos, not a dozen – each photo should have different people or a different aspect of the event. Put each photo in its own plastic (document) sleeve, with the date /event / location / names written in pencil on a separate piece of paper. People are listed left to right, back to front. If the "lines" of people aren't obvious, diagram and number the arrangement with an accompanying numbered list.

Note: "Polaroid"-type photos degrade badly. If they are all you have, consider taking them to London Drugs or somewhere else that does photo-finishing, and having a duplicate print made.