

**Keeping it simple: Introductory archival  
guidance for voluntary small sector  
organisations, v1**

# Campaign for Voluntary Sector Archives (CVSA) Draft guidance v.1

## 1. Introduction

This guide is intended for those who are creating, have inherited or who for any reason have responsibility for digital (or electronic) and paper records that they judge to have lasting value. It does not offer detailed technical guidance on the design of electronic records-keeping systems, with retention schedules.

It is written to give simple, practical advice on how to care for your records for those with no expertise in archives and records management matters and with limited money or time to spend. More detailed guidance can be found in '*Keeping Value: Archival guidance for voluntary sector organisations*' which has been published by the Campaign for Voluntary Sector Archives (CVSA) and can be found on their website [*to be draft will be published in April 2013*]; <http://www.voluntarysectorarchives.org.uk/>

This guide includes some introductory guidance on the retention and management of digital records. This can be found in Section 4 of this guide.

## 2. Your records

Records in any form are an ever-increasing important core asset for your organisation. They document activities and functions and provide evidence of decisions, processes and transactions. It is vital that current records are well managed, and other records with continuing value are preserved and made accessible for the future. Your records, whether paper or digital have importance because of their value to your organisation and its beneficiaries, and they will also be of broader historical or social importance to future researchers and policymakers.

Already there is a move towards better record keeping as part of the good governance required by the Charities Act 2006. Many voluntary organisations will also be registered charities. This requires proper keeping of minutes and financial records, with audited accounts, so that in the future there will be a better official record of decision-making and financial management in the charity sector being laid down for the future. At the same time however, the challenges of record keeping are increasing with the complex needs of digital records such as the rapid pace of technological obsolescence or with the increasing challenge to arrange, list and preserve archival order to make records accessible to researchers where this is practicable and in accordance with data protection legislation.

An archive collection needs as far as possible to reflect all the activities or functions of your organisation. Record keeping should not only encompass the official records created by the administrative functions of an organisation, but also take into account the experiences of staff, users and volunteers. Photographs, event programmes, personal diaries, reminiscences and scrapbooks for instance might capture the wider community perspective of an organisation's activities and functions.

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For voluntary organisations a corporate archive can offer substantial benefits including promoting and publicising current activities and campaigns while a long established heritage can attract trust and a longevity of support that can powerfully enhance the corporate brand with potential donors and beneficiaries. There is a great opportunity to create an archive collection that complements the official records of central and local government, whilst giving diverse perspectives on life in Britain. With the increase in the devolution of state activities to the voluntary sector the archives of the voluntary sector together form a strategically valuable source for academic and policy research in the delivery and history of social policy.

### **3. What can I do with my records?**

This guidance covers the following main areas:

- Storage
- Packaging
- Selection
- Arrangement
- Cataloguing and listing
- Access
- Digital records –some basic sources of advice

#### **3.1 Storage**

All archive material needs to be kept in secure accommodation, a cool, fairly dry and stable environment. There should be protection against fire, flood, theft, pests and other hazards including damp and mould. Good practice includes:

- Storage areas must be secure and must be kept locked when not in use.
- Access to the storage must be controlled and monitored.
- If a storage area have to be shared, archives should be clearly separated and only handled by people responsible for their care
- No item should be removed without permission of those people responsible for their care.
- If an item is moved or removed, a note should be left with details of where it is and who has it.
- A register of withdrawals and returns should be kept.

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Cellars and attics should not be used, unless the environmental conditions can be controlled and protection against water penetration and flooding is in place. Stores should be located away from water tanks and radiators, which may cause damage to collections.

The latest British Standards Institution (BSI) publication 'PD5454: 2012 *Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials*' recommends for mixed collections including papers, photographs, leather bound volumes and other materials storage temperatures between 13° and 20°C. It also recommends that relative humidity (moisture in the air) should be kept between 35% and 60%.

Sharp fluctuations during the course of each month should be avoided.

Environmental conditions can be monitored by a small digital thermo hygrometer, which can be purchased for under £20. Below are links to the websites of three suppliers of conservation materials and equipment. We cannot of course endorse the products of any particular firm:

- <http://www.conservationresources.com/>
- <http://www.conservation-by-design.co.uk/>
- <http://www.preservationequipment.com/>

### **3.2 Packaging**

Records need to be protected by archival quality (fibreboard) boxes and packaging in the long term to ensure that they remain in good condition. In the shorter term, the main aim should be to box files of loose papers in clean containers and to label them with brief descriptions of the contents.

- Containers should not be airtight as the lack of air circulation can lead to damp and mould attacks, however these should be stout enough to give some protection against water and smoke damage.
- Plastic bags and containers should not be used.
- Bound volumes need not be boxed unless they have detached boards or badly damaged bindings, but can be shelved upright.
- Do not stick labels directly onto spines.

### **3.3 Selection**

For any existing organisation, the most important step is to gather the historical records, which have passed out of current use, and to arrange them, following their original order, which reflects the activity or functions of the

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creator. This would involve for example keeping all the minutes of the organisation's governing body together.

Not all records contain evidence of historical value and these records may be considered for destruction. Some material may not be of permanent value, containing little or no evidential worth according to established criteria. This judgment should not be the decision of an individual and would benefit from professional archival advice. There is no need to keep multiple copies of ephemeral publicity material that is printed. One archival copy of each publication for example should normally be kept as evidence of this type of activity and of the event itself.

The Charity Commission for England and Wales has published '*Retention of Accounting Records*' that can help organisations to appraise their current administrative and financial records and develop their own records retention schedule for these categories of records. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the archival schema attached to this paper:

<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/guidance/Buzzacott%20Insight%20Retention%20of%20Accounting%20Records.pdf>

### **3.4 Arrangement**

Records selected for the archive can then be arranged according to a general classification scheme. Most organisations can usually identify five or six key functions, which their records reflect. These may relate to governance, finance, administration, worship and training, charitable relief, property holdings or staff. Personal papers of individuals may be added if desired. The appendix to this guide is a model archival scheme that identifies categories of records that are potentially significant either administratively or historically and advises how they might be arranged. It should be made clear, ideally through the means of a written agreement whether records not created by the organisation itself are held as a gift or a loan and on what basis they are being cared for in case there a legal dispute at some later date.

Records are often created on a subject basis or by function or activity. Wherever possible material should be kept in order it was created in case vital evidence provided by the relationship of documents to one another is lost. Series of records should not be broken up.

### **3.5 Cataloguing and listing**

In the course of arranging and boxing material, it should be possible to draw up a brief inventory or list (a box and volume list), to which locations by room and shelf can be added in order to make the archive readily accessible. This can be done using basic word processing packages and does not require specialist archival software. '*Archival guidance for voluntary sector organisations*' provides further information on how to do this. Such a list will provide the basis of a more detailed catalogue down to file/volume level or

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where necessary down to item level, in the future. Damaged or fragile material can also be noted on this basic inventory for professional advice and subsequent treatment later.

### 3.6 Access

Archives that are of long term social or historical importance are not necessarily suitable for immediate access. If they contain information that is confidential, you may need to restrict access to them. You have a responsibility under Data Protection legislation to protect the confidentiality of records containing personal information about living people. Any collection of private records is likely to include such material. This may be personal to the creator; it may refer to a third party or it may be semi-official material generated by an outside body. The Data Protection Act 1998 provides for personal data to be processed under certain conditions. For further information, see the Code of Practice published by The National Archives:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/legislation/data-protection.htm>

One way to protect records containing sensitive information is to close them to research access for a stated period after the death of the person or the date of the creation of the material, except by special permission. Appropriate closure periods can range from 20 years for many categories of records to 100 years applied to census and medical records. Further information is available from either your local Record Office or the Private Archives Team at The National Archives: [asd@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:asd@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

The Community Archives and Heritage Group website includes links to various pieces of guidance relating to the handling personal information that would potentially be covered by the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts:

[http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/page\\_id\\_507\\_path\\_0p4p.aspx](http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/page_id_507_path_0p4p.aspx)

If public access is allowed, files or volumes should be produced in a separate reading area under constant supervision, with slips to check material in and out. Never let researchers into the archive storage area to help themselves as this may lead to disarrangement of material or theft.

### 3.7 Some basic sources of advice on archives

#### ***Where to start***

*'Archival Principles and Practice: an introduction to archivists for non-archivists'* is the draft advice published by The National Archives for institutions and people who own or look after archive material:

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<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/archive-principles-and-practice-an-introduction-to-archives-for-non-archivists.pdf>

***How documents should be produced if members of the public are given access***

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/visit/document-handling.htm>

***Best practice followed by professionally-run repositories: The National Archives Standard for Record Repositories (2004)***

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/standard2005.pdf>

**What to do if you have a disaster**

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/disaster-planning-risk-management.pdf>

## **4. What can I do with my digital records?**

### **4.1 Digital Records**

Electronic analogue and digital records are an ever-increasing part of modern documentation and record keeping. It is vital that records in this form are preserved and made accessible for both for current operational requirements as well as for their long term research value.

So when you are assessing your organisation's records you must not overlook records created and stored on your computer or stored on detachable physical media (floppy disks, CDs, memory sticks, etc), whether they are word-processed documents such as drafts of letters, e-mails, web pages, photographs, films or databases.

Unlike paper records, those created in digital form will not long survive without active intervention. They require systematic and periodic attention, for without such care even the short-term future of digital material is uncertain. Firstly, digital records are dependent on software and hardware. This means they are vulnerable to changes in technology and the market. Secondly, the media on which electronic records are stored is unstable. Disks, diskettes, and hard drives as well as optical media like CDs and DVD's all have a limited life-span. Though estimates vary depending on storage media a ceiling of twenty-five years seems a reasonable estimate. It is worth noting that for memory sticks, the latest widespread form of electronic data storage, the lifespan is significantly less.

Although comprehensive strategies for achieving the long-term preservation and accessibility of electronic records are still being devised, and the same

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solutions are not necessarily applicable to all types of digital records, simple measures will improve the likelihood that your digital archive remains intact and accessible.

The key steps are to:

- Identify the digital records you have
- Decide which are most important
- Organise the content
- Save copies in different places
- Manage your digital records

#### **4.2 Identify the digital records you have**

Gather information about the digital records you have. Where are the files located? On your computer? On your camera? Online? Are they scattered around on unmarked floppy disks and CDs?

Do a survey to locate computer hardware in any physical form. This may prove a useful exercise to locate records more generally. They may be held by current or previous officers and not necessarily physically onsite the property. It might then be helpful to assemble them physically in one location, but in so doing be careful not to any lose information that might be provided by the order in which they were stored, or any paper records that might provide context.

- The first task is to identify what it is the media actually contain.
- Use a dedicated computer that has up-to-date antivirus software and that is not being used for online activities that may introduce viruses.
- Create a new directory on the computer for the material you have identified. Give it an identifiable name.
- Then create folders for each of the media you wish to transfer. If you can set a write blocker on the computer and write-protect tabs on the media you will be able to prevent unauthorised changes to the content. If the electronic data is on removable media (e.g. CDs), copy the data from the physical medium to the relevant folder.
- If digital records are on removable media (e.g CD's), copy the data from the physical medium to the relevant folder. If the medium is a disk, consider copying the data as a disk image, which is a single file that contains an exact copy of the disk's content and ensures that essential metadata will be retained.

You should conduct an initial survey of the material to form an overall impression. This does not necessarily entail opening and reading every record; an initial assessment might involve opening a few files in each folder to assess whether the folder title accurately reflects its contents, and an assessment of the likely significance of the material. File names, dates, author



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and correspondent names can be useful clues. This survey should help you to identify low value material, which can be deleted, material that may have short- or medium-term use, and material with potential long-term value. If you can, generate a copy of the directory information (folder and file names, sizes, extensions, and dates). Store a digital copy in the survey directory and print out a hard copy for reference. It is also advisable to make a back-up copy of the directory. An external hard drive might be used for this purpose.

Of course, you might be faced with old digital material - perhaps those of a family member, a predecessor at work, or even your own materials, abandoned after a software upgrade. These can be in forms that you simply cannot access (for example, floppy disks for which you have not drive on your computer), or it may be that the software required to read the file is now lost.

There are techniques and equipment for retrieving information held in such cases but it is not easy to know whether it is worth spending money, time and energy on retrieving information that may well prove to be of no value. Look for any identifying information on labels or associated packaging such as the creator, title, description of contents, and dates. Record anything that is known about the hardware and software used to create the files. Remember that many of the media will have been created relatively recently, easily within living memory, so their creators may well be alive and able to remember something about the media. For example, photographs of a social gathering from 3 years ago, or copies of an organisation's newsletters 2000-2004.

### **4.3 Decide which are most important**

It may not be practical and almost certainly isn't desirable to preserve and transfer to a trusted digital repository every single file, so the next step is to select exactly what you want to save.

Prioritize material based on factors such as the following:

- The value of the records to you, your organisation, or their historical importance;
- The level of use or anticipated future use of the record;
- Whether there is an immediate danger of loss of content because of media degradation;
- Whether there appears to be significant digital content that is not replicated in paper records, and if so, whether the digital version has features that add value to the content.

### **4.4 Organise the content**

Once you've decided what to keep, create a new directory and title it something like ***Archives***.

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Then create folders inside the directory and name them with descriptive titles according to the subject, project or activity on which they are based.

In naming files and folders, be as consistent and concise as you can while choosing meaningful names based on standard naming conventions. If you include the date in the file name, use the format `yyyymmdd` (e.g. 10 June 2005 = 20050610) for recording dates: that way your files will be presented chronologically in file using management tools. It is advisable to avoid capital letters or spaces: this can cause problems when moving files between different computing environments. The University of Edinburgh has published some useful guidance on naming conventions:

<http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk/InfoStaff/RMstaff/RMprojects/PP/FileNameRules/FileNameRules.htm>

Next, transfer your files from wherever they were held originally into the archive folders you've just created.

If you have several copies or versions of a file, always save the highest-quality, larger-size master version. You can give each file a descriptive name to help you find the files again in the future. So if your camera or related software allows you to add metadata to your images (i.e. information about when and where a photograph was taken, and what or who it depicts) at point of capture or export, then use this function.

When saving documents from the Web for reference purposes, make a note of their source: web addresses can change and it can be important to have a record of where you obtained it from.

### **4.5 E-mail management**

E-mails should be regularly managed and organised into subject folders with concise and relevant titles. Separate personal and professional email if you can. It is sensible though potentially time-consuming to save historically important e-mails in an alternative format such as html. But don't forget to include the metadata (sender, recipients/s, date etc), or any attachments. File e-mail attachments you wish to keep separately rather than leaving them in your email directory. However, identify their source in their file name, and save a copy of the e-mail alongside the attachment to provide contextual information

Then delete e-mail that has no long-term value.

### **4.6 Save copies in different places**

Always make a backup copy of your digital archives.

An external hard drive is your best and most convenient choice. Using CD-Rs or DVD-Rs is more time-consuming, could result in splitting data over several disks, and they are also more easily misplaced. A hard drive can hold a lot of

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content – maybe all of the digital files that you have – so it makes a good central repository while being portable. Store that copy in a different geographic location away from the main copies.

However, even hard disks will fail at some point. They will either physically decay or become outdated in time. At least once every ten years transfer the content from the old drive to a newer storage technology. This helps ensure ongoing access to your archives.

In addition, you can also backup your personal digital collections with online services. But always read the terms and conditions carefully and don't use an online service as your only backup. Keep a copy on a drive at another location.

Paper is still this best backup option for the records intended for permanent preservation. Print out copies of important documents and photographs, so that you can have the document in an alternative and durable format.

#### **4.7 Managing electronic records**

Without active and ongoing management, digital records are extremely unlikely to survive intact in the long-term. Use the system of record-keeping you have just adopted to inform future filing and ensure that you create and keep new records in a compatible way.

Before undertaking major upgrades and updates of hardware and software, think and plan ahead. It is common for older files to get lost as a result of updates so files should be backed up prior to such changes.

Anti-virus software and a firewall should be installed and regularly updated.

If you have encrypted valuable digital records, it is best to select open-source encryption software. However, it is important that if you encrypted digital data to make provision for their access in the event of organisation ceasing to exist. The same is true for password-protected material, which may include your computer, of course. Relevant details should be stored offsite in a secure location, perhaps lodged with another organisation or kept in a site known only to key colleagues.

Keep up to date. Technological changes are rapid and new technologies are constantly appearing. Interoperability with others and the threat of hardware and software obsolescence mean that you must constantly evolve your digital environment, but do think critically about the impact of these new developments on your ability to use your digital data now and in the future

#### **4.8 Sources of advice on digital archives**

There are many online sources of advice on all aspects of digital records management and archiving. Among those most suitable for those with little or no technical knowledge are:

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'A useful introduction to the importance of digital preservation is a short video guide, published by the Library of Congress:

<http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/multimedia/videos/personalarchiving.html>

The Online Computer Library Center has produced useful starting information at:

*You've Got to Walk Before You Can Run: First Steps for Managing Born-Digital Content Received on Physical Media*, by Ricky Erway (OCLC, 2012) (<http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2012/2012-06.pdf> )

The National Archives offers a number of resources:

*Advice for creators and managers of electronic records when selecting physical storage media for long-term preservation*

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/selecting-storage-media.pdf>

*Guidance on care, handling and storage of removable media*

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/removable-media-care.pdf>

*Assistance in identification of files in unknown formats:*

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/PRONOM/Default.aspx>

The Digital Preservation Coalition has produced a *Handbook on Digital Preservation*

<http://www.dpconline.org/advice/preservationhandbook>

Although principally aimed at specialist staff in organisations, it includes much useful general advice.

If you believe that your archive (whether in digital form, paper, or mixed format) should make its way to an archive repository for permanent preservation, then it is a good idea to get in touch with your chosen repository at an early stage. You can identify archive services within in your region or area of collecting interest on ARCHON, a directory for archive repositories and institutions in the United Kingdom. This is available online:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon/>

While these guidelines provide useful advice, specialist archivists can offer more specific and up-to-date guidance that is tailored to your record-keeping habits and preferred technologies.

Contact the Archives Sector Development department at The National Archives who can offer advice on suitable places of deposit: [asd@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:asd@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

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**5. Questions to ask**

The following checklist of questions can help an organisation to decide whether to retain historical records or deposit them elsewhere:

1. Do any of the surviving records have significant value as evidence of the organisation, the constituency it serves, and that community's history?
2. Can these be brought together and maintained by the organisation itself?
3. Will external funding be sought, with the implication of opening up public access, or will the organisation fund the archive itself?
4. How will appropriate care and access be provided? Is there, at least, a secure storage room and reading area, which can be constantly supervised?
5. Where is professional advice going to be obtained if there is no professional archivist?
6. Who is going to arrange and list the archives?
7. Is deposit with a appropriate local or specialist record office a more viable option?
8. Are records from other organisations or individuals going to be collected?
9. If so, are the necessary procedures in place to support the gift or loan of archive material, and future preservation?
10. How is sensitive material going to be handled in terms of access for research? Who is going to determine whether they are closed or made available?

These questions may be daunting for some, but they will perhaps help organisations to make realistic decisions as to the future of their records.

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**Appendix : Archival appraisal scheme for voluntary organisations**

This short scheme for archival appraisal lists the types of records that might be created by a voluntary organisation and associated bodies (such as charitable trusts) which have historical significance for the future. This guidance can be used to organise and arrange the current records created by the organisation's present activities and functions including those created and stored electronically.

The following outline is a possible template for cataloguing the records created by an organisation and to help organisations to distinguish between different types of records and identify those of historical significance that should be retained for inclusion in the archive

Archive appraisal schema for voluntary organisations

**Key general information**

When appraising an archive collection record the following: the date of the establishment of the organisation, a description of its activities, major events in its history such as moves to new premises, prominent campaigns and members.

**General description of the archive**

Include information about the size of the collection, the format, languages of the material as well as how the collection is arranged physically and intellectually. Details of any available supplementary finding aids such as card indexes should be included and of any published histories of the organisation.

Categories of records that should be retained

**Governance**

Minutes of governing bodies  
Trust deeds  
Constitution  
Charity Commission schemes of management  
Annual reports  
Membership records  
Correspondence

**General administration**

Policy and subject files  
Case files – however take advice before applying any selection criteria  
Visitor books

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**Finance and resources**

Annual accounts  
Trust accounts  
Fundraising appeal accounts and literature

**Property records**

Deeds  
Tenders, specifications, architectural plans and drawings, photographs relating to major projects e.g. new buildings and extensions  
Inventories  
Logbooks  
Correspondence  
Library accession registers

**Staff**

Personnel files for key members of staff

**Publications**

Newsletters and magazines  
Press releases  
Invitation cards for events  
Records of festivals and special events including invitation cards  
Calendars  
Scrapbooks and newspaper cuttings

**Personal papers**

Archives drawn exclusively from official sources without a personal dimension would only provide a partial perspective on an organisation's activities and it may be appropriate to receive the personal papers of activists, donors, officials and volunteers if they provide additional information about the organisation's culture, operations and policies.

Diaries  
Correspondence including e-mails  
Study notes  
Photographs  
Newspaper cuttings