

Intrinsic value

Records may need to be kept permanently or in their original format based on enduring or intrinsic value. The ACT Government Standard and Guidelines for Records and Information Governance [defines criteria](#) to assess and identify records that have ongoing value to the Territory. Certain records may have significance to the ACT Government beyond the information they contain, usually due to unique properties of a record, such as particular physical format or links to significant historical events. However, assessment may be based on a combination of more subjective criteria.

Enduring value

Records with enduring value have a usefulness or significance based on the information they contain that justifies their permanent or ongoing preservation. These records are usually sentenced as Retain as Territory Archives (RTA). In a small number of cases, records may not technically meet these characteristics but are of significant value anyway, for example, records of individuals who have experienced out-of-home care, or similar classes of record that have long term but temporary retention.

Intrinsic value

Records with intrinsic value are those that have qualities or characteristics that should be retained in their original format or medium. In determining intrinsic value records the age, information it contains and/or its format are considered. These characteristics that make the record significant could be lost or diminished if the physical source record is destroyed and only the content or digitised copies are retained. It is unusual to retain records for their intrinsic value alone. In most cases records are first assessed according to their enduring value, with their intrinsic value influencing decisions about whether the records must be kept in their original formats.

Characteristics of intrinsic value

Intrinsic value refers to the qualities and characteristics inherent in the original medium which contribute to its archival value. These qualities and characteristics may be lost or diminished if the record is converted to another medium, thereby compromising its archival value. Intrinsic value may be physical or intellectual as defined below.

Physical qualities

- *Records on rare or obsolete formats* – including particular types of paper, vellum, objects, volumes with unique form or binding, magnetic storage devices, punch cards, wax cylinders, photographic slides and negatives, gramophone discs, etc.
- *Unique or curious physical features* – such as wax seals, watermarks, cross-written correspondence or scrapbooks with rare and unique content.
- *Records where the original medium conveys meaning* – such as overlay drawings, watermarks or other formats where the information cannot be accurately reflected in digital format.

- *Records of artistic or cultural significance, or with aesthetic quality* – such as art, cultural artefacts, photographs, architectural drawings, illuminated manuscripts, design drawings.
- *Questionable authenticity, date, author, or other characteristics that are significant and ascertainable by physical examination, or where controversy around the subject may warrant the original to be retained for later forensic proof* – for example, purchase or provenance documents for artworks or other valuable items.
- *Value for use in exhibits* – where the record itself imparts a sense of historical significance or of the significance of a person or event to which it relates.

Intellectual qualities

- *Original documents of general and substantial public interest due to a direct association with famous or historically significant people, places, things, issues, inquiries or events* – such as original reports of significant commissions of inquiry, or sister city agreements and other ceremonial documents.
- *Primary establishment documents with significance to the establishment or continuing legal basis of an agency or institution, the functions or powers of government, or the formulation of the highest levels of legislation* – such as the field books used by surveyors during the establishment of the ACT.
- *Policy documents with significance to the formulation of the highest levels of policy.*
- *Significance or value to individuals as an artefact or evidence of their ancestry, identity or heritage which contain original photographs, handwriting etc* – such as records of individuals in care that contain personal correspondence from family members, and related artifacts.
- Relationship to existing holdings that complement and add research value.

Considerations of records with intrinsic value

The qualities of enduring and intrinsic were often seen as inseparable in the past, with RTA material being retained and preserved in physical ‘hard copy’ formats. With widespread adoption of digital records formats, and acceptance of their fulfilment of legal or evidential requirements (e.g. electronic approvals vs ‘wet signatures’), the link is less clear. ACT government agencies are realising benefits from digitising their physical records holdings, particularly in terms of increased access to, and preservation of the information.

Permanent retention of physical records requires a high standard of environmental control for any storage environment, as well as features to provide resilience and security during natural disasters or other incidents.

Recognition of the qualities that identify records with intrinsic value allows us to make informed decisions during recordkeeping activities. Assessed intrinsic value does not necessarily prevent or lower the priority for the digitisation of records. - Digitisation can enhance the accessibility of records regardless of their intrinsic value. Digitisation can also assist in the preservation of intrinsically valuable records by reducing the need to handle the originals. Digital copies cannot, however, be preserved as substitutes for original records when they have been assessed as having intrinsic value.

The subjective nature of determining intrinsic value requires careful consideration.

- *Consider records beyond conventional record holdings* - Records with historic or artistic value can be overlooked or not readily recognised as records, as they may be held outside of the context of informational records holdings and systems in regular use by agency staff. e.g. promotional posters for agency activities, or historic maps, plans and photographs that have been framed for display.
- *Records may acquire intrinsic value in hindsight* - A change in value of a record may be due to an inquiry, significant events, or a shift in community expectations. These records may be temporary records that have acquired significance through historic events, such as arrangements for visits or performances involving individuals who have gone on to notable achievements or significant fame.
- *Intrinsic value may be the sum of multiple contributing factors* - A collection of handwritten daily occurrence books used by the fire service as a log of activities during shifts at each fire station were recognised as being a unique record of responses to significant events throughout the history of the ACT.
- *Not all records in rare or obsolete formats need to be retained* - If appropriate, a representative sample may be kept as evidence of historic agency processes and practices, following digitisation or format shifting. – Such as samples of magnetic media containing educational material may be retained following digitization to provide insight into historic technology and practices in education.

References

Territory Records Office Principle 3 - Assess Guideline - [Territory-Records-Office-Principle-3-Assess-Principle-Guideline-June-2022.pdf \(act.gov.au\)](#)

Assess - Significant Records

https://www.territoryrecords.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2028629/Assess-Significant-Records-FINAL.pdf

<https://www.naa.gov.au/information-management/records-authorities/types-records-authorities/general-records-authority-31#appendix-1-intrinsic-value>

Society of American Archivists: *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*

[General Records Authority 31 | naa.gov.au](#)



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