Selecting records as Territory archives

**Purpose**

This Records Advice provides a summary of the criteria for selecting ACT Government records to be retained as Territory archives. This advice should be used in managing ACT Government records, and can also be applied to other government information and data holdings.

**Selection process**

The process of identifying which ACT Government records must be retained as archives is known as appraisal. Appraisal involves understanding the functions and activities carried out by the Government and making assessments about how long the records that document them must be retained to satisfy business, accountability and community requirements. Some categories of records are assessed as having significant and enduring value to the community, and these records are identified through the appraisal process as Territory archives.

**Selection criteria for Territory archives**

The Territory Records Office’s guideline on the *Retain Principle* sets out the criteria the ACT Government uses to determine which of its records are most significant and must be retained as Territory archives. Those criteria are:

*Records that provide concise evidence of the deliberations, decisions and actions of the Territory and Territory institutions, relating to key functions and programs and significant issues faced in governing the Territory.*

Examples of records meeting this criterion are those that document:

- the development, implementation and review of Territory legislation;
- the development, implementation and review of major government structures, policies and programs;
- government responses to the most significant issues of the day.

*Records that contain information that is considered essential for the protection and future well-being of Australians and their environment, including the protection of their significant rights and entitlements.*

Examples of records meeting this criterion are:

- birth, death and marriage registrations;
- records detailing long-term environmental hazards or significant environmental change;
records detailing elements of Territory heritage such as heritage places registers;
records documenting rights to land.

Records that have a special capacity to illustrate the impact of Territory government activities on individuals, groups and the environment, the interaction of people with the government and especially the influence of the Territory community on government decision-making.

Examples of records meeting this criterion are:

- case files detailing significant government intervention in the lives of individuals or classes of people, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were separated from their families;
- records documenting the high-level planning and execution of major public works such as main roads and residential developments;
- land-use and zoning plans;
- records which document significant community opposition to government actions or policies.

Records that have substantial capacity to enhance knowledge and understanding of aspects of the Territory’s history, society, economy, culture and people, especially as these are influenced by government activity.

Examples of records meeting this criterion are:

- concise Treasury and economic data;
- statistical data on the Territory’s population and its circumstances;
- records documenting the planning and production of major cultural events and historical celebrations;
- records documenting major social, economic, cultural or scientific discoveries or developments of significance to, or having a special relationship with, the Territory.

Records that provide evidence of the source of authority, foundation and machinery of the Territory and Territory institutions sufficient to document the administrative and legal context of other Territory Archives.

Examples of records meeting this criterion are:

- formal instruments or authorities, including legislation, Administrative Arrangements Orders and delegations under legislation, which establish, maintain, alter or review the functions, powers, responsibilities and jurisdictions of the Territory government organisations;
- judgements which have bearing on the jurisdiction or powers of the Territory government;
- agreements with other governments.
Records containing information that may allow people to establish links with their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage.

The order of these criteria is not significant and does not reflect collecting priorities or quantities of records to be retained. All criteria are equally significant to the archival heritage of the Territory. Records assessed as meeting any of these criteria will be retained as Territory archives.

**Records, information and data created before 1931**

In addition all ACT government records, information and data created prior to 1931 are deemed to be Territory archives. This is because the quantity of early Commonwealth-created records about the ACT that remain in the ACT’s custody may be limited. It may not be efficient to use resources to identify which of these records are eligible for destruction amongst this small category. Selection of a date before which all records may be retained without further examination, no matter their perceived archival value, allows for their efficient management and acknowledges their relative scarcity.

The Director of Territory Records has selected the year 1931 as an appropriate date prior to which all Government records in the ACT’s custody must be retained. This is the year following the appointment of the first ACT Advisory Council. Before this time records specifically relevant to the ACT community may be less easily identified, and few such records are likely to have made their way into ACT custody.

**For more information**

Please contact the [Territory Records Office](mailto:TRO@act.gov.au) for further information.