



SUBJECT: STANDARD OF PRACTICE FOR ARCHIVAL APPRAISAL

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PREFACE

A draft standard of practice for archival appraisal was developed by a working group consisting of archivists from the Archival Holdings Management Division, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.

The working group consisted of:

- Barry Cahill (Government Archives) *Chair*
- John MacLeod (Government Archives)
- Wendy Thorpe (Private Sector Archives)

1.0 SCOPE

The Standard is a voluntary code of practice for the archival appraisal of records whose acquisition is under consideration by archival repositories. Institutions reappraising their holdings may apply the same standard to existing archival units. The Standard outlines a number of tasks which, when completed, will ensure the proper identification of archival fonds and facilitate their arrangement.

The Standard guides the performance and delivery of the appraisal function through a series of prescribed sub-functions and activities. For the purposes of the Standard, appraisal is the differentiation of what is archival from what is not archival. The Standard follows the structure of the *General International Standard Archival Description* in that each action proceeds from a specific purpose. It also draws on the structure of an ISO-approved standard for information and documentation: *AS4390 – 1996 Australian Records Management Standard*.

Each element consists of:

- a. the name of the element of appraisal governed by the action;
- b. a statement of the purpose of the element;
- c. a statement of the action applicable to the element; and
- d. where applicable, examples illustrating the effect of the action.

The organization of the Standard reflects the preferred sequence of activity for any given appraisal. Within this structure the elements are grouped into four sub-functions.

1. *Context of Appraisal Unit*
(where the external evidence is considered)
2. *Content of Appraisal Unit*
(where the internal evidence is considered)

3. *Determination of Archival Unit*

(where the judgement is made of what the archival unit will be)

4. *Functional Documentation*

(where the appraisal functional requirements are verified as met)

Unlike description, the essential nature of which is documentation, the purpose of appraisal is not to represent the appraisal unit but to evolve the archival unit from it. Nevertheless, documentation forms an integral part of the functional requirement for appraisal. In accordance with internal policy and procedures, each archival repository should define the content and structure of the record documenting the appraisal.

2.0 APPLICATION

The Standard should be applied only in relation to an institutional acquisition policy or strategy. It does not prescribe what is to be appraised, nor does it anticipate the end result of an appraisal. Instead, it provides a method and means of determining whether the unit being appraised is archival.

3.0 REFERENCES

3.1 Conseil International des Archives/ International Council on Archives. **ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description** *Adopted by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards Stockholm, Sweden, 21-23 January 1993 (Final ICA approved version)*. Ottawa 1994. URL - [http://www.archives.ca/ica/cds/isad\(g\)e.html](http://www.archives.ca/ica/cds/isad(g)e.html)

3.2 AS 4390.5 – 1996 Australian Standard / **Records Management Part 5: Appraisal and disposal** = ISO/DIS 15489-5 Information and documentation – Records management.

4.0 GLOSSARY

The following glossary forms an integral part of this standard of practice for archival appraisal. The definitions are to be understood as having been formulated specifically for the purposes of this document.

Appraisal. The process of determining whether records are archival.

Appraisal unit. The body of material being appraised.

Archival records. The contents of an archival unit.

Archival unit. The body of material existing after and as a result of appraisal.

Metadata. Information about the context, content or structure of an appraisal unit.

5.0 PRELIMINARY STEPS

5.1 Scope

Appraisal may be conducted at any level at which an archival unit may be arranged.

5.2 Unit of appraisal

PURPOSE: To establish a provisional identity for the archival records which may result from the appraisal.

ACTION: Determine whether the appraisal unit is prospectively a fonds (or more than one fonds), a sous-fonds, a series, a sub-series, a file (multipart or unitary) or an item (multipart or unitary).

5.3 Part-to-whole relationships

PURPOSE: To determine whether the appraisal unit is prospectively the whole of an archival unit or a part of an existing one.

ACTION: Ascertain the relationship between the appraisal unit and any archival units originating from the same creator.

6.0 ELEMENTS OF APPRAISAL

6.1 Context of Appraisal Unit

6.1.1 Provenance

PURPOSE: To document the context of creation and use of the appraisal unit.

ACTION: Verify provenance by metadata collection and analysis. (Do not appraise any unit of material of which the provenance is unknown and cannot be ascertained.)

6.1.2 Name(s) of creator(s)

PURPOSE: To link the creator(s) to the records being appraised.

ACTION: Confirm the identity of the creator(s) of the appraisal unit.

6.1.3 Function or activity of creator(s)

PURPOSE: To determine whether the records being appraised document the creator's prime function or characteristic activities.

ACTION: Conduct research into the creator's prime function or characteristic activities.

6.1.4 Records of creator(s)

PURPOSE: To make explicit the relationship between the context of creation of the appraisal unit and its content and structure.

ACTIONS: Determine whether, and to what extent, the records reflect the context of their creation and use.

Look for evidence of how the creator(s) used the records to carry out or document the function or activity concerned.

6.2 Content of Appraisal Unit

6.2.1 Date(s) of creation

PURPOSE: To link the records being appraised to the act of their creation.

ACTION: Determine when the records were created.

6.2.2 Physical characteristics

PURPOSE: To determine whether (and, if so, how) the physical characteristics of the records being appraised affect their appraisal, and to render the appraisal unit describable as an archival unit.

ACTIONS: Ascertain the extent and physical classes of material into which the records comprising the appraisal unit fall, and evaluate their general physical condition.

Examples:

Video reels

Audiotape cassettes

Microfloppy disks

Photographs

Braille

Microfiche

Consider whether the records exist in, or are convertible to, a preservation-quality medium.

6.2.3 Form(s) of material

PURPOSE: To evaluate the documentary character of the appraisal unit.

ACTION: Identify the narrow classes of intellectual material into which the records comprising the appraisal unit fall.

Examples:

Cadastral maps

Marriage licences

Commonplace books

Deed registers

Photo albums

Artist's sketchbooks

6.3 Determination of Archival Unit

6.3.1 Recognition of archival records

PURPOSE: To separate all non-archival records from the appraisal unit.

ACTION: Identify the archival records present in the appraisal unit, based upon the analysis of context and content as outlined in 6.1 and 6.2.

6.3.2 Formation of archival unit

PURPOSE: To convert the archival records into an archival unit.

ACTION: Specify the nature of the archival unit which the archival records comprise, e.g., fonds, series, file, item.

6.4 Functional Documentation

6.4.1 Declaration

PURPOSE: To show the results of the appraisal exercise.

ACTION: State whether the appraisal unit is archival in whole or in part.

6.4.2 Rationale

PURPOSE: To explain the *Declaration*.

ACTIONS: State the criteria according to which the archival records were identified as such.

If the archival unit was developed through a sampling process, indicate the method or technique by means of which the archival parts of the appraisal unit were determined.

6.4.3 Certification

PURPOSE: To ensure that the appraisal functional requirements have been met.

ACTION: Verify that the appraisal was conducted in accordance with the Standard.

6.4.4 Appraisal record

PURPOSE: To document the appraisal.

ACTION: Create a record of the appraisal using a prescribed data content standard which incorporates the *Declaration*, *Rationale* and *Certification* as minimum elements.

6.4.5 Authorization

PURPOSE: To ensure that no non-standard appraisal is implemented.

ACTION: Make approval of the *Declaration* conditional on *Certification*.