

# Archive Strategy

2019 - 2022

**STATE RECORDS**

of South Australia



Government of South Australia  
State Records

# Background

State Records of South Australia (State Records) is the South Australian Government archive and has responsibility for the maintenance, preservation and accessibility of archival records created by state and local government agencies within South Australia.

## Challenges

State Records faces challenges relating to the management and maintenance of the South Australian archive, including:

- » Managing digital records as archives
- » Meeting the demands for increased access
- » Managing one of the largest archives in Australia, versus population
- » Ensuring systems used to manage and provide access to the archive meet current user demands
- » Ensuring facilities are appropriately climate controlled and allow for predicted growth
- » Legislation that does not fully address modern records and archives management.

## Purpose

This Strategy identifies how State Records plans to ensure a valued government archive, and how we plan to preserve and make the archive accessible over the next four years in a sustainable way.

This is not something that State Records can achieve on its own.

Achieving the outcomes described in this Strategy will require the participation and collaboration of many parties including State and Local Government, third party providers of services, stakeholder groups, professional associations and the general community.

The Strategy aligns with *State Records Strategic Plan 2018-2023* which also addresses State Records' information management responsibilities across records management, Freedom of Information, Privacy and copyright.

## Scope

The South Australian government archive comprises approximately 85 linear kilometres of records of state and local government dating back to 1834, which are in State Records' custody. It includes records whose delivery into State Records' custody is yet to occur, has been postponed or is subject to an exemption including:

- » digital and physical records held by agencies and councils that have been identified as having permanent value in approved records disposal schedules
- » official records in agency and council archives.

State Records is also able to recover official records in private hands which have strayed from government custody and are now in non-government collections.

# Vision for the Archive

Our vision is that the archive is valued by South Australians and stakeholders, actively preserved, readily accessible and managed sustainably.

We seek four outcomes for the archive:

- » **Valued.** Our first priority is to ensure the archive is valued by South Australians and other stakeholders who are impacted by decisions about what records are kept or destroyed.
- » **Preserved.** Once we know what records are valued, we must focus on preserving those records as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- » **Accessible.** There is little value in preserving records if no one is able to access and use them. The archive belongs to the State and South Australians should benefit from it.
- » **Sustainable.** State Records must ensure the cost of managing the archive is commensurate with the value it delivers to South Australians and other stakeholders.

The following strategies and actions have been established to support the outcomes.

## Strategies and Actions

### Clearly define the criteria for deciding what records are kept

State Records published the *Appraisal of Official Records: Policy and Objectives* in February 2003. This document sets out broad criteria for what records are kept as part of the archive.

State Records must ensure that these criteria are reviewed and updated as expectations change.

Publishing these criteria ensures there is transparency about how the archive is formed and means that agencies, State Records Council and State Records can be held accountable for decision-making about what records are kept and what is destroyed.

Actions:

- » Regularly review the appraisal policy, setting out what records are kept as part of the archive, to ensure the objectives are unambiguous and that they meet government and public expectations
- » Provide a mechanism for the public to provide feedback on the appraisal policy. This can be achieved through government consultation mechanisms.

### Monitor decisions about what records are kept

The participants in the process of deciding what records are kept as part of the archive, and what records can be destroyed, must be aware of, and apply, the agreed appraisal criteria.

Records disposal schedules, developed by agencies, require agencies to justify why records are proposed as permanent value, and these recommendations are reviewed by State Records and the State Records Council.

State Records must monitor the application of the appraisal criteria and advise agencies and consultants on how to apply the criteria.

Actions:

- » Inform and educate agencies, State Records Council members and State Records staff about the application of the criteria in the appraisal policy
- » Document the rationale for appraising records as having permanent value
- » Regularly review appraisal decisions against the criteria to ensure they are being applied appropriately, and advise agencies and consultants where the criteria are not being applied correctly
- » Publish disposal schedules and determinations on State Records' website (unless they are sensitive) so that decisions are transparent.

### **Prioritise transfers of permanent records**

State Records must ensure that only inactive records of permanent value are transferred to our custody. This is critical to ensure that we do not function as a semi-active storage provider, competing with commercial storage businesses and diverting our resources from our core responsibilities. Delaying the transfer of many records until they are over 15 years old ensures that current administrative use is less likely.

Records that date from the nineteenth or early twentieth century will be prioritised, as these records are likely to be rare and at greater risk of physical deterioration. Likewise permanent records at risk of loss or damage will also be prioritised.

Lower priority will be given to the transfer of records which have long term public access restrictions (more than 20 years) because State Records is unable to provide access and must loan the record back to the responsible agency for access, which increases the risk of loss or damage to the record.

Whilst State Records cannot yet accept transfers of digital archives, we will also give lower priority to transfers of physical records which are printed from digital format or which have been converted to digital format as part of a routine business process.

Actions:

- » Prioritise transfers of high value records, including nineteenth and early twentieth century records, and records at risk of loss or damage
- » Postpone transfers of hardcopy permanent records until they are 15 years old, unless there are exceptional circumstances
- » Postpone transfers of permanent records over 15 years old where they are still in active use, including restricted records where agencies must provide access.

### **Deaccession records that are not of permanent value**

Records have been transferred into State Records' custody for nearly 100 years, and between 1980 and 2002 State Records provided storage for semi-current temporary records and records whose value had not been assessed.

State Records therefore continues to manage some records in its custody which do not belong as part of the archive. This is because the records are of temporary or unknown value, and were not returned to the responsible agency when State Records ceased providing the temporary storage service. In other cases,

records were previously identified as having permanent value, however, this decision needs review given the benefit of hindsight and greater knowledge of the records and their context.

Managing these records comes at a cost.

Whilst it is acceptable practice to re-appraise records, we must be careful to ensure we do not simply apply current thinking to historic records in our custody. Removing records from our custody must be handled on a case by case basis.

Actions:

- » Identify records in our custody that do not form part of the archive and arrange for their destruction or return to the responsible agency.

### **Enable South Australians to participate in the formation of the archive**

Increasingly there is a view that people should be able to have their say in the management of records which relate to them. For instance, in the 2001 Australian census, the Australian Government first offered Australians a choice as to whether they would like their name-identified information kept. Many State and local government records contain information about people and some of these records become part of the archive. While access restrictions are used to protect personal privacy, consideration can also be given to what personal information is created in the first place.

Decisions to retain records permanently should include input and feedback from the people who are the subject of the records, where this is feasible and appropriate.

Actions:

- » Publish consultation drafts of records disposal schedules and determinations and seek stakeholder input and feedback
- » Encourage agencies to be transparent about what records they are creating and capturing about individuals and families, and whether these records will be kept as part of the archive
- » Liaise with stakeholder representative groups regarding records relating to individuals in the archive.

### **Provide optimal storage conditions for physical records**

Physical records deteriorate over time regardless of their format. Steps can be taken to slow the deterioration by maintaining physical records within optimal temperature and humidity ranges and by reducing the variation in environmental conditions. Physical records also need to be kept in clean, secure facilities with minimal risk of damage from natural or human elements.

State Records maintains two repositories, one of which has temperature and humidity control (although these systems are ageing) and one repository which only has temperature and humidity control for 25% of the records. There is currently only space for approximately 8 years growth (at an average annual growth rate of 1300 linear shelf metres). The need for additional physical space to manage the archive should slow down as State and local government move to digital recordkeeping, however, the need for a physical archive will always exist.

State Records will investigate future facility arrangements prior to reaching capacity in current facilities. Any facility needs to have good public transport links to ensure researcher accessibility and, ideally,

provide a single location for the physical and digital archive, as well as offices for all staff, and facilities for research, preservation and exhibition.

Actions:

- » Work with State Government to identify facility options
- » Progress the development of a future archive facility for South Australia.

### **Implement a digital archive**

Digital records of permanent value cannot currently be transferred to State Records' custody and are at risk of not remaining accessible or even surviving over the long term. A digital archive capability is needed for agencies creating permanent records in digital format.

A digital archive can potentially also be used to preserve and maintain accessibility to long term temporary records, reducing the need for each agency to develop their own long term archiving solutions.

State Records will explore a variety of options for providing a digital archive capability for South Australian agencies and local councils.

Actions:

- » Research the digital archiving approach of other jurisdictions and learn from their experience
- » Progress the implementation of a digital archive for South Australia.

### **Ensure agencies manage permanent value records effectively**

Records can be identified as having permanent value from the moment they are first created and yet they are not required to be transferred to State Records' custody for 15 years after creation or until no longer needed for current administrative purposes. This means that many records of permanent value are the responsibility of agencies, and need to be managed effectively by agencies until they can be transferred. For example local council minutes are often managed digitally in Council recordkeeping systems.

This is also true in respect to agencies such as Adelaide City Council, who manage their own archive.

State Records must establish clear and practical standards for agencies and local councils to follow with respect to managing any permanent value records in their custody.

Actions:

- » Set clear and practical standards for agencies to manage permanent value records whilst they are in their custody prior to transfer
- » Assist agencies' to observe best records management practices with respect to permanent value records.

## Actively preserve records at risk

Various factors can impact on the preservation of permanent value records. Physical records can be impacted by environmental factors such as extremes or variability in temperature and humidity, as well as damage from water, fire, pests or mould. This is why basements, sheds and shipping containers are not recommended for storing records of permanent or long term value (where the risk of losing the records is medium to high).

Archives can also be lost or damaged through transportation and handling, or may be added to by agencies or top-numbered into new systems (which compromises their integrity). Generally archives transferred to our custody should not be retrieved by the responsible agency except in rare circumstances. State Records will cease the loan of nineteenth and early twentieth century archives (those over 50 years old) which are at most risk of damage or loss. Agencies can obtain digital copies or view these records in our Research Centre.

The risk to audio visual records on analogue media such as magnetic tape is recognised through statements such as *Deadline 2025: Collections at risk* (published by the National Film and Sound Archive in October 2015), which encourages collecting institutions to convert records to digital formats for preservation and access.

Actions:

- » Prioritise conservation work on high value items
- » Repair high value records which are damaged and digitise where possible for preservation and access
- » Convert analogue audio visual records to digital formats by 2025
- » Advise agencies on preservation of permanent physical and digital records in their custody
- » Cease the loan of nineteenth and early twentieth century archives (over 50 years old).

## Increase online access to digitised records and catalogue data

Customers of archives increasingly expect online access to digitised copies of records.

State Records currently has an arrangement with FamilySearch to digitise open access records relating to life events (such as passenger lists and school admission registers). This makes the records accessible via the FamilySearch website or from State Records directly. Further opportunities to digitise records in custody are being pursued, including conversion of microfilm and microfiche to digital format.

Currently State Records does not have an adequate platform to publish digitised records so that they are easy to navigate and view. A system is needed to store digitised copies of records and their metadata, ideally linked to our catalogue.

State Records' archival catalogue systems, ArchivesSearch and Archives One, are at end of life and no longer supported technically. They are whole of government systems, documenting the history of the South Australian government (and local government) and enabling agencies and the public to search, find, and request to view records. These systems are at risk of ceasing to work with modern operating systems. Both systems need to be replaced as a matter of urgency to ensure that researchers, agencies and staff can locate, order and access records in the Archive.

Actions:

- » Partner with third parties to digitise and index and publish records in our custody, including those held on microfilm or fiche
- » Digitise records on demand and proactively, to meet public and agency access requirements
- » Establish requirements to progress a system to store digital images and their metadata
- » Develop a business case to support for new archival search and catalogue systems
- » Consult users and stakeholders regarding our online systems.

### **Obtain agency approval to provide access to more records**

Many records in our custody do not have a public access determination, where the responsible agency has decided whether the records are open access or need to be restricted from access for a period of time. This means we do not provide public access without seeking approval from the responsible agency.

State Records will aim to implement global public access determinations to clarify the access status of these records, which should result in many records becoming open to public access.

Where records contain sensitive personal or confidential information, these will continue to be restricted in accordance with current community expectations.

Actions:

- » Implement global public access determinations to clarify the access status of records in our custody which are currently restricted, and for new transfers of similar records.

### **Improve the description and indexing of records**

With approximately 85 shelf kilometres of records in custody, the level of description and indexing of the records varies considerably. This can limit access to the archive, especially for remote researchers, as searching for specific information can be time consuming.

Records transferred since 2004 are mostly described at the individual file folder or volume. Records transferred prior to this may only be described at the box level (i.e. the range of items within the box) or at the consignment level (i.e. the number of boxes of the series received at the one time). Some records are not described at all.

Many records are not indexed. In some cases the original index used by the agency is accessible, and this can often be used to find a relevant record. In other cases the agency may not have maintained an index. Some high demand records have been indexed by State Records staff and volunteers to provide better access to the records.

Some organisations and individuals have also indexed records in our custody. Records which are being digitised and published by FamilySearch will eventually be indexed. There are opportunities to encourage interested people to index and describe our records through volunteer projects either onsite or online.

Actions:

- » Increase the number of volunteer indexing and description projects
- » Establish capacity to enable online transcription and indexing by volunteers, and engage volunteers to index records remotely.

## Facilitate reuse of digital images and metadata

Digital humanities scholars and other researchers are increasingly exploring the re-use of digital images of archives and the metadata which describe the records. One example of the re-use of archival records is the Founders and Survivors project which is a partnership between historians, genealogists, demographers and population health researchers, largely based on the Tasmanian convict records. Where possible, State Records should liaise and partner with researchers to identify sets of South Australian records which have potential for research.

The South Australian Government, through data.SA, encourages agencies to open data in order to unlock opportunities for our community and economy. Open data has the potential to empower citizens with information, advance research and enable new business innovations. State Records should ensure that any digital images and metadata we publish relating to the archive are accessible as part of the Government's open data, in formats that facilitate re-use by the research community.

Actions:

- » Ensure digitisation formats and metadata data formats enable re-use
- » Ensure platforms used to publish digital images and metadata support creative re-use of the data
- » Work with data.SA to ensure our images and data are accessible to the widest possible audience.

## Ensure processes are efficient and consistent

State Records has to manage its resources effectively and efficiently. We also need to ensure that our processes do not place an unnecessary burden on other state or local government agencies or the public.

Currently our processes relating to the archive are designed around the transfer, management and provision of access to physical records. As we progress work on implementing a digital archive we will need to ensure our processes are updated to be able to cater for either physical or digital records.

Actions:

- » Research digital archiving processes to understand the potential impact on our existing processes
- » Redesign our process to cater for either physical or digital records
- » Update the way we describe records to cater for digital records.

## Be economically and environmentally sustainable

Managing the archive is a long term undertaking. State Records has existed for 100 years (our centenary is in 2019) and we need to ensure the archive lasts for the next 100 years. This requires long term planning and funding to ensure our capability in managing both a physical and digital archive.

We also need to ensure that any future physical archive, and the technology for our digital archive, have minimal environmental impact. Ideally an environmentally sustainable operation will also be economically efficient and sustainable, reducing the ongoing cost to taxpayers.

Actions:

- » Ensure our archive facilities are environmentally and economically efficient
- » Explore whole of government solutions to managing permanent value records, which reduce cost to individual agencies and councils.

Draft for consultation

## Need further assistance?

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