

**Washington State Archives Policy Statement
on
Archival Appraisal**

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Attributions and Acknowledgements

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Florida Department of State, Division of Library & Information Services. Collection Development Policy, January 2010. (<http://dos.myflorida.com/media/32489/collectionpolicy2010.pdf>)

National Archives and Records Administration. Strategic Directions: Appraisal Policy, September 2007. (<https://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/initiatives/appraisal.html>)

Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation, Queensland State Archives. ([Queensland State Archives' Appraisal Statement](#)), February 2013.

Purpose

To establish a policy for the archival appraisal of records created by state and local government entities in Washington. This policy sets the framework, objectives, and guidelines the Archives uses to decide whether state and local records have archival value. The policy will:

- Promote the integrity and transparency of the appraisal process by describing what characteristics the Archives looks for in records to select for permanent retention in the Archives;
- Assist public agencies with their legal obligations under the Public Records Act by providing guidance so they may identify permanent public records;
- Protect citizens' fundamental rights and entitlements;
- Shape the scope and breadth of Washington's archival collection.

This policy will not address deaccessioning or weeding. These will be handled in a separate policy document.

Authority

RCW 40.14.020 - provides that the State Archivist centralize the archives of the State of Washington and make them available for reference and scholarship.

RCW 40.14.060 - authority of the State Records Committee to set records retention policy for the records of state government agencies.

RCW 40.14.070 - authority of the Local Records Committee to set records retention policy for the records of local government agencies.

Definitions

- **Appraisal:** The process of determining the value and disposition of records based on administrative, legal and fiscal use; evidential, intrinsic and informational value; and the relationship to other records.
- **Archival value:** The enduring historical or other value of records, as determined by the State Archivist that requires continued preservation past the minimum retention period. All records requiring appraisal and/or archival transfer, are designated as such on the records retention schedules approved by the Local and State Records Committees
- **Archival (Appraisal Required):** Designation for records that may possess enduring legal and/or historical value. All designated records must be appraised by Archives staff prior to transfer or disposition. The use of this designation

should be minimized in draft retention schedules by appraising the records series prior to the adoption of the retention schedule.

- **Archival (Permanent Retention):** Designation for records that possess enduring legal and/or historical value. All designated records must be preserved permanently and cannot be reappraised for selective retention unless their designation is changed by the approval of the State Archivist or appropriate records committee.
- **Disposition:** Actions taken at the end of the retention period. Actions are either the destruction of the records or their transfer to the Archives for permanent retention.
- **Sampling:** The selection of files or items from a group of records that are representative of the whole.

Responsibility

- **Records Committees:** The Local Records Committee and the State Records Committee approve, modify or disapprove agency recommendations on records retention schedules for all public records and act upon requests to destroy any public records.
- **State Archivist:** Approves the policies, priorities and processes used by the Archives for the appraisal of government agency records. Creates working groups of Staff Archivists to make archival designation recommendations. Serves on the State and Local Records Committees.
- **Staff Archivists:** Assist in the development of policies and procedures for appraising public records and are responsible for the application of the appraisal policies and procedures in the disposition of state and local government records.
- **State Records Manager:** Manages the incorporation of recommended archival designations into records retention schedules presented for approval to the State or Local Records Committees.
- **Office of Origin:** Complies with all approved records retention schedules that govern the records it holds.

Notifies the Archives when records designated “ARCHIVAL (Permanent Retention)” are ready for transfer to the Archives.

Notifies the Archives when records designated “ARCHIVAL (Appraisal Required)” are ready for appraisal and potential transfer to the Archives.

Policy

As the custodian of the State’s irreplaceable historical and legal records, it is the policy of the Archives to collect, preserve and make available for research the documentary memory of Washington for present and future generations. The appraisal of public records is the cornerstone of determining which public records will form the State’s documentary cultural heritage.

The Archives appraisal practices have the objective of documenting the following characteristics:

- ***Authority, Foundation & Structure of Government:*** Public records that provide evidence of the source of authority, foundation and structure of the State’s local and state government entities.
Examples:
 - Legislation;
 - Regulations;
 - Judgments and rulings that determine the validity of legislation, powers, and jurisdiction.

- ***Primary Functions & Programs of Government:*** Public records that provide evidence of deliberations, decisions and actions that influence the administration of government and the people.
Examples:
 - Meeting minutes of governing bodies;
 - Policies and plans;
 - Governmental reorganizations or restructurings;
 - Judicial cause files;
 - Reports.

- ***Enduring Rights & Entitlements:*** Public records that provide evidence of the legal status of individuals and groups within the community, as well as their fundamental rights to participate in the affairs of the state, and claim entitlements and protection provided by the state.
Examples:
 - Vital records (birth, death, and marriage);
 - Adoptions;
 - Voter registration;
 - Name changes;
 - Property rights records (deeds, tax assessments, and mortgages).

- ***Significant Impact on Individuals:*** Public records that provide substantial evidence of the impact of government decisions and actions on individuals and communities, the interaction of people with the government, and the influence of the communities on government decision-making.

Examples:

- Land-use records;
- Major public works files;
- Jail and prison admission and discharges;
- Criminal court files;
- Social services planning and policies;
- Case files;
- Petitions documenting community opposition to government actions and policies.

- ***Substantial Contribution to Historical Events:*** Public records that contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the history, society, culture or people of Washington.

Examples:

- Speeches on significant occasions
- Planning for significant events or celebrations
- Statistical data on populations and economics.

- ***Environmental Management & Change:*** Public records that provide evidence of government's actions relating to environmental management and change, including the occupation, management and use of the state's natural resources.

Examples:

- Rainfall, temperature and soil statistical data;
- Toxic site identification;
- The spread and control of disease;
- Applications for enforcement activity;
- Environmental monitoring;
- Mining files;
- State land lease files.

General Appraisal Guidelines

Records appraisal requires informed judgments, knowledge of researchers' interests, recognition of resource considerations, and a willingness to acknowledge and understand comments and suggestions from diverse customer perspectives.

In appraising records to determine if they have archival value and should be accepted for permanent retention in the Archives, use the questions below. The answers to these

questions will make decision-making easier and will provide consistent appraisal judgments that can be easily explained within the Archives and to outside constituents.

The answers to the following questions should be considered as a whole, rather than in isolation.

How significant are the records for research? The future research potential of records is difficult to determine. What has low research use today may have high use in the future. Even more difficult to predict are the issues and topics that will be considered significant in the future. It is possible to consider the kinds and extent of current research use to try and make inferences about future use.

How significant are the source and context of the records? The significance of the functions and activities performed by the office of origin and the context in which the records are created are important considerations for appraisal. The appraiser must relate the source and context of the records to the six characteristics and objectives found above.

Is the information unique? Appraisals must be conducted in context with other records. The appraiser must determine whether the records under consideration are the only or most complete source for the information. Records that contain information not available in other records (including other files accumulated by state and local governments) are more likely to justify permanent retention than records that are duplicated in other sources.

How usable are the records? Consider these three issues:

- How does the records arrangement by the office of origin affect their usability? Records that have an arrangement and/or indexing that makes it easy to locate needed information are more likely to be kept over those that are more difficult to use.
- Are the records in the most useful format? In some instances, summary data may be available for selection instead of numerous individual records.
- How do technical considerations affect the usability of the records? Some electronic and audio-visual records may be very difficult to recover, while other records containing similar documentation may be usable with much less effort.
- How does the physical condition of the records affect their usability? Some records may have deteriorated to the point that the information they contain is not readable.

Do the records serve as a finding aid to other permanent records?

Records that can be used as a finding aid to other records may justify retention even if the information they contain is not unique or complete.

What is the timeframe covered by the information? "Timeframe" may refer to the date span of the entire body of records or the length of time that individual records or file units typically cover. The longer the date span, the more valuable the records are likely to be for research.

Do the records document decisions that set precedents? Do decisions or actions of the office of origin set precedents, or is each decision or action independent of others and merely based on policy set at some higher level? If the former, the records are more likely to justify permanent retention.

Are the records related to other permanent records? Records that add significantly to the meaning or value of other records in the Archives are more likely to be kept. For instance, records that are chronological continuations of records already in the Archives are likely to be kept, especially if the older segments of the records have a high reference use.

Do the files contain non-archival records? Files that contain a small number of non-archival records, such as routine fiscal documents, supplies requests, etc. are more likely to be appraised as permanent than records where the number of non-archival documents is high, particularly where the overall volume of the records is large.

What are the cost considerations for long-term maintenance of the records? This consideration should only play a significant role in marginal cases. In such cases, an appraisal should balance the anticipated research potential of the records with the resource implications of retaining them permanently.

What is the volume of records? Volume should only play a role in the appraisal of records of marginal archival value.

Are the records restricted, exempt from disclosure, or confidential? Restrictions should not play a role in the appraisal of records of archival value.

Is sampling an appropriate appraisal tool? Appraisal decisions that call for sampling records should be made only after careful analysis of all other options and the costs and benefits of implementing a sampling decision. Appraisal decisions involving sampling must specify a process that permits the easy identification of records that are to be retained permanently.

- Sampling that involves subjective judgments or item-by-item decisions to retain individual records or individual file units should only be used as a last resort, if at all.
- Sampling projects must specify whether the originating agency or the Archives will be responsible for the sampling work.

- If a sampling decision is driven by the originating agency, this appraisal decision should only be made if the agency is strongly committed to doing the sampling work.
- If a sampling decision is driven by the Archives, this appraisal decision should only be made if staff are strongly committed to doing the sampling work and have the resources to do it.