

## **Policy on Archives and Records Management**

### **1. Scope of the Policy**

This archives policy recognizes the unique role that the Archives institution can play in managing current records and in the selection of historical archives for the preservation of this country's corporate memory. It encompasses all official Government records in all formats including- traditional, audiovisual, maps and plans and digital records. It also acknowledges the crucial need to foster close links with museums and libraries. It esteems the effectiveness, economy and efficiency an archives and records policy can bring specifically to government administration and to national life generally. It also encourages private persons and institutions with substantial archives to adopt a similar approach to that set out here.

### **2. The Value of Records**

Records created in the course of an organization's business transactions are a vitally important asset. They provide authentic and reliable evidence of those transactions. This integrity is of instant value to the creating department in managing its own affairs and for accountability - to auditors, shareholders and to the public. No government or organization can possess a collective memory and operate effectively without the practice of efficient record keeping. Citizens also have a general right to obtain information about the activities carried out by departments and organizations acting on their behalf. This right is essential for democratic accountability and also if public bodies are to be subject to informed public scrutiny. However, it must also be recognized that the individual citizen has a right to privacy concerning personally sensitive data supplied in confidence to government or private organizations. Adherence to the requirements of Freedom of Information Act, and any other applicable legislation is an essential.

Researchers, academic historians and students will make use of historical records to study the policies and actions of the organizations themselves but also for genealogy and other exploitive endeavours. Additionally, by also providing access through the use of electronic media, the value of archives to all users will be enhanced.

### **3. Archives can help Government to achieve its main policy objectives**

Any Archives institution exists primarily to select and permanently preserve the country's records of enduring value in whatever format; to ensure that records are properly managed according to best standards and to ensure that everyone who needs to can have ready access to current records and archives on site or online.

Archives, as an active resource could 'release power' at every developmental point- be it for administrative efficiency, development planning, social and economic progress, cultural growth, education reform, research and scientific discovery or national identity. More precisely, Archives can make vital contributions to the Government's most important policy objectives:

#### ***i. A Stronger Economy:***

The information contained in Archives can 'bring new focus and energy' to regenerate the economy and business but most importantly, Archives underpin the success of the Government's major economic objectives. Indexing and then digitizing archive collections will make information made more accessible to the creative industries operating in the cultural sector. Archives repositories also have the potential to attract regional and international visitors who wish to research this unique information source. This can boost tourism.

***ii. Improved Social Services and Better Health Care:***

Archives have a distinctive role to play in maintaining the rights of citizens in society. They are testimonies of contracts made between citizens, and between the government and citizens. They are proofs of various rights and obligations: genealogical records communicate proof of lineage; the deed communicates proof of estate. Archives provide evidence of vital statistics- birth, marriage, death; medical history; school and university attainments; finance, property or profession. Archives are also essential for maintaining the general mental health and well-being of individual citizens and of the collective citizenry by providing a sense of history and belonging, heritage and a source of national pride. Archives can offer ready access for all citizens to the irreplaceable primary sources on which the history and culture of Virgin Islands are based. An Archives Repository will 'give our people one of the tools they need to realize their full potential'. Access to a functioning Archives service is one means of 'empowering the people'.

***iii. Good Governance - open and accountable government:***

The Government by the enacting Freedom of Information legislation and by observing other Acts relating to the protection of citizens' rights wishes to cultivate a climate of openness and respect for the right of citizens 'to know' and their right of access to information contained in official records. But open government generally, will depend in great measure upon effective records management. This embraces the creation of reliable records and arrangements for their speedy retrieval when requested.

***iv. World Class Education:***

A modernized and reformed curriculum more in tune with the culture and history of the BVI cannot survive without the resources to sustain it. Archives can bring teachers, students and 'life-long learners' into direct contact with the raw materials of the total historical experience through exposure to the original documents of the time. They will make key information relevant to the national curriculum and self-directed learning available. Archives could stimulate the creation of teaching aids, for example, archives teaching and work units, and supplementary reading materials.

***v. Improving Communication and Infrastructure:***

It is imperative that 'electronic government' is introduced sooner rather than later in order to modernize public services. Its success will depend on our ability to manage, store and retrieve digital records. If government departments are to deliver the high quality of public services that citizens have a right to expect and if they are to co-operate effectively with one another in the information age, then they must ensure that their information systems are compatible and that business transactions are recorded securely. The Archives sector will embrace the advanced new information communications technology (ICT) in order to bring its contents alive and accessible to a greater number of potential users.

***vi. Sustaining the Natural Resources:***

The Government believes that its greatest natural resource is its people and that it has 'a duty to empower them to achieve'. The next great natural resource of the Government is its own routine creation: its administrative records. They are an account of Government's business transactions and interactions with citizens, peoples of other nationalities and with organisations. Official records and Archives are a powerful resource if properly

managed according to high standards of best practice. They have the potential to become a positive force and stimuli for national development.

#### **4. The Objectives of the Policy**

The objectives of this policy aim to address the development needs of Archives and Records and to enable the sector to make its full contribution to society and to Government policy;

- i. To ensure that ready access to archives is offered to all citizens and to other users in the most useful and convenient way.
- ii. To enable the educational sector at all levels to have proper access to the country's archival resources, so that national educational needs are met.
- iii. To ensure that public institutions select, preserve and manage their current records and their archives regardless of medium, in accordance with the relevant legislative requirements, guidance and agreed professional standards.
- iv. To encourage private organizations and individuals to manage their records effectively, to preserve their historical archives and wherever possible to facilitate public access to them.
- v. To enable the archive sector to prepare for the processing of increasing quantities of electronic data.
- vi. To add maximum value to the information resource held by the archives sector.

#### **5. Providing Access to Records and Archives**

If current records and historical archives are to be efficiently managed then a sound access policy across the public sector is required by enacting legislation to: i) Institute the Archives & Records Management Service; ii) Provide physical accommodation and equipment for the National Archives Repository and Records Centre buildings and iii) To provide an Archivist and such other staff necessary to manage and operate an Archives Repository and a Records Centre as outlined in the Victoria Lemeux Report.

#### **6. Measures to promote practical access to archives**

Government policy is to: facilitate the provision of a functioning Archives institution and Records Centre; improve and widen access to all sectors of society, particularly students and 'life-long learners'. The policy is based firmly on the need to also take full advantage of ICT developments as well as improving standards for maintaining traditional materials, i.e. the consultation of original documents in public search rooms.

#### **7. Providing Information about archives via indexes, lists, abstracts etc.**

A key priority should be the provision of finding aids to Archives followed by accurate descriptions of all historical archives on a website, so that a wider public is made aware of their existence. Cataloguing of unrecorded material should embrace ICT and modern standards, and infrastructure to allow on-line access to catalogues of holdings should be developed.

## **8. Digitization for access to archive**

Digitized images of the most popular records should proceed in tandem with the production of on-line catalogue information, because potential and new users will experience archives for the first time through ready access to these digitized images. These images will need to be periodically refreshed and preserved for the long term, according to approved standards. Access to archives should also be enhanced through the participation of archives in educational programmes both on-line and on-site at all levels and outreach work should be targeted at social groups which have not hitherto used archives. This work should be accompanied by digitizing material of use to particular sectors in schools, colleges and libraries and via television and other channels in order to maximize the utility of archives for the country and for the world.

While 'content creation' for archives is a matter for the respective organizations with the assistance of funding agencies and suitable enabling structures, archives should participate fully in the emerging information networks and on the Internet in partnership with other cognate sectors in establishing a framework.

## **9. Records Management**

The management of current records - those which have not yet been sent to an Archives- forms an essential backdrop to the later archiving of important records, as well as being important in its own right for business reasons. It is expensive business. These resources must be used effectively to ensure that records are created to document an organization's principal activities, that they are maintained in an orderly manner, available for retrieval and that they are stored cost effectively. In deciding how long to keep records, organizations must pay heed to the statutory requirements and agreed regulations and schedules.

## **10. Digital Records**

Technological change has transformed the task facing records managers. Most records are now created electronically, sometimes called 'born digital', and it is appropriate that they should also be held electronically if their original characteristics are to be maintained. The management and maintenance of electronic records will be successful only if the systems, which create the records, are designed appropriately. Work on this task-which is quite distinct from the digitization of records created in paper form -will require greater attention from organizations across the public and private sector if reliable records are to be created for current and future use.

## **11. Selection of Records**

The permanent historical archive can only be part of the whole: many current records do not merit preservation once their business purpose has passed. The selection of the permanent record is a demanding task to be conducted according to clear policies, which, wherever possible, should be made publicly available. Selection activities should be integrated with current records management to ensure that action is taken sufficiently early to ensure that the appropriate records are identified for permanent preservation.

## **12. Preservation**

Archives in whatever medium, are especially vulnerable to the effects of natural and man-made disasters as well as to the degenerating effects of age. They should, therefore, be kept according to standards, which offer the highest possible degree of protection against ageing and disasters. They are also very sensitive to rapidly fluctuating temperatures and humidity and accidental or malicious damage, and so they have to be kept in carefully controlled storage areas within secure buildings. Archives which are physically deteriorating should be identified and receive

professional conservation treatment, so that the unique information which they contain can be passed on intact to future generations.

### **13. Standards and Performance**

The management of records and of archives services in common with all aspects of public life should be in accordance with published standards; performance against those standards should be measured and the results made available to the public. International standards now exist, for example, the cataloguing of historical archives, the storage of records and the legal admissibility of electronic records. Work is currently under way to prepare such standards (notably for public services, for records management and for the long-term management of electronic records). The Government wishes to promote the adoption of high standards and in particular to encourage participants from across the sector to ensure that appropriate training is developed to support the delivery of services to the new standards when published. The Government also recognizes that standards can ultimately be enforced only by giving the appropriate archival body/ies sufficient powers of inspection.

### **14. Resources and Management**

The Government will, subject to its overall policies on funding for the public sector, support the archival sector through the allocation of resources to meet these objectives, making the best use of available public resources. It looks to the archival sector to make effective use of its resources through management, which is geared towards best value for money, and reduction of costs, for example, through collaboration on infrastructure schemes, which have broader usefulness and offer potential for cost sharing. It also looks to the archival sector to maximize income where possible by exploring other sources for income, such as: revenue earning through sale of goods and services; obtaining sponsorship; setting up public and private partnerships for projects where appropriate; and securing funds from actions in line with overall government policy.

### **15. Total Involvement**

To ensure that the archival sector contributes to the attainment of these policies is the task of the Government and the whole breadth of the public sector. The Government also wishes to do all it can to encourage private organizations and individuals holding historically significant archives to make their own contributions to these objectives.

*Endorsed by the Executive Council in May 2005*