

How Archives Staff Appraise Records for Archival Value

The State Archivist, as the representative of the State Librarian, has the authority to identify and retain those records that "are of historical value to the state" (CGS § 11-8a(c)). The State Archives adopted a collection policy with the approval of the State Library Board in 1991 which defined what records had archival or enduring informational value.

For purposes of this policy, government records possess archival or enduring value if they contain information which satisfies one or more of the following:

- Documents the evolution of organization, policies, and practices of State government.
- Documents claims or petitions made on State government by citizens and the disposition of said claims or petitions.
- Documents obligations and claims made on citizens by State government and their disposition.
- Documents the legal and legislative history of the State.
- Contains secondary informational value useful for studying a variety of subjects beyond the functions and purpose of a public agency such as such as commerce, culture and society, education, legal theory, public policy, and medical practices.

By documenting institutional functions, activities, and decision-making, archivists provide an important means of ensuring accountability. In a republic such accountability and transparency constitute an essential hallmark of democracy. Public leaders must be held accountable both to the judgment of history and future generations as well as to citizens in the ongoing governance of society.¹

Archival records may be in either analog or digital format, including but not limited to paper, still images, video, PDF, and email.

Appraisal Values

Trained professional archivists appraise records by looking at several different values based on the original purpose of the records for the creating agency. Agencies create records to meet their administrative, legal, or fiscal needs. Records often have more than one value that overlap.

Examples:

- *Administrative:* Policies and Procedures; Legislative Records; Personnel Files; Minutes; Correspondence
- *Legal:* Investigation Files; Hearing Files; Legal Opinions
- *Fiscal:* Accounts Receivable Records; Audit Reports; Payroll Deduction Records

¹ Society of American Archivists. Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics. <http://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>.

In addition, records also possess evidential and informational value beyond the original value to the creating agency. Evidential value "provides information about the origins, functions, and activities of their creator".² Informational value is a "usefulness or significance ... based on [records] content, independent of any intrinsic or evidential value."³ This information is valuable for studying historical events, social developments, or other subjects beyond the reason that the agency created the records.

Examples:

- *Evidential:* Policies and Procedures; Minutes; Project Files; Correspondence; Organizational Charts; Duty Statements; Press Releases
- *Informational:* Patient Case Files; Professional Licensing Files; Legislative Records; Special Event Files, such as commemorative events and outreach activities

Finally, archivists look at whether the records document a routine administrative housekeeping function or a policy making function. Records concerning vehicle maintenance or office supply orders rarely have archival value. Records that document how agency or program policies were formed and managed; that contain unique information; or have significant relationships to other agency records series or to those already in the State Archives usually have archival value. Records that may help future researchers understand current events also have archival value.⁴

Appraisal Process

Archivists determine a record series archival value during the appraisal process. There are several steps in this process:

- Reviewing the records during the development of retention schedules
- Reviewing the records when submitted for approval for disposition
- Appraising the records prior to transfer when necessary
- Looking at the records at the time of accessioning
- Archival processing, when the records are being fully arranged and described

Staff may flag record series that look interesting on a retention schedule as "Archival Review Required" during the development of a records retention schedule⁵. When the records are eligible for disposition, staff will conduct an analysis, including review of sample documentation, and may determine that the record series does not have archival or research value. The reverse may also be true: the record series may not have been flagged, but at the time the public agency requests disposal, staff may determine that the series or a portion of it should be retained.

² Society of American Archivists. *A Glossary of Archival & Records Terminology*.

<http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/e/evidential-value>

³ Society of American Archivists. *A Glossary of Archival & Records Terminology*.

<http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/i/informational-value>

⁴ For archival appraisal values of architectural records see the State Archives Architectural Records Appraisal Guidelines.

⁵ Older schedules use the phrase, "May Have Historical Value."

Appraisal of Exempt or Restricted Records

Archivists promote and provide the widest possible accessibility of materials, consistent with any mandatory access restrictions, such as public statute, donor contract, business/institutional privacy, or personal privacy. Although access may be limited in some instances, archivists seek to promote open access and use when possible.⁶ The State Archives follows all exemptions to disclosure of governmental records in Connecticut General Statutes, Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, Federal law and regulations, and legal opinions and decisions.

Archival records that are exempt or contain confidential information follow the same appraisal process as discussed above. Agencies are asked during the appraisal process if records have any restrictions to access. Archivists use this information as one part of the process to determine archival value. Even though a particular record may have access restrictions does not mean they do not have archival value. Archivists weigh the restrictions with what is being documented in the records along with the informational or evidential value they may hold.

Agencies are asked on the memorandum of transfer form, at the time of transferring records to the State Archives, to list citations for statutes, codes, regulations and/or Attorney General Opinions restricting access to the records. After physical transfer has occurred, Archives staff label the boxes that contain the records as RESTRICTED, record that they are restricted in our accessions database, and note the restrictions to access in our finding aids for the particular Agency records. Finding aids tell researchers what they will find in the State Archives collections and why the particular set of records are restricted.⁷ If individuals request restricted records Archivists follow the following process:

- Review and determine the restrictions on the records. In some instances records might be restricted due to their use condition (i.e. fragile, easily torn paper, water damage, etc.).
- Determine if anything in the records are disclosable to the requestor. If nothing is disclosable requestors are told why in writing and/or verbally.
- Depending on the record we may request an agency review the record before any information is disclosed to the requestor.
 - Example, State Police Investigation Files held by the State Archives are reviewed by the State Police and the information is disclosed directly by them to the requestor. Archives staff may search and provide requestors with case numbers in order to assist them with their information request.
- Disclose the portion of the records applicable to the requestor.
 - Example, Connecticut Valley Hospital Patient Admission and Discharge Registers and Patient Files held by the State Archives, which only Archives staff search, and transcripts of the registers are provided to the “next of kin”. Files are only provided with documented proof of relationship using published obituaries, birth and death certificates, census records, a signed and dated notarized statement of relationship to the patient, and a current photo identification of the requestor.

⁶ Society of American Archivists. Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics. <http://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>.

⁷ State Archives Finding Aids. <http://ctstatelibrary.org/state-archives-finding-aids/>.

- Depending on what is disclosable records may also be redacted to conceal exempt or restricted information.
 - Example, the records from the Office of the Governor contain constituent correspondence and in the mid-twentieth century the office would organize correspondence by subject. The State Archives received a request to look at constituent correspondence relating to Mental Health issues. Since the topic is highly researched Archives staff redacted information that either was exempt by law from disclosure or would reasonably invade personal privacy. Original records are never redacted only photocopies which are then put in the box and the originals are restricted in a different box. Redaction, while time consuming, makes the records accessible to the public without compromising the confidential information.
- The State Archives works with requests for records made to specific agencies as well.

The State Archives respects all users' right to privacy by maintaining the confidentiality of their research and protecting any personally identifiable information collected about users in accordance with the State Library's policies.