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State Records
of South Australia



Appraisal of Official Records - Policy and Objectives

Guideline

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Introduction

Purpose of this document

This document states the policy of State Records for the appraisal of official records in South Australia and the fundamental appraisal objectives used to identify records of ongoing value to the State.

Scope and application of this document

The document applies to agencies within South Australia as defined in section 3(1) of the *State Records Act 1997* which includes State Government agencies, Local Government authorities and Universities. It is issued in accordance with section 7(g) of the State Records Act.

The appraisal objectives described below will not be used retrospectively to review records deemed as permanent that are already in the custody of State Records.

Statutory framework

The State Records Act establishes a statutory framework for authorising the disposal of official records. An agency cannot dispose of official records without the approval of the State Records Council. Accordingly all disposal schedules developed in South Australia need to be submitted to and authorised by the Council before they can be considered to be legal instruments.

Acknowledgments

State Records acknowledges the advice and assistance of the following institutions, and their publications, in developing this document:

- The State Records Authority of New South Wales - *Policy on Records Appraisal and the Identification of State Archives (June 2001)*
- The National Archives of Australia - *Why Records are Kept (2000)*.

Further Information

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This Guideline and related Standards, Guidelines, and Recordkeeping Advice Sheets can be obtained from the State Records web site <http://www.archives.sa.gov.au>.

Why keep official records?

Official records created by South Australian agencies bound by the State Records Act are an important source of information about, and evidence of, the functions and activities of the Government. The official records document the:

- rights of South Australian citizens
- legal obligations of South Australian Government agencies
- actions taken by agencies to implement government policies
- impact of the policies of the Government on South Australian citizens.

Official records also enable:

- South Australian citizens to scrutinise the Government
- interested parties to learn what has happened in the past
- Government to make decisions on the basis of past experience.

Official records can, therefore, be of benefit to the Government and citizens of South Australia in many different ways.

Why not keep all official records?

Official records have many uses **yet** some of them are destroyed. Why not keep all official records?

To retain every government record forever would require an immense investment of space, money and staff. The sheer quantity of records created by the South Australian Government would soon fill the storage space available at State Records and require staff resources far beyond State Records' capacity to access and manage them. Even in the electronic environment, where data storage costs continue to fall, the full cost of cataloguing, maintenance, migration and accessibility would still be too high to retain all records.

All official records are created for an identifiable business or administrative purpose. Most of them can be destroyed once that purpose has been fulfilled and all legal and accountability requirements for their retention have been met.

Most records - both analogue and digital - degrade over time, due to the manner in which the records were made and the materials used in their creation. The attempt to preserve every official record forever would ultimately require State Records to keep records whose physical properties have broken down to such an extent that, for all practical purposes, the records no longer exist. This problem is compounded in the case of electronic records by the rate at which software and hardware formats become obsolete. The preservation of all electronic records requires either, the continuing preservation and maintenance of specialised equipment capable of reading older-style electronic materials, or ongoing regeneration of stored records in new formats. To keep all official records would therefore be unrealistic and put considerable strain on State Records and government resources.

Appraisal

What is appraisal?

Traditionally, appraisal was a process of evaluating records, using a number of defined criteria, to determine whether records were permanent or temporary. Traditional appraisal focused on the records as the primary entity and therefore took a micro or records class-based approach. The values assigned to the records were most commonly grouped into two areas - primary (or evidential) value and secondary (or informational) value. Records that satisfied the primary value were usually assigned longer retention periods than records that met the secondary value.

The traditional view of appraisal is being replaced by a new approach known as 'functional' or 'macro' appraisal:

Appraisal is the process of evaluating the business activities of an agency to determine which records need to be created and captured and how long the records need to be kept, to meet business needs, the requirements of organisational accountability and community expectations. This includes determining which records should be kept as part of our community's collective memory and cultural heritage¹.

The basis of the functional appraisal approach is the exploration of the functions and activities of an organisation by:

- determining what the agency does and what its staff considers it does
- analysing and classifying the functions and activities of the agency
- identifying the relationships between functions, and the activities and transactions that make up a function
- identifying the range of stakeholder interests in and uses of records
- determining risk factors associated with deciding which records to keep and which to destroy
- identifying legislation, standards and accountability requirements that need to be complied with.

Based on the functional analysis the appraiser recommends retention periods for official records generated as evidence of the agency's functions and activities.

Consistent with other Australian archives, State Records is increasingly adopting the functional approach. Schedules based on a class-based approach can only be developed in limited circumstances and only after consulting with State Records.

¹ From *Policy on Records Appraisal and the Identification of State Archives*. State Records Authority of New South Wales. June 2001.

What is the outcome of appraisal?

The outcome of appraisal is that an agency and State Records are both able to identify records that fall into one of four categories:

- records of permanent value
- records of temporary value, to be retained for long periods of time
- records of temporary value, to be retained for short periods of time
- records of temporary value that can be immediately destroyed.

Once appraisal is completed, disposal schedules can be developed. Disposal schedules identify functions, activities, transactions and/or records and assign disposal actions based on the four broad categories described above.

Who are the key participants in the appraisal process?

There are four key participants in the appraisal of official records within South Australia, and each has its own roles and responsibilities.

Government agencies

Agencies are responsible for:

- conducting appraisal and disposal as part of an overall records management program
- recommending records for either permanent or temporary retention based on their business requirements and the objectives set out in this document
- consulting with an appropriate external stakeholder or historian.

State Records

State Records is responsible for:

- providing advice and assistance to agencies and ensuring best records management practices are observed
- confirming, via its internal disposal process, that the appraisal objectives outlined in this document have been applied
- endorsing the application of the appraisal objectives so that a disposal schedule can be submitted to the State Records Council for approval
- appraising types of functions and activities (and their associated records) common across the South Australian Government and issuing recommended disposal actions as general disposal schedules.

State Records Council

The State Records Council is responsible for:

- endorsing the policy statement and appraisal objectives set out in this document
- reviewing determinations for the retention or destruction of official records and either approving such determinations or requesting amendment in accordance with section 23 of the State Records Act.

External stakeholders/historians

An external stakeholder/historian consulted by a government agency is responsible for:

- providing feedback and advice on a disposal schedule, and related appraisal decisions.

Appraisal policy statement

In order to be retained in the State's archival collection, official records of South Australian Government agencies need to meet one or more of the appraisal objectives outlined below. The objectives aim to ensure that records, as evidence of the business of the South Australian Government, are kept as needed by the Government and the community.

Appraisal objectives

What are the appraisal objectives for identifying records of permanent value to the State of South Australia?

The following minimum appraisal objectives, originally developed by the State Records Authority of New South Wales², have been adopted with minor changes for use in South Australia. The objectives, applicable to records in all formats, will shape the future appraisal process in South Australia.

Objective 1

To identify and preserve official records providing evidence of the source of authority, foundation and machinery of the South Australian Government and public sector bodies.

To meet this objective, official records need to be identified that document the establishment, structure and functions of government and public sector bodies, and that establish the nature and extent of their jurisdictions, obligations, responsibilities and powers.

The types of activities and associated records likely to meet this objective include those on:

- the passing and promulgation of legislation
- formal instruments or authorities establishing the functions, jurisdictions, boundaries and operations of all levels of government within the State, its offices and any changes
- legal delegations to perform duties and functions of the State
- judgements or rulings determining the extent of jurisdictions and powers
- agreements between governments such as contracts, complementary legislation, policy and funding initiatives.

² *Policy on Records Appraisal and the Identification of State Archives*. State Records Authority of New South Wales. June 2001.

Objective 2

To identify and preserve official records providing evidence of the deliberations, decisions and actions of the South Australian Government and public sector bodies relating to key functions and programs and significant issues faced in governing the state of South Australia.

To meet this objective official records need to be identified that provide evidence of key decisions and activities influencing the administration of government and the people of South Australia. This will include records documenting the background, basis, and outcomes of those decisions and activities.

The types of activities and associated records likely to meet this objective include those relating to:

- the formulation and determination of policy across the whole of government
- the formulation, determination and implementation of high level policy and strategic management decisions within and across government strata, and between the public and private sectors
- the monitoring, analysis and review of policy affecting key government functions
- major reforms of the State's political and administrative structures and institutions
- the development, implementation and review of legislation at an across-government or agency level.

Objective 3

To identify and preserve official records providing evidence of the legal status and fundamental rights and entitlements of individuals and groups.

To meet this objective official records need to be identified that are essential for establishing and protecting the fundamental rights and entitlements of individuals and groups within the community and the ongoing administration of the State. This will include records establishing the existence of individuals and groups, as well as their rights to participate in the affairs of the State and make claim to entitlements and protection provided by the State.

The types of activities and associated records likely to meet this objective include those relating to:

- the registration of births, deaths and marriages
- the administration of land title and real property
- the administration of probate.

Objective 4

To identify and preserve official records substantially contributing to the knowledge and understanding of the society and communities of South Australia.

To meet this objective official records need to be identified that will substantially contribute to the existing body of knowledge or understanding of aspects of the history, society, culture or people of South Australia. This will include records relating to events,

persons, places and phenomena of social, environmental or cultural significance to the broader community and the State of South Australia.

The types of activities and associated records likely to meet this objective include those relating to:

- the planning and management of major infrastructure or development projects
- the planning and management of the State's economic resources
- the planning, management and staging of significant cultural events and celebrations
- the identification, development and management of sites of conservation, cultural or heritage significance
- the works and activities of individuals or organisations that have significantly contributed to South Australian society.

Objective 5

To identify and preserve official records that contribute to the protection and well being of the community or provide substantial evidence of the condition of the State, its people and the environment, and the impact of government activities on them.

To meet this objective official records need to be identified that contain information essential for, or contributing to, the protection, physical well-being or social benefit of both current and future generations. This will include records documenting the impact of government activities on the environment, the community and individuals within the community or the nature of people's interaction with the Government and their environment.

The types of activities and records likely to meet this objective include those relating to:

- collections and analyses of data to assist effective planning and decision making in relation to issues significantly affecting the community, resource management, the environment or the provision of essential services
- representations and appeals against the decisions and actions of government or the legislature
- individual case management where it is evident that government functions and programs had far reaching impact or influence on the lives of individuals within the community, the environment or the development of the State and its resources.

Other issues affecting the retention of official records

The physical state of a record will also be considered when it is appraised. If a record is in such a poor physical state that it cannot be preserved or poses a threat to more stable records, then it may not be kept as part of the State's archival collection.

Records that lack any context, and where that context cannot be reasonably reconstructed, may also not be kept as part of the State's archival collection.

The feasibility, long-term costs of storage, preservation and accessibility also need to be considered and assessed as part of the appraisal process.

What happens to records that do not meet the appraisal objectives?

The appraisal of official records in accordance with the objectives above will ensure that records of permanent value to the State are identified and preserved. However, permanent value records represent only a small proportion of the total number of official records in South Australia. Records that do not comply with the objectives above will be sentenced as temporary value records.

All temporary value records will be destroyed at some time; however, some may be retained for long periods, for example up to 100 years