

**ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT  
GUIDELINES**

ONCOLOGY NURSING SOCIETY  
2003

## INTRODUCTION

We all are faced with a deluge of records: work files, our own personal papers, and now ONS records. Why does it seem as if nothing ever gets discarded? Why are documents so hard to find? What do we keep? What *should* we keep? How do we organize our files? How should we store them? In exasperation, we are tempted to shout out: "Papers! Papers! Papers! And now photographs, cassette tapes, computer discs! What can we do?!"

Archives and records management are really two ends of a continuum.

*Archives* may mean:

- documents that are not currently used but that have been selected for permanent retention because of their legal, fiscal, historical, or other value
- the place where these materials are kept, be it a building, room, storage area, or filing cabinet
- the organization, department, or person who is responsible for selecting and maintaining these records of long-term value.

The purpose of an archives is to identify, preserve, and make accessible records of long-term value. These records may be valuable for legal, auditing, or reporting purposes; for reflecting the organization, its activities, and its setting; or for the information they contain. Overall, the archives should mirror the activities of your organization and provide answers to the basic questions: who did what, when, why, and how?

*Records management* is the management of the active and semi-active records of an individual or an organization. Active records are those used regularly in the course of everyday activities (for our purposes, at least once annually). Semi-active records are those not currently in use but that must be retained for reasons of accountability or liability; these records are typically kept one to seven years and then destroyed. Cancelled checks are one example.

The term "records" here means any form of recorded information, so archives and records management encompass formats such as paper records, photographs, computer files, and audiovisual materials.

As mentioned above, *archives* and *records management* are closely related. A *records management program* can serve as the "front end" into the archives, because records that pass through their active phase and are still important form the core collection of the archives. The ultimate goal of a records management program is to ensure the efficient and economical use of records, and a well-organized, uncluttered set of files promotes quick retrieval and limits unnecessary costs.

An *archives*, though, has more philosophical aims. It safeguards the memories of your organization, sustains its culture, and preserves its history. This provides a perspective on which to base planning and to avoid past mistakes. Your organization is a community with its own culture; a lack of commitment to sustaining that culture will ultimately weaken the organization, and an organization proud of its history will treasure it. Each of these roles provides an unbroken link to the past, a bond that continuously supports the organization and its members.

Thus records management and archives as two ends of a continuum are both concerned with the management of information within an organization. Like membership or finances, information is a valuable asset to your organization, and adept management of this asset is similarly very important.

For consistent practice, we recommend that a person(s) volunteer or be appointed as archivist and retain this position for some time. The archivist duties include:

- Familiarize yourself with this document, *ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES*.
- Work with the leadership of your organization to develop a regular transfer of ongoing records to the archivist.
- Organize the records using a modified version of the *PROPOSED RECORDKEEPING/ARCHIVES SCHEME*.
- Make the records accessible to those that need them.
- Assist with historical projects such as the organization's history and scrapbook.

A *PROPOSED RECORDKEEPING/ARCHIVES SCHEME* is provided to aid in the decision-making process of those records that should be retained and those that should be discarded. Following the scheme, is a brief synopsis explaining the content of this chart.

In general, the qualities that make a good archivist are active participation, a good sense of organization, the ability to work well with others, mentoring the next archivist(s), and an attachment to history. You are *not* expected to be a professional archivist or a qualified historian. The purpose of these guidelines is to enable you to do professional level work with assistance.

Please have no reservations about consulting the National Office at 412-859-6289 or [mvrabel@ons.org](mailto:mvrabel@ons.org) with your questions or to obtain more detailed handouts titled:

- *Archival Supply Companies*
- *Writing an ONS Chapter History*
- *Creating a Chapter Scrapbook*
- *Preservation*

## **DEVELOPMENT OF A BASIC ARCHIVES**

The basic archives is merely an extension of good records-keeping practices combined with a sense of history. The key elements of any archival endeavor include:

- \* Identifying valuable records
- \* Gaining custody of these records
- \* Storing the records appropriately
- \* Organizing these records for easy access

An archives can fill a filing cabinet or a building depending on the size, age, and activity of your organization.

## IDENTIFYING AND ORGANIZING VALUABLE RECORDS

Generally records are saved for four reasons:

- they are used in the routine activities of the organization (often called "administrative value")
- they indicate what the organization has been doing (often termed "evidential value")
- they contain information of longstanding value (often called "informational value")
- they reflect aspects of the organization's development (often termed "historical value")

Records saved because of their "administrative value" include bills (paid and unpaid) and manuals. In some cases, these records become outdated and may be discarded. Records saved because of their "evidential value" may include certain administrative records (ex. charter, bylaws, minutes of meetings), legal records (ex. contracts, leases), and some financial records. Records saved because of their "informational value" may include surveys, files, and research reports. Records saved because of their "historical value" may include photographs, news clippings, a scrapbook, and anything that may help people understand the wider context in which an organization operates. Note that many records have both evidential and informational value, that all records originally had administrative value (or they would not have been created in the first place), and that records with evidential value often also have historical value.

The first major category in the scheme to identify and organize is *BUSINESS RECORDS*, which reflect the official operation of the organization. The first section here, *Matrix Records*, concerns the foundation of your organization. These records typically do not accumulate. While there may be occasional revisions to the Standing Rules or Policies, generally these records change little. In most cases, the official copy should be in the archives, with reference copies in the hands of the President and Secretary.

The remainder of the business records is listed by administrative unit: *Board of Directors*, *Workgroups*, and *Committees*. Because the Board of Directors is ultimately responsible for the organization, its records are vital; all listed items should have official copies in the archives and reference copies with the President and Secretary. The records of the Chapter President are similarly very important and must be retained. Annual reports to the organization, if different from the report sent to the National Office, should be retained as well. The records of the Treasurer and Secretary are also vital for the activities of the

organization. Official copies of listed documents should be placed in the archives, while reference copies may be useful for the Treasurer or Secretary to maintain. Although this may seem like senseless duplication, the advantage of having copies of vital records in more than one place becomes evident should a disaster destroy one set of records. At least essential records, such as Board minutes and Standing Rules, will still be available.

An organization exists for its members, so the records listed under *Membership (General)* are valuable. The organizational roster, along with records reflecting meetings and conferences, should all be represented in the archives. It is only necessary to retain the January and December membership rosters of a given year.

Because committees and workgroups do so much work, their records are also worth retaining. For each committee or workgroup, retain copies of meeting agendas and minutes, committee rosters, committee process or operating guidelines (ex. a detailed account of routine committee activities; how, why, when, and by whom things get done), and reports (periodic reports may be oral and thus uncollectible). Each committee or workgroup will also have records that pertain only to that committee.

Thus the *Membership Committee* may have reports such as a membership needs assessment, the *Nominating Committee* will have ballots and election results, the *Program Committee* will have planning and speaker files, and the *Research Committee* (if you have one) may have files on grants and awards. If you have any other standing committees (ex. Clinical Practice, Newsletter), ad hoc committees, or task forces, they will all have standard records (meeting agendas, minutes, and reports, for example) and records specific to that committee or task force. Remember that records reflect activities, so if you know what a committee does, you will already have some idea what are the appropriate records to retain. *Congress* or *IOL presenters* should provide some record of their activities for the organization's benefit.

*PUBLICATIONS* are a part of every organization. Official copies of all publications (newsletter, booklets, brochures) should be retained in the archives. A second reference copy should be available for circulation. *PROJECTS* may also be an integral component of your organization. Final reports and final products pertaining to the project should be retained. Finally, *HISTORICAL MATERIALS* reflect the origins and development of the organization in ways not necessarily captured in the above records. They include materials in other formats, such as photographs and memorabilia (ex. artifacts or objects, such as buttons or pins). These are the items saved for their historical value and not solely for their evidential value.

## TRANSFER OF RECORDS TO THE ARCHIVES

Annually, the status of records needs to be assessed and reviewed. Some records are considered to be active and will be passed (perhaps at a Chapter Board meeting) to the successor of an elected or appointed position within the leadership of the organization. Depending on the nature of the documents, originals may be transferred to the archives while a copy is passed to the successor. Other vital records and those no longer active should be transferred to the archives. This annual review of all records is extremely important for the ongoing operation and activities of the organization, for the mentoring and development of new leaders, and for the preservation of the history of the organization.

The two basic principles in collecting materials for assessment and review are *timeliness* and *completeness*. This means that materials should be acquired by the archivist quickly and systematically and are filed according to the archival process and preservation of materials.

## ORGANIZING ARCHIVAL RECORDS

The overall organization of archives should be divisions by *origins* and then by *form*. Consider the minutes of a meeting: they function as a record of what took place in the meeting of a specific group (their origins/content) and they are minutes (their form). The *PROPOSED RECORDKEEPING/ARCHIVES SCHEME*, illustrates these points: *BUSINESS RECORDS* are filed by origin (*coordinator*) and then by form (agendas, minutes, reports). Non-business records are generally filed separately by form (ex. *PUBLICATIONS*) or format (ex. *HISTORICAL MATERIALS* - Photographs). *PROJECTS* will generally also be filed separately unless they become a regular activity of a position, Committee, or Workgroup. Within each file or set of files the organization of materials can be chronological (by time), alphabetical (by topic or proper name), or a combination of the two.

Another basic organizational principle is that the materials of the organization be in an order consistent for easy retrieval, which is accomplished by placing materials in file folders, labeling in pencil, and appropriately storing records in a file box. Each year the materials should be filed in the same manner that they were the previous year.

Lastly, an index of how the archival records are organized should be prepared. This index is a list that mirrors the arrangement of the collection and is listed on the *PROPOSED RECORDKEEPING/ARCHIVES SCHEME*.

In summary, if you are new to the position of archivist or feel that more details are needed, please do not hesitate to contact the ONS National Office at 412-859-6289 or [mvrabel@ons.org](mailto:mvrabel@ons.org) to obtain more detailed handouts or answers to your questions.

### Acknowledgements

Shirley Gullo, Shirley Stagner, Mary Gibbons, Lynne Carpenter, Stephen Wagner  
Geoffrey Gill, Nancy Hallock, Annette Sullivan, Judy Lentz, Gail Sansivero,  
Sandra Lee Schafer, Pat Weigand, Katina Koontz, Mark Vrabel.