

**Department of Records and Information Services**  
**Municipal Archives**  
**Statement of Policies**

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**I. Legislation**

The Municipal Archives was established in 1977 by a local law that amended the charter and administrative code of the City of New York to create the Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS). The duties of the Municipal Archives are described in Section 3004 of the charter.

Chapter 72 of the New York City Charter (Section 3004 and 3010) authorizes the Municipal Archives to receive all the city records of lasting value “made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official city business”. The Archives collects, preserves, and makes available for research all city records, “regardless of physical form or characteristics,” which are appraised as having continuing and significant “historical, research, cultural or other important value.”

**II. Policy Statements**

**APPRAISAL POLICY**

The Municipal Archives has established the following policy guidelines in recognition of the primary importance of the appraisal function:

1. Responsibility for records appraisal of multi-format collections for historical value is assigned to the Municipal Archivist. Appraisal to determine administrative, legal, and fiscal values is a function of the Municipal Records Management Division of DORIS. The Archives Division and the Records Management Division will exchange information freely in order to ensure that appraisal determinations have been carefully considered from all important perspectives.
2. Appraisal for archival value may be initiated by the Archives or by request of the Records Management Division for the purpose of retention scheduling; by request of a potential donor; by agencies for the purpose of immediate transfer to the Archives.
3. Subject area specialists, may be consulted whenever the unusual nature of records places determination of their research value beyond the expertise of available staff.
4. The Municipal Archives will not appraise records for the purpose of establishing monetary value except as necessary to serve internal administrative and development purposes involving the Archives’ holdings.
5. All appraisal decisions will be carefully documented in the manner prescribed by the Collections Management Procedures Manual. Appraisal reports, resulting in accession or not, will remain on permanent file in the records of the Collections Management Unit.
6. Appraisal reports will be reviewed by the Director of the Archives, the Assistant Commissioner, and the Commissioner of DORIS. Recommendations made in the report will not be considered final without the signed approval of the Director and the Commissioner.
7. In the instance of digital records appraisals (Electronic Mail, records produced using desktop applications, records produced from relational databases, and websites), the MA will follow evolving best practices and integrate open source digital forensics tools for the purpose of appraising, transferring, ingest, storage and preservation of digital assets.

8. Appraisal decisions will be based primarily on characteristics of the collection being appraised and consideration of the following criteria :

- Informational content/evidential value—uniqueness—relationship to other records;
- Physical characteristics (form, arrangement, volume, dimensions, condition, understandability, age, and adequacy of other documentation available for the period—authority of the creating agency or individual—scope and time span—intrinsic value.

9. Appraisal decisions MAY recommend exceptional, exemplary, illustrative, or systematic sampling. Sampling recommendations will be reviewed by the Director of the Archives and approved by the Commissioner of DORIS prior to disposal of any material. Sampling will be considered only where the benefits of reduced storage space, reduced processing and reference time, and increased understandability for the researcher justify the expenditure of staff time necessary to produce a valid sample.

## ACCESSION POLICY

### Glossary of Terms

**Accession/Acquisition:** materials physically and legally transferred to a repository as a unit at a single time; an acquisition.

**Appraisal:** The process of identifying materials offered to the Archives that have sufficient value to be accessioned. The process determining the length of time records should be retained based on legal requirement and on their current and potential usefulness.

**Deed of Gift:** an agreement transferring title or property without an exchange of monetary compensation may be for real personal or intellectual property; the form of a contract establishing conditions governing the transfer of title to documents and specifying any restrictions on access or use.

**Permanent records:** Materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs intended to be preserved because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator. **Notes:** Some archivists may distinguish permanent records from archives, the former representing records still in the hands of the records creators before transfer to the archives. In the vernacular, 'archives' is often used to refer to any collection of documents that are old or of historical interest, regardless of how they are organized; in this sense, the term is synonymous with permanent records.

**Record:** The New York City Charter defines 'records' as "any documents, books, papers, photographs sound recordings, machine readable materials or any other materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official city business.

**Retention:** The length of time records should be kept in a certain location or form for administrative, legal, fiscal, historical, or other purposes.

**Transfer:** The process of moving records as part of their scheduled disposition, especially from an office to a records center, or from a records center to the Archives. May involve a change in custody without a change in title

### Objectives

- To ensure legal custody of government records
- To ensure access to government records in line with personal privacy information laws and other legal obligations
- To ensure compliance with Record Management disposition processes, directives and policies

### Statements

1. The primary responsibility of the Municipal Archives is to maintain and manage a repository for archival records created by city government.
2. The MA will follow federal, state, and local government protocols for acquiring records of historical or potentially historical significance.
3. The MA will ensure responsible custody of collections detailed by the SAA Code of Ethics by:
  - a. Making reasonable and defensible choices for holdings
  - b. Balancing competing interests of various stakeholders
  - c. Ensuring maintenance and management of collections to benefit the public

- d. Recognizing the potential need to deaccession materials so that resources can be strategically applied to the most essential or useful materials
4. Bearing in mind the tenets of responsible custody, the Archives may accept donations of records or manuscripts created by persons or agencies whose relationship to the city is unofficial, or the creation of which did not occur in the transaction of official city business. Donations in this category will be accepted **only** if the material documents some aspect of city government, city property, or the lives/careers of city officials, thereby **complementing and significantly** adding to the research value of other holdings.
  5. Records formally accessioned by the Municipal Archives are considered to be permanent additions to the Archives' holdings (i.e., intent is for permanent custody). The following exceptions apply:
    - a. location of a superior series/source- a series may be "deaccessioned" if another series is acquired which provides the same information/evidential content in a superior form or which was the creation of a superior authority (e.g., substitution of a series created by the office of a Commissioner or Deputy Mayor for a series of nearly identical files created by a lesser official; substitution of original files for copies when located, etc.);
    - b. loss of physical integrity- a series may be "deaccessioned" if damage or deterioration has eliminated its understandability and research usefulness, **and/or** if the informational content has been preserved in another format including analog and/or digital formats;
    - c. voluminous record series with evidential value and limited informational content may be sampled (see appraisal policy);
  6. New accessions will not be accepted with non-statutory restrictions as to use or future disposition with the following exception:

The Archives will not accession records which would be permanently closed to research. However, when necessary to prevent damage, destruction, or jurisdictional loss, the Archives will accept material upon which reasonable and specified restrictions (limiting access or delaying research availability) must be placed to protect the rights of New Yorkers or the legitimate interests of the City. Where restrictions apply to collections of non-official documents acquired from other than city government donors, such restrictions must be clearly stated in the transfer form. The Archives will strictly adhere to any such agreed-upon restrictions.

#### **Accountability:**

1. Specific responsibility for the accessioning of archival records is assigned to the Collections Management Unit of the Municipal Archives.
2. The Commissioner of DORIS, as Chief Archivist of the City, will review quarterly reports from the Municipal Archivist detailing accessions to the Archives.

#### **Process:**

1. The Collections Management unit will conduct an appraisal of prospective acquisitions. (See Appraisal form).
2. All prospective collections require an appraisal report for the following reasons:
  - a. Records within City agencies may change in series name and function and may not necessarily state "transfer to MA" in retention schedules
  - b. Collections may not be related to the business functions of City government

- c. Records may not have an identified provenance
- 3. The Archives will recommend updates in retention schedules when necessary
- 4. The Archives will ensure accession documentation follows established minimum level requirements and description practices
- 5. The Archives will ensure permanent retention of accession records.
- 6. Accession documentation on collections not acquired through the formal records disposition procedure will include a Deed of Gift conveying property, copyright and literary rights, where possible, to DORIS' Municipal Archives.
- 7. In case of a decision to dispose of an entire series of formally accessioned city records, the disposal will proceed according to disposal procedures adopted by the Municipal Records Center, a division of DORIS (i.e., approval of the Corporation Counsel, and the Director of the Municipal Archives, and the Commissioner of DORIS required prior to destruction).

## **ARRANGEMENT & DESCRIPTION**

1. The purpose of arranging and describing local government archival records is to help users access information. The MA will adhere to local and national standards of archival description and preservation, and will aim to produce guides and inventories that meet international schemas and robust internet accessibility. The MA will ensure published catalog records and finding aids are accessible through the Municipal Library's Catalog, WorldCat, the current archival management application and digital repository interfaces.
2. **The Processing Procedures Manual** will describe workflows and strategies to manage processing activities. The manual details standards and metrics that will be evaluated and revised as necessary in order to maintain the highest standards in description, preservation, and access.
3. If any of the processing activities will be performed by a vendor/ third party, a staff member will be delegated to ensure quality control and compliance with the existing archival and RM standards.

## **PRESERVATION**

1. The Municipal Archives defines preservation as a primary goal. Consideration is given to managerial and financial requirements, space and storage, staffing, and methods applied to physical and digital assets. The preservation policies will ensure long-term, sustainable, intellectual, and physical access to our collections.
2. The MA will support a Preservation program with the following elements:
  - a. Environmental controls
  - b. Replacement and Reformatting
  - c. Conservation
  - d. Storage Maintenance
  - e. Disaster Preparedness and Response-including COOP
  - f. Personnel and User Education

## ACCESS, USE & REFERENCE

The Municipal Archives provides access to all researchers of its collections to the fullest extent possible. While the primary goal of the MA is ensuring access to government records, some collections will require consideration of city, state, and federal laws regarding personal privacy issues and intellectual property rights.

See **Regulations Governing Use of Archival Material** for protocols and procedures.

### 1. Loans

The Conservation Unit of the Municipal Archives will review and assess records requested for loans for exhibition use. The conservation unit will ensure conditions for outgoing loans are followed by the borrower for protection, packing, transportation, credits, costs, and return of the loaned records. The Conservation Unit will be responsible for monitoring and updating the status of loaned materials.

### 2. Copyright and Citation of the New York City Municipal Archives Collections

Copyright protections are the sole responsibility of the party displaying, using, and/or sharing collections from the New York City Municipal Archives, however, the MA may provide guidance and/or restrictions on use based on personal and/or privacy information or City, State or Federal law.

Official credit line of records of the MA: **Courtesy of NYC Municipal Archives.**

### 3. Copying and Reproduction Services

The MA recognizes its responsibility to facilitate access to its collections by permitting the reproduction, reprinting or publishing of archival material. However, the physical condition of materials or other restrictions may prohibit or limit reproduction capability. The Archives reserves the right to decide when and to what degree these restrictions shall apply.

### 4. Security

The Municipal Archives requires all patrons to register and sign-off on regulations governing use of archival materials.

### 5. Safe handling practices

Patrons are required to adhere to the Municipal Archives' handling procedures and will be required to sign-off on MA protocols for use when registering at the MA or online.

Collections available in microfilm or in digital form will be the preferred format for research and reference and facsimiles.

### 6. Responsive approaches to customer service (digital access services, online finding aids, and in-house researchers).

- a. Finding aids are available to researchers in the Municipal Library and Archives Reading Room. Reference personnel are also available via email [research@records.nyc.gov](mailto:research@records.nyc.gov) or in-person at 31 Chambers St.
- b. Most of the MA collections are stored off-site. Researchers should anticipate receiving original materials within 2 days of their inquiries. Materials are made available to researchers in the Municipal Library and Archives Reading Room.