

Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization

A Manual for Preserving the Records of
Neighborhood Organizations

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A Manual for Preserving the Records of Neighborhood Organizations

Conducted on behalf of
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Preserving the Records of Your Neighborhood Organization

- **Overview**

- 1. What is an archives?**

The term “archives” refers to the documents and records of an organization that were originally created or used by the organization in the course of conducting every day transactions but are now preserved because of their enduring value. “Archives” is also used to refer to the location where an organization’s archival materials are stored.

- 2. Why preserve the records of a neighborhood organization?**

Preserving the documents and records of a neighborhood organization can be of value for a number of reasons. First, the records of a neighborhood organization convey information about past human activity and, if preserved, provide information about the history of the organization itself as well as information about the history of the surrounding community. Second, the preserved records of a neighborhood organization may serve as a type of “organizational memory” and assist in instilling pride in past accomplishments, honoring long term members, facilitating accountability, and measuring the organization’s growth and development. Third, the preserved records of neighborhood organizations may be interest to researchers and scholars from a wide variety of fields.

- 3. What types of materials and records created by neighborhood organizations may have enduring value?**

A neighborhood organization's charter, constitution, and bylaws; minutes of business meetings and board meetings; membership lists; anniversary publications; photographs of organizational activities; publicity clippings about the organization; rosters of officers; annual reports; budgets; expense reports; committee files; special projects or activities; correspondence with other organizations; organizational memorabilia, etc. are all examples of documents and records that may be of enduring value.

4. What is included in the process of preserving records?

An important first step is identifying and collecting all (or as many as possible) of the past records and documents created and used by the neighborhood organization. Second, the collected materials are described and organized so that they can be located easily in the future. The collected records and documents are then stored in ways that result in the least amount of deterioration over time due to the effects of light, temperature, and humidity on the materials of which the records and documents are constructed. Finally, a reference system is developed that allows interested parties, such as researchers, historians, future organizers, etc., to access the materials under supervised conditions.

5. What is a repository?

A repository is a place where archival materials are stored, preserved and maintained, and accessed under supervised conditions by

interested parties. An individual organization may develop and maintain its own repository or donate its archival materials to an existing repository.

- **Before You Begin Preserving the Records of Your Neighborhood Organization**

The *worst* time to start preserving your organization's records and documents is at a time of crisis – such as when your organization's materials are about to be discarded. The *best* time to start preserving your organizational materials is when you have ample time to plan ahead and to make decisions based on a careful understanding of the issues involved in records preservation. For example, starting up a records preservation program within your neighborhood organization could easily take several years of time – not counting the permanent time commitment needed to maintain and supervise the archival program once it has begun. Second, implementing and maintaining a program of records preservation within your organization will require continual approval, commitment, and support (including possible financial support) from your organization's leadership – this is not a project that you would want to tackle single-handedly. Third, you will need a careful understanding of your organization and the records and documents it creates and uses before undertaking the process of records preservation. This would be in addition to understanding the records that your organization *should* be creating and using – in case your organization has been lacking in its record-keeping activities. Fourth, you should have an understanding of your organization's records management system and its records retention schedule. If your organization does not have a records

management system and/or a records retention schedule, it would be to your benefit to work with others in your organization to see that they are in place before you begin your records preservation activities. Last of all, you should be aware of what types of materials *should not* be placed in an organization's archives, such as materials that may violate individuals' privacy rights. Located in the accompanying folders is additional information on each of the above-mentioned topics.

- **Conducting a General Survey or Preliminary Inventory**

After gaining an understanding of some of the issues mentioned above and obtaining the support and approval from the members of your neighborhood organization's board, you may want to begin the records preservation process by identifying and collecting the entire universe (or as many as possible) of records and documents created and used by your organization since its inception. In addition to obtaining assistance from past and present officers, board members, and long-time members of your organization in locating past and present records, you may also want to contact outside sources that keep records on your neighborhood organization such as the NRP (Neighborhood Revitalization Program) staff and the state of Minnesota. After collecting as many of your organization's records and documents as possible, you will want to conduct a preliminary inventory and/or survey of those materials in order to document what you have and to describe the condition of the materials. Examples of preliminary surveys and inventories are located in the accompanying folders. Once completed, the preliminary inventory and/or survey of your organization's records may help

you and your organization decide whether to work toward developing your own archival space for preserving and holding your organization's records or to seek out an existing repository or local history collection with which to donate your records. Additional information on factors to consider when making this decision is available in the accompanying folders.

You may want to seek out professional assistance and/or receive additional training when conducting your preliminary survey. In addition, you may want to receive assistance when appraising the value of your organization's materials. Information on factors to consider when appraising the value of records is also available in the accompanying folders.

- **Preserving and Maintaining Your Own Organization's Records**

If you and your organization decide to develop and maintain your own archives for your organization's records, there are several preliminary steps that you may want to take. First, you may want to obtain approval from the board of your organization to create an archives committee and/or to designate an individual as your neighborhood organization's archivist or organizational historian. You may also want to obtain board approval for a job description of the role of archivist and/or historian. Next, you may want to develop (and obtain board approval for) a policy and/or a system for disseminating to your organization's archives copies of future organizational records as they are created (such as future board minutes, flyers, announcements, etc.). As mentioned above, you may also want to ensure that your organization has a records management system and records retention schedule in place and that it includes a policy and/or

system for ensuring that noncurrent records of enduring value and copies of current records of enduring value are placed in your organization's archives on a regular basis. Finally, you may want to review the preliminary inventory of your organization's collected materials (as discussed in the section above) and determine what key organizational records of enduring value you do *not* yet have in your organization's archives and will therefore need to locate and/or obtain copies of.

Now you're ready to begin the process of arranging and describing your organization's records. Information on the arrangement and description of archival records are included in the accompanying folders. You may also want to obtain assistance and/or further training in understanding the principles involved in arranging and describing archival materials. Information is also included in the accompanying folders on how to slow down the deterioration of your organization's records while they are retained over time in your organization's archives. Technical leaflets describe how to care for the types of materials of which your organizations' records may be constructed (e.g. paper, photographs, digital and electronic materials, VCR tapes). In addition, technical leaflets describe recommended storage materials to use for your records and ways to lessen the effects of environmental factors such as sunlight, temperature, and humidity.

- **Additional Resources**

In addition to the materials and resources found in the accompanying folders, the resources listed below may also be helpful in beginning to understand

how to create an archives for your neighborhood organization and preserve and maintain the records of your organization:

Conrad, J. H. (1989). Developing Local History Programs in Community Libraries. Chicago: American Library Association.

Hunter, G. S. (1997). Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

O'Toole, J. M. (1990). Understanding Archives and Manuscripts. Chicago: Society of American Archivists.

Thompson, E. T. (1978). Local History Collections: A Manual for Librarians. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History.

Yakel, E. (1994). Starting an Archives. Metuchen, N.J.: Society of American Archivists and The Scarecrow Press.