

THE RECORDS OF
N|G|O|s,
MEMORY ... TO BE SHARED

A practical
guide
in **60**
questions

Thanks:

This guide has been prepared by **Armelle Le Goff**, senior curator of the National Archives Historical Centre (France). The International Council on Archives thanks its Section for Archivists of International Organisations for its contribution, and Patrick Cadell, Margaret Procter and David Leitch (United Kingdom) for their translation, adaptation and editing. Please note that the structure of the guide is not the same as the original French version. This is not a literal translation but an adaptation to the context of records' management in the English speaking world

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Ever since its creation in 1948, under the auspices of UNESCO, the International Council on Archives (ICA) has provided significant technical and professional assistance to archivists and archival institutions in the world. By way of studies, conferences, expert missions, elaboration of norms and standards and the sharing of information, the ICA has played an essential role in raising awareness of governments, civil society and the international community of the importance of archives.

This manual is a practical guide, which draws the attention of officials, staff and volunteers of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the value of their records and offers advice on their management and preservation. Some of these records are indeed of crucial importance for the history of both the organizations themselves and the societies concerned.

The benefits of good records management within a public or private institution are well known: gain of time and space, legal and administrative memory, an informed vision of past decisions and transparency of information. In the electronic environment the safeguarding of records in the medium and long term has become more complex; in order to ensure preservation, records management must begin in the early stage of the document's life cycle. Therefore, the guide also provides simple and effective advice to meet this need.

In certain countries where the NGOs carry out activities not provided for by the State, the archives of such organizations become essential for the reconstitution of the history of individuals, institutions and populations. In former repressive countries, where public archives have disappeared or been purged, the records of NGOs are among the rare sources of information that allow the victims to understand better the mechanisms of repression and to claim a right to truth and reconciliation.

This guide is the realization of a recommendation of the directors of national archives and the chairpersons of professional archival associations, gathered in Reykjavik in 2001 on the occasion of the XXXVth International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA), where the theme was the collection and selection of records in contemporary societies. In view of the growing role played by civil society at the international level and the threats confronting the safeguarding of records of NGOs, the concern and initiative of the ICA is entirely justified and praiseworthy.

Behind an apparently modest ambition is hidden a true determination to serve the citizens of the world, by working for more transparency, good governance and a better preservation of the memory of humankind. I am delighted to welcome this Guide as an expression of the continued strive of the ICA to preserve the memory of the world in all its immense diversity.



Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General of UNESCO

For whom?

For you, managers, employees
and associates of Non-governmental
Organisations (NGOs)

I. You said NGO?

NGOS: A NEW PRESENCE ...

What is an NGO?

NGO = Non-governmental Organisation

It is hard to give a brief definition of an NGO, given the richness and diversity of their activities but they do share certain special characteristics. This booklet relates to organisations which meet the following three criteria:

- The first, which is immediately obvious from their name, is their **relationship to public authorities**. NGOs are in fact independent of the state, though that does not prevent their collaborating with governments or receiving financial aid from them.
- But the above criterion alone is not sufficient: there are other international organisations, such as multinational corporations, which are independent of the state. The second criterion therefore is that of being an **association**. That is to say, an NGO is a group of private individuals brought together for non-profit-making purposes.
- In addition, this association usually exists to uphold some human, universal and democratic value. Thus **aid** the main subject of this guide, is one of the many fields in which NGOs work.

When did NGOs first appear on the international scene?

Aid is not a twentieth-century phenomenon: charitable societies and 'good works' have existed since antiquity. The twentieth century can however be called the '**century of the NGO**'. NGOs developed from 1945 in the wake of the UN (United Nations). A further wave of humanitarian initiatives marked the 1970s with the development of organisations 'without frontiers'.

Nowadays there is a proliferation of NGOs. According to the Union of International Associations (UIA), there were about 40,000 international non-governmental organisations (INGO) throughout the world in 2001.

... WITH DIFFERENT NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS ...

Is an NGO a national or an international organisation?

An NGO has its roots in a single country or it may develop from the outset as an international network. Examples of the former are Oxfam (in Great Britain) or CARE (in the United States of America), both of which originally raised funds only in their own countries, before setting up links with international federations. In the latter category is Amnesty International, founded in Great Britain, but which, from the beginning, sought support in other countries.

IO, IGO, NGO, INGO: what are the differences?

An **IO** (International Organisation) is a collective term which encompasses all sorts of international organisations, while an **IGO** (Inter-governmental Organisation) is an organisation with regional or international responsibilities, created by several states, the UN and UNESCO for example.

An **INGO** (International Non-governmental Organisation) is an organisation created by transnational agencies (NGOs, corporations, political parties...).

What are the differences between the NGOs of different countries?

Apart from differences in name, NGOs vary in size, organisation and number from country to country. In the same way, the role played by public funding also varies from one country to another; it is particularly important in Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia.

ASSOCIATIONS: A VARIED LANDSCAPE

In France the situation is fragmented with numerous small and medium-sized associations, and a few large ones such as Médecins sans frontières (MSF) and Médecins du monde (MDM).

In the USA, as in Great Britain, there are relatively few associations, but they are large and capable of channelling substantial funds.

In the Netherlands aid associations are organised in four large federations: NOVIB (lay), HIVOS (humanist), ICCO (Protestant), CEBEMO (Catholic). What is particular about **Germany** is the existence of foundations linked to political parties: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (CDU), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (SPD). A great number of NGOs have developed in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly after the change of the political system there. Their role is mostly related to social needs and issues, as they try to fill the gaps which are not sufficiently dealt with by the state.

... BUT RECOGNISED TODAY BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

What is the status of NGOs in relation to the UN?

Article 71 of the UN Charter recognises the special role of transnational agencies, including of course NGOs, which may participate in a consultative capacity in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). A series of resolutions governs the way in which this consultation may take place¹. Today, nearly 2000 NGOs are involved in ECOSOC.



Further reading

John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds)

The Globalization of World Politics.

An Introduction to International Relations.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Eurasia Resources. Published by Civil Society International

(www.civilsoc.org/books/resource)

From the Roots Up: Strengthening Organizational Capacity Through Guided Self-Assessment. Published by World

Neighbours (Mail order at order@wn.org)

Post-Communist Transition as a European Problem. Published by Longo Editore

Ravenna (long-ra@linknet.it)

www.longo-editore.it

Brian Pratt (ed.), *Changing Expectations?*

The Concept and Practice of Civil Society in International Development. International

NGO Training and Research Centre

(INTRAC), Publications@intrac.org

(www.intrac.org)

¹Resolution 288(X)B: February 1950; Resolution 1296 (XLIV): May 1968; Resolutions 1996/31 and 1996/297; July 1996.

Why?

NGOs are about action, but they all produce records which can be of long-term value even though they may never think of them in such a way. Their memory is there...

II. RECORDS, THE SEEDS OF MEMORY

ARCHIVES: A COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS...

1 What are records?

Records embody the “information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business”. They are also Memory is what we can recall...but this recall takes effort. Memory needs to be cultivated like a well tended garden. They are a medium of memory.

2 What is a “fonds”?

Everyone creates records

- individual person: a scholar, a writer, an artist, etc;
- a legal entity: an association etc;
- a public organisation: a government agency or department;
- a private organisation: a corporation or a bank...

The collection of documents and records which grows as a consequence of the activities of a legal entity is what is called a “fonds”. The collection of records managed by an NGO therefore falls into this category.

It is important for an NGO to preserve the integrity of this fonds by keeping it together or by bringing together, if they have been dispersed, all the documents produced or acquired in the course of its activities.

3 What is a file?

A file is made up of the documents brought together in the course of work on one subject or one area of business. It is testimony to the way in which the business was carried out, and its value is both administrative and evidential. A document must not be separated from the file of which it is a part. Out of context it loses its sense and its informational value. **Every document has its place in a file and every file is part of a fonds.**

...WHICH RECORD THE ACTIVITY OF MANKIND OVER A PERIOD OF TIME ...

4 Current records, historical archives; what's the difference?

In the Anglo-Saxon world there is a clear distinction between **current or active records** ‘documents necessary for day-to-day work’ and **archives**, ‘documents no longer required for current work, and which are preserved, with or without preliminary appraisal, by the organisation which created them for its use, or by an appropriate archival institution’¹.

Thus it is possible to distinguish between three categories:

- **documents used for** the management of **work in progress** because they are consulted frequently. They are held in offices so that they are immediately accessible.

¹ According to the ICA's Dictionary of Archival Terminology.

- **documents which are no longer used frequently**, but which need to be preserved for a while for **reference purposes** or to meet legal requirements. They do not need to be kept on the premises of the creating organisation. They can be kept off-site or close to the office site. If records are consulted less than 2-3 times per month, their place is at the Records Centre (which obviously can be a storage room in an office too). In the US and even in Europe, many NGOs use off-site commercial records centres, and records are accessed via the commercial provider.

- **permanent or historical archives**: documents whose long term administrative interest or historical value justifies permanent preservation. This in turn means that they deserve to be made available for historical research, and in due course they may be placed in the care of an archive service.

5 Do all documents have archival value ?

No, not at all. Most organisations – of any kind – will destroy 95% of their records but at the same time, even from the moment of creation, many documents do have archival potential. It is therefore necessary for an NGO to identify and ensure, from the outset, the proper archiving and preservation of:

- all titles deeds (gifts, purchases, contracts, agreements etc);
- legal documents (statutes, by-laws, founding documents etc);
- files which explain the existence, the work and the development of the NGO (minutes of meetings, funding campaigns etc);
- reports and resolutions of the board;
- policy and procedure manuals;
- files which contain information about its members, volunteers and partners;

- files about the peoples and countries within its sphere of action;
- grant files;
- project files;
- annual reports and annual financial statements;
- publications by and on the NGO.

And all this without waiting until the files have ceased to be of current use! The founding statutes of an NGO have archival value from the moment of their promulgation; and the file of papers prepared for a future general assembly or for the managing board is as much an archive file as the file of the founding general assembly.

... AND WHICH INCLUDES ANY MEDIUM

6 Can documents on disk or on cassette also be records?

Yes. Documents can be created in any medium which can record and reproduce information. The records of an NGO are not only files of papers containing manuscript, typed or printed documents, originals or photocopies, such as telegrams, faxes, plans, letters, grey literature¹, posters, agreements, contracts, but may also include photographs, film, sound recordings, and electronic documents made in the course of its work. What these documents in different media have in common is that they arise from and reflect the activities of the NGO. If they have archival value, it is also essential to preserve the associated 'paper' documentation (instructions, information, etc) which will ensure their future accessibility. This can imply, for electronic documents, the downloading of the information they contain onto

¹ Grey literature is commonly defined as any documentary material that is not commercially published.

other media. In addition, different kinds of media should be archived separately. This means that floppies, photos and tapes cannot be physically stored together with paper, which is less demanding than other media. Photos and other audio-visual (AV) material need special care, and it is better to transfer them to a historical archives repository. Much care should be taken over the management of electronic records and because NGOs are unlikely to have the capability to care for electronic records in the long term. They should be saved in an electronic repository where the metadata, providing information about the context in which the record was created, are preserved with the record content. The latter is crucial for records' authenticity and integrity.

7 So an NGO should assume that documents produced by office automation or e-mail are part of its fonds?

Yes, because the time when all was hard copy is long gone. E-mail is now the standard method of working and communicating for NGOs, and it has shown itself particularly useful when their members are at a distance. This has become increasingly apparent in recently created NGOs, most of whose members are young, and belong to the 'Internet Generation'. In such cases it is usual for the majority of working documents not to be printed out and only to be available electronically. Care is needed therefore to ensure the survival of these virtual documents and of the technical means of access to them. Disks provided with the e-system as documents in hard copy connected with it should be preserved, because they will be essential when the disk or the record becomes technically obsolete, and can no longer be read by new hardware or software. You should also print these documents out on

paper, and preserve a copy in the relevant subject file.

8 What other kinds of 'digital objects' can throw light on the activities of an NGO, and are thus part of the transmission of its memory?

Apart from documents produced by word-processing and E-mail, which are generally computer files of very modest size, some organisations, for management or informational purposes, set up databases which develop over time and are periodically brought up to date – a personnel record for example. These databases can be very substantial sources of information.

In addition many NGOs set up their own website. These sites are powerful information tools, and are also places where members can communicate and exchange ideas (electronic forums and petitions).

So from the moment of the creation of any information or data in digital form, it is essential to put in place, and to enforce, procedures for its preservation.

9 And what about audiovisual materials which may be held by an NGO?

These might include sound, video and film recordings and may well have archival value. As far as sound recordings are concerned, one should distinguish between sound archives and oral history archives, even though they are preserved in the same medium. The difference between them arises from the way in which they are produced. Sound archives are

¹ Information about the type of information, its creator, and the business process that produced it).

created in the context of particular activities according to procedures which may or may not be compulsory. They are part of a business process and are usually not intended as historical or documentary evidence. Oral history archives are created in the context of an historical project, they are therefore not the consequence or reflection of an activity, but bear witness to it.

10 As an example, what sort of sound archives might one find in an NGO?

There are three main types of sound recording:

- the recordings of statutory meetings of the NGO, general assemblies, councils, bureaux, and also those of other work meetings or even of important telephone conversations. The interest of these recordings lies in their comprehensiveness as compared with minutes written up later from notes taken at the time, because we do not always have a full shorthand record. These recordings are irreplaceable when no minutes have been taken, or these have been deliberately shortened or rearranged. But as consequence they can present particular problems of confidentiality.
- live recordings of activities or public demonstrations by the NGO, such as sounds and pictures of a public celebration or of street collecting. They can subsequently have documentary – especially ethnographic – value.
- recording for informational purposes. Efficiency requires an NGO to inform the public of its activities and objectives. If this information goes out through a professional organisation (radio program, TV channel etc.) the documents produced are part of the archive of the organisation which made them, but it is usual for a copy to be given to the representatives

of the NGO who took part in the program. It is useful for the NGO to hold a collection of such recordings. They will be more accessible to it and to future researchers than they would be through the radio or television channel which created them. Informational recordings whether amateur or highly professional, whether for internal or external use, can also be made within the NGO, and again the NGO ought to hold as comprehensive a collection as possible of the materials it has broadcast. Before disposing of tests and rushes, it is worth considering and evaluating the future value of the information they hold, but which was not been used.

III. THE RECORDS OF NGOs, A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

'Records, archives, that's all in the past!' No!

Though in practice records record the past activities of mankind, their use is just as real for the present and for the future.

Good management of records results in an immediate saving of time and money, by ensuring better information transmission within the NGO itself, and thus improving performance and output.

Records also help to ensure that neither the organisation itself, nor those involved in its activities, 'lose their memory'.

In addition, thanks to the preservation of some records as archives, men and women of the future will be able to study and better understand the role of these organisations.

For an NGO, the preservation of its archives is an act of public service designed to meet the known and unknown needs of those men and women today and in the future; it is also a way of overcoming the transience of the here and now. An organisation which does not preserve its archives is destined for oblivion.

INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

11 What has good records management to offer in the daily life of an NGO?

It is said that today's society is the information society. So swift and efficient retrieval of information offers major advantages, particularly in the saving of time and money: The cardinal principle to bear in mind is as follows: **good management of records within an organisation also improves the availability of information and thus its value.**

Above all records must be well managed for **administrative and legal reasons**. Well organised records ensure that rights can be properly asserted in case of litigation. Staff records must be maintained properly - a mass of information such as that relating to careers and pensions. In addition different countries have different legislative requirements, which necessitate the retention of legal, administrative and accounting records for certain time periods.

Information accumulated in records systems can be reused for a variety of purposes by the NGO. It is first-hand information, and money and skill have been invested in gathering it. At the outset documents are created as a result of the work of the NGO: minutes of meetings, letters, reports, ledgers, bills, forms, plans, and that is why they exist. They thus become both management tools, and sources of information about the experience

acquired by the NGO in the course of its activities, sources on which it can draw as required to support decisions and open new cases. They can help to decide for example whether emergency action can be followed up by development work, or on the other hand whether development plans can be sustained in the context of a crisis. NGOs have to take account of the whereabouts and the size of a country, and the circumstances of its population, in order to identify means of supporting independent local administrations. They will be able to extract, from the files on various earlier missions, the information and arguments necessary to set up new projects, and they will avoid errors and wasting time and money by, for example, knowing in advance good local contacts. Aside from official and semi-official records, such information is valuable for the exchange of knowledge and opinion with their partners, and thus for developing new forms of collaboration.

THE MEDIUM OF MEMORY

12 How do archives constitute the internal memory of an NGO?

Records help build the internal memory of an NGO. In organisations in which benefactors, volunteers and professionals work side by side, and where personnel keeps changing, the preservation of records as archives creates a link between the generations. They allow a proper evaluation of the work of older members, at a time when, by choice or by necessity, they have to pass the baton to their successors.

It is a matter of handing on not just experiences but also a corporate spirit. Just as historians and sociologists talk of business culture, so we speak nowadays of “organisational

culture”. Archives bear witness to the fact that “one doesn’t come from nowhere”. They demonstrate the role of the heritage that has been developed in the NGO, the reasons for its creation, and the links that tie it to one or more other associations – whether for example, while having no church affiliation, it still has a religious feel to it, its founders having set out their activities and their principles on the basis of their religious faith, whether it is linked to some political tendency, and what is its world outlook. All this information helps to define the identity of the organisation and to ensure that this identity is not lost. It is at the root of its corporate culture and allows it, in a fully-informed way, to direct and select its options and to choose its methods of work.

13 Can we therefore talk about a ‘shared memory’ in the context of the archives of an NGO?

The activities of NGOs have created links between peoples, individuals and societies. In preserving their archives, they serve a universal function as preservers of memory, and as contributors to the development of new friendships, something fundamental for the future of the world.

By making archives accessible they will contribute to the process of memory, even of mourning, for those populations who have either been ‘forgotten by history’, or who have been victims of natural or civil catastrophes on which the archives of official bodies may be silent, suspected of bias, or no longer in existence. Lack of information about the victims of an authoritarian regime, for example, makes mourning and forgiveness impossible for those who survive. Memory remains an open sore.

A SOURCE FOR ACADEMIC STUDY

14 Why should academics need of the archives of NGOs?

Archives are the raw material of academic study. Certainly contemporary historians, just like sociologists, make use of eyewitness and newspaper accounts in their study of recent events. But an understanding of the real issues inevitably needs further research, based on archives. What would one think of a history of NGOs based simply on newspaper articles?

SOME SUBJECTS FOR POSSIBLE STUDY ARE:

NGO archives are at the crossroads of several possible lines of research, for example:

- **The history of NGOs themselves:** as new but major participants on the international stage in the second half of the 20th century, NGOs are worthy of study in their own right.
- **The history of international organisations.** States and NGOs are the two active partners in international organisations. The activities of states are recorded in public archives. If the archives of NGOs are not preserved there is a risk of a documentary imbalance, and consequently of a lack of academic clarity.
- **The history of the forgotten, of victims.** The archives of NGOs restore life and voice to victims, to prisoners deprived of their civil rights, to oppressed and ethnic minorities, to women, to exploited children, to landless peasants, to those on the fringes of society, and to victims of social exclusion, who are often also 'excluded' from archives.
- **Globalisation.** What is the attitude of northern and southern countries to this phenomenon?

15 Setting up a recordkeeping system would appear to be a fundamental task for an NGO, but how we go about it?

Take deliberate steps to:

- gain the support of the management, especially at senior level
- prepare a list of the documents and files which you use. Include in this list the different media in which these documents are preserved (paper, analogue, digital), and set up procedures for their intellectual and physical management;
- raise awareness and provide information for members, volunteers and partners so as to encourage them to appreciate the issues;
- encourage them to create and preserve working documents, including unofficial preliminary drafts, which will facilitate an understanding of the way in which a subject originally came up, will aid the development of new partnership strategies, and ultimately will constitute an important body of historical evidence.

In this booklet you will find basic guidelines. For further information in English, two of the best sources are



the UK National Archives website (formerly the Public Record Office) at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> and especially its records management pages. International Records Management Trust : www.irmt.org.uk especially its Management of Public Sector Records pages. As you become more expert in managing records you will find that the National Archives of Australia maintains a good resource at www.gov.au/recordkeeping

How?

Your organisation is unique, and so are its records! Get to know them and arrange them properly.

IV. ON A DAILY BASIS: GOOD FILE MANAGEMENT

You should try from the very beginning to introduce good habits in the creation and management of files, without waiting until they have ceased to be current. This section gives very basic advice on good file management in the short term.

MANAGING A FILE WELL

16 When and how should I open a file?

Each **new subject** is entitled to its own file. Bring together all the documents on a particular subject; for example link a letter to its reply, and a principal document to the papers which support it.

Do not leave **single documents** lying about; they risk getting lost. Every document should immediately be put in the appropriate file.

Each file is a **special case**. Its nature is determined by its subject and not by its composition which can vary very widely.

A file should be **homogeneous**, that is to say made up of documents on the same subject. These however can be of a variety of types (such as reports, correspondence, accountancy records etc).

17 What rules should be put in place to ensure the integrity of a file?

Generally speaking it is always better to make a photocopy than to remove an original from a file. Do not remove a document permanently from a file in order to open another. So if you need to make up a file of documents

on a particular subject before starting a project, do not remove an original such as a paper or report from a file relating to previous work. Instead, you will have to use a better method, for instance to photocopy the original for the new file, and put it back in the file it came from, otherwise the original file will become incomprehensible.

In the same way you should not remove a document from the file to which it belongs because, for example, it bears the signature of some important person. Likewise do not create an artificial file by selecting items of this kind from different files. You should maintain the integrity of the file.

If a document is temporarily removed from a file for consultation, indicate the withdrawal in the file by putting in its place a slip, on which the date of the withdrawal and the full name of the person responsible has been noted. The document should be replaced as soon as it is returned, and the slip removed.

18 What order should be used within a file?

In general documents are arranged in chronological order, the oldest at the bottom, and the most recent at the top, so that when one looks at a file it is the most recent item which appears first. This chronological order is not absolute, to the extent that supporting papers should not be separated from the correspondence to which they relate. If a file is dealing with a large and complicated subject, you can open sub-files. However care should be taken not to have too many of them as they may undermine the structure of the main file.

You should fix upon an order for sub-files within a file (alphabetical, chronological, thematic, geographical), moving from the general to the particular.

Like a main file, each sub-file should have a title. Use lighter-coloured file covers for sub-files, and put the full title as well as the sub-title on each cover.

You might also have to open a new part of a file if it becomes physically too large. Large files are difficult to handle and may disintegrate. A file should be no thicker than 3 cm.

A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT MAY REQUIRE MANY FILES.

The establishment, monitoring and control of some of the projects supported by NGOs produce an enormous quantity of paper and supporting documentation. A project involves:

- a series of objectives to be fixed in advance;
- the finding of partners; and a budget;
- a statement of the action needed to attain these objectives;
- a timetable for their achievement.

These projects require the opening of different kinds of file relating to:

- aspects of the project: these are specific files which provide specific information on the project and its beneficiaries;
- stages of the project: files on the logistics of the physical and administrative organisation needed for its establishment, monitoring and control.

Every project at every stage has planning, contact, communication, financial, technical and logistical aspects which produce different types of document: working and funding proposals, draft conventions and agreements, the official description of the project, various reports, draft press releases, expert and delegation reports, etc.

It could therefore become necessary to open sub-files.

Through a series of well arranged files one can follow the whole life cycle of a project, from its first description and the pilot study which preceded it, through assessments of the socio-economic circumstances, the community background and the target group of the project, through study delegations sent by the organisation, through initial and regular contacts for purposes of good relations with the local or governmental authorities of benefiting countries, through the search for partners in the country involved, the basic agreements with the receiving country, the setting up and monitoring of the financial arrangements for the project, and the reports of members of the organisation on the spot, through to the final technical and financial reports on its completion.

A whole section of these files can also relate to the nuts and bolts of the project, and be extremely technical. The building of a school or of a maternity unit for example will demand a variety of professional expertise in the initial study and evaluation of needs, and in the technical supervision of the work.

19 What types of files will I find an NGO?

The following are the different types of files which you may come across in your organisation:

Policy files

These files are specific to your NGO. They develop from its policies, that is to say from the task or tasks which it has undertaken in one or several areas (health, education, environment, habitat etc). For example: aid to the victims of natural disasters or accidents, food aid to displaced populations, support for lepers or victims of AIDS, development policies, education, defence of human rights etc.

These files can differ from each other in terms of their contents. Nevertheless your regular activities will produce a series of files which

deal with projects which are different, but similar within the general scheme of your procedures. As a consequence you may well have set up precedent files as well as policy files.

Executive files

These files result from the structures and systems set up to achieve your objectives. The working methods of your NGO lie within the framework of your country's law on associations. The documents to be found in these files are a consequence and a reflection either of your organisation's **status as an association**: rules, papers relating to general assemblies or congresses, minutes of meetings; or of the **activities of the membership network** of your association: correspondence registers, circulars and membership lists; or of your **management** activities: finance, personnel, policy, chairmanship, and legal matters, as well as relations with governments and partners etc. The files are produced at the level of the official bodies and services of the organisation (president, assemblies, committees, commissions, secretariat...).

General information files

This information is for the use of members, of volunteers, or of the different structures within your organisation (federations, collectives, networks etc), and so may include bulletins, circulars, brochures, and audiovisual documents for the benefit of your members. Sometimes the availability of this information will be the reason for your existence, or your principal function, and its use will be both internal and external: information on human rights, or on ecological problems etc.

Public relations files

The purpose of public relations is to develop public awareness of your existence and to raise funds. They are aimed at the public at large; publications by your organisation, pam-

phlets, posters, press releases, appearances on radio and television both local and national, films, slide shows, exhibitions, 'open door' days, conferences, etc. Remember that all these documents photographs, films, periodicals published in various languages — which are a means of spreading information widely and of attracting outside interest — are an essential element of the history of your NGO. Give them the greatest attention, and be careful to keep complete sets of them. Do not allow these sets to be broken up.

Subject files

Documentation produces thematic files which bring together material of diverse origins, often printed or photocopied, to provide information on a particular subject. You may have constructed files of this kind to help you in your work, but be careful not to remove original or copy documents from your policy files, of which they are an essential part.

20 What procedures should be followed for setting up policy files?

Think of the context within which your tasks advance, and the main stages of their progress, in order to work out their usual development within your organisation. The lifecycle of a task comprises several stages which produce documentation; it is possible for you to work out which of these always create documents, which do so occasionally, in what medium they are produced and in what medium they should be preserved.

You may find this table helpful in retracing the lifecycle of a task (in Roman) in order to decide on the nature of the documents (in italics) which are likely to be found in your archives.

LIFECYCLE OF A PROJECT AND ITS DOCUMENTARY CONSEQUENCES

PROJECT STAGES	TASKS TO BE COMPLETED	QUESTIONS TO ASK	DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS PRODUCED
Before the project starts	Information gathering – producing your own information	Why? When? How?	<i>Pamphlets, information received, witness statements, studies, investigation reports, correspondence, etc</i>
	Setting up a project	Who? Where?	<i>Project description, reports, programs, supporting documents, estimates, etc</i>
	Finding partners		<i>Correspondence, contracts, agreements, grants, etc</i>
	Getting going and informing		<i>Circulars, correspondence, internal information sheets, pamphlets, posters films, photo displays, press releases, interviews, lectures, etc</i>
	Collecting		<i>Petitions, demonstrations, meetings, concerts, sales, subscription appeals, subscription lists, etc</i>
During the project	Organising, managing, controlling		<i>Instructions, notices, correspondence, progress records, summaries, reports and minutes, press reports, etc</i>
After the project	Evaluating		<i>Minutes, enquiries, reports, statistics, final evaluation, technical and financial reports, press reviews, etc</i>
	Publicising		<i>Posters, professional press, pamphlets, films, books, etc</i>

NAMING A FILE

21 What is a good name?

In order to be able to use and make the most of a file, you must identify it, that is give it a title.

The title is made up of a heading which indicates the purpose of the file, and must also include dates: the dates when the file was opened and closed.

A good title should be both accurate and intelligible. It should relate to the contents of the file, be understandable by anyone, and not be open to interpretation.

The title of the file should appear on the outside of the folder which contains it.

22 What process should be followed in fixing on a file title?

Be strict. Ask yourself simple questions. What does this file say? Why are we talking about it? Who has done what, where, and when? Where and at what time did it all take place? What is it?

These questions will help you to work out for each file or sub-file:

Its subject: that is to say the theme or common factor of the documents which make up the file. For example:

- *World environment day*
- *International week for the elderly*
- *Children's rights*
- *Family centre*
- *Management committee*

If you think it necessary to give both a principal and a subsidiary subject, your title should go from the general to the particular:

- *XXX reception centre: carpentry workshop and*
- *XXX reception centre: canteen facilities*
- *Prize for humanitarian reporting:*

working party minutes and

- *Prize for humanitarian reporting: selection of winners.*

In the title you should also mention the action resulting from the existence of the documents to be found in the file or subfile.

Thus for example:

- *Aid to refugees from XXX: assessment of medical needs*
 - *XXX Dairy; standardisation of equipment.*
- Or express the title in the form of an action:
- *Reconstruction of villages*
 - *Construction of a maternity unit*
 - *Assessment of the medical needs of refugees from XXX*

The important thing is to be consistent in the style you use to name your files.

Type of document: generally speaking, a statement of the type of document which makes up a file both explains its contents and offers extra information about the way in which the subject is dealt with. Thus:

- *Sponsorship of cheap canteens; correspondence, report from local managers*
- *'100,000 trees for the Sahel' campaign; press cuttings.*
- *Personnel file.*
- *Reconstruction of the water supply in XXX: Invitations to tender, and estimates;*
- *Architectural plans and sketches;*
- *Photographs.*

Place and date: as far as possible the subject should be defined by place and date. Thus

- *Earthquake, El Asnam, Algeria, October 1980*
- *Demonstration against apartheid in South Africa, London, Great Britain, January 1979*

Author of the documents: it can sometimes be useful to include the author of a document in the file or subfile title where an external organization is involved. Thus:

- *A market research project carried out for the organisation by XXX*

- A specialist project carried out for the organisation by XXX
- An enquiry commissioned by the organization from XXX
- A collection of circulars or pamphlets produced by XXX
- A photographic report produced for the organization by XXX.

The outside dates of the documents: from when to when? You should note in every file and subfile title the dates of the oldest and most recent documents.

Construction of the maternity unit in [village] in [country]: plans and sketches by the architect, [XXX], October 1993- February 1996.

23 What is a reference number?

The reference number identifies a file, and at the same time simplifies its storage and retrieval. It can be a simple number, one or more digits (a decimal system), one or more letters (an alphabetical system), or a combination of the two (an alphanumerical system). In the following examples, the shelf marks of these two files are MC/1 and MC/2:

MC/1 Management committee, 3 December 1998.

MC/2 Management Committee, 5 December 1999.

More information about reference number systems is given below in response to question 35 below.

PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENT...

24 Are there immediate precautionary steps to be taken for the proper physical preservation of the documents?

Yes. You should be aware that modern paper is acid and can destroy itself. Modern inks made

from synthetic substances offer no guarantee of permanent stability. Use acid-free (ph neutral) paper for all important documents, and pen and ink when marking them up. Consider whether it would be worth keeping a microfiche or digitised copy of such documents.

In addition, when storing documents, do not use rubber bands (they dry out and break), nor pins nor paper clips (they rust and may damage the document).

Use folders, not binders or hanging folders, and make sure that files are preferably packed into standardized boxes.

25 What steps should be taken for the storage of a file?

In your office store files of the same kind in chronological order (minutes, correspondence series), alphabetical order (personnel files), or geographical order (development projects, country by country)

Use folders and sub-folders to separate files. Put the summary title on each, and place the files in large envelopes or in archive boxes. Give each envelope or box a reference number so that the files can be identified and easily found. Make a list of your current files so that they are accessible for research. Put the reference numbers of the files on the list, and keep the list carefully up to date.

26 What should be checked before a file is closed?

All duplicates and blanks should be removed. Ensure that no important element is missing, and print out important e-mail messages. Check that each document is identifiable, that is to say that the three questions who? when? and where? can be answered at once. Date photographs and press cuttings, showing the newspaper from which they have come. Identify the author of manuscript notes and

reports, the people who appear in photographs, the exact place where something happened or a photograph was taken, etc.

- Check the order of the file.
- Check the title and contents.

Complete the file title with the date on which it was closed.

GOOD PRESERVATION DEPENDS ON DISPOSAL

27 What should be disposed of?

A records system is only effective if it is directly relevant to current needs. Disposing of files which are not longer required for immediate organisational need, for medium-term legislative or financial reasons, or for archival reasons is as vital as creating them properly in the first place.

When disposing of records you can do two things with them: destruction, or, if your NGO does not have its own facilities for archival storage, transfer to an archives repository for permanent preservation for historical and other research purposes.

To begin with, destroy only papers which are of no use: duplicates, rough notes and first drafts of documents (unless the development process of a project is of great importance), and the manuscripts of published documents (unless they show a marked difference from the final version). Reference information documents which are not needed anymore, records to be destroyed according to the records retention schedule.

You may perhaps have created several copies of the same file for the use of your partners, and your funding agencies. Keep only the original file, and make sure that it is complete. Avoid spreading identical documents around your NGO. Parallel series of files can develop in large organisations, and you can see the pre-

servation of the same material in different services. This material can be made up of documents which relate to the work of other services or of the NGO as a whole, minutes of general meetings, memoranda etc. Here again a single complete file is sufficient.

Do not keep out-of-date documentation from other organisations.

28 Are there precautions to be taken before destroying files?

Be careful to retain **originals** (documents both signed and dated) which alone have evidential value. Make quite sure that what you think is a duplicate really is before you throw it away. Find out from the management of the [DAL: 'national or a'] local archive service about the **legal requirements** in force for the preservation of documents in the country where your organisation has its headquarters, and in those in which it operates. These requirements will relate for the most part to legal, financial and accounting records.

You should always build in a margin to allow for the fact that legislation on the period for which a document must legally be preserved can be revised.

Be aware of the interests both of your organisation and of individuals when looking at a document, keep in mind the **need for proof**, and ask yourself whether sooner or later it might have to be brought before a court of law. Regimes change; archives are for ever.

In case of destruction of large amounts of records, the action should be authorized by the management, and a destruction authorization should be signed along with the list of records to be destroyed. In case of personal data special care is needed, and such records should preferably be shredded so that the confidentiality is ensured.

V. THE LONG TERM: LIST AND ORGANISE YOUR FILES

This section gives advice on planning a records management system for the long term.

FINDING OUT WHERE DOCUMENTS COME FROM

29 How can I find out how files circulate?

Find and preserve all the successive organizational charts of the structure of your organisation. On the basis of these charts, set out the remit of each directorate, service or department, and its development. In this way you will be able to work out who has produced and managed these files, and who, at any given moment, has been responsible for them. In order to carry out its work (emergency response on behalf of earthquake victims, school building, etc), an NGO embarks on a certain number of activities. Some of these can be grouped into broad categories or functions, and then handed over to an agency or service – that is to say to a body made up of human and material resources. In some groups where the work is very professionalised, certain functions can be highly developed within the association, just as they would be in a business, and will therefore produce a considerable quantity of archive material – legal and litigation sections, personnel, accountancy, public relations, etc. Remember, however, that structure charts are ephemeral management tools, while the main work of the NGO is continuous. It is important to appreciate the difference. A function is an abstract reality but its existence,

and the activities of which it is composed, can be defined by answers to the questions why? how? when? Once you have identified function and activities, you will see how different series of records ‘belong’ to an activity and function e.g.

FUNCTION	ACTIVITIES	RECORDS
EDUCATION	funding teacher training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•correspondence with training colleges•correspondence with funding bodies
	Appointing teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•staff files•Pension files
	Building schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•plans•Architects' files

30 Can one plan the management of some groups of documents in advance?

The legal framework within which records relating to various functions are created vary from one country to another, but there are usually fixed forms and procedures, so that clearly defined types of documents can usually be found in the following categories:

- Administrative and organisational papers: statutes, minutes and reports from assemblies, committees, and commissions; correspondence, membership lists etc.
- Documents connected with international law: extra-territorial status, relations with and control by UN organisations (PNUD etc.);
- Financial documents: gifts, settlements, bequests, expressions of support, grants, gifts in kind etc.;
- Accounting records: balance sheets final accounts, reports;
- Documents relating to property;
- Insurance;
- Human resources;
- Financial control and tax records (depending on the legal requirements of each country);
- Publicity.

It is clear just from reading this list that some of these documents clearly have historical interest while others could be disposed of after a certain time.

They can thus be brought into retention and disposal schedules. Such a schedule includes descriptions of the records to be destroyed, and information about the lifespan of each category.

This is a first step towards records management, a source of economy and efficiency in the creation, appraisal and preservation of records.

31 What is records management?

The purpose of records management is to define for each type of function/activity the documents which should be created, and what they should contain; to say in what form the documents should be produced and stored; to determine consultation needs and disposal dates in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements; to evaluate the risks arising from the unavailability of documentary evidence; and to investigate improvements in cost effectiveness, efficiency, decision making, and in the creation, organisation and management of documents.



Records Management is "a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records". ISO 15489-1:2001. *Information and Documentation. Records Management.*

ARRANGING RECORDS

32 What is the value of a classification scheme for files?

Even though it may be simple, a classification scheme for files [DAL: 'is essential']. Such a scheme should give a structure to all your files according to a practical and logical system. It makes it possible to give each file its own fixed and permanent place, and this makes

it easier to go directly to that file. A classification scheme should make clear the contents of the files, and the subjects they deal with. It should be appropriate to each organisation, and flexible, since the functions and activities of an organisation can change.

33 How can I draw up a classification scheme?

Find fixed points which will allow you to determine the series or headings for your classification scheme:

- list all activities linked to the legal status of your organisation.
- list all your management functions.
- list all your specific activities along with the populations affected by them.

Set out all these activities in relation to each other in the form of a listing or flowchart.

The files you have can then be slotted into the appropriate classification. These will be divided into series or headings. Each series can be divided into subseries or subheadings, which can also be subdivided and so on.

34 Should a classification scheme be the same for electronic as for paper archives?

Yes. In spite of the fact that there are numerous ways to access information held electronically, it is important to have an overall plan of action, and to set out the same classification scheme for electronic archives as for paper archives, following the same procedures and the same logic. Make sure that all microforms, and audiovisual archives, whether electronic or machine readable, have their place in the classification, since their value has nothing to do with their physical form, but relates to the activities which produced them. Revise the classification, and adjust it as neces-

sary so as to be sure that every type of document, regardless of medium, will find its place in it.

35 Why is it important to have a classification scheme common to documents in any medium?

It is common for documents relating to a particular activity to be partly on paper and partly electronic. If there is the same classification scheme for both, it is easier to manage the business in its entirety, establish the links between the documents, and give the same retention periods to each.

EXAMPLE OF A CLASSIFICATION SCHEME

A classification scheme for an association providing international aid, and based in UK: (first general level)

- A** Set of foundation documents, statutes, etc
- B** Set of structure charts
- C** Files for statutory activities (congresses, general meetings, committees) minutes and resolutions
- D** Files for the president and general secretariat
- E** Legal service
- F** Human resources
- G** Finance and accounting
- H** Internal memoranda: house magazine
- I** Publicity
- J** Files on international aid programmes

In each of these series it is important to identify the files produced by the NGO.

For example in section I, the way in which the NGO carries out its programmes, their timing and/or their geographical location can produce subseries within the classification scheme e.g.

J International aid programmes

J1 Ghana

J1/1 1999

J1/2 2000

J1/3 2001

or

J2 Gambia

J2/1 Reception centre 1

J2/2 Reception centre 2

J2/3 Reception centre 3

Files in series or subseries can be arranged in a chronological or alphabetical order (programmes arranged by year, personnel files), or in a combination of alphabetical and subject order (geographical order is a form of subject classification). The statutes of an organisation for example can be preserved on paper, in digitised form, or in microform, but all three media should be placed within section A, Set of foundation documents as the informational content refers in each case to that category. (Of course, they will probably have to be stored separately.

So, literature, information and public relations files can become specific series, depending on the structure of the association (service with public relations responsibilities, press officer), or on where they were kept (existence of a collection of photographs, films or posters within the organisation, etc), and may be found in a number of places. They can either be part of files where they have an evidential role (and they should be left there; no file should be taken apart in order to create an artificial collection), or they will be found with the service responsible for documentation and public relations. **In the latter case the classification scheme will be adapted to the functions which appear in the organisation chart.**

USE REFERENCE NUMBERS TO FIND ONE'S WAY ABOUT

36 What reference numbering system should one use?

There are a variety of schemes that can be used; the most important thing is to use the chosen scheme consistently. An alphanumerical system (a combination of letters and numbers) generally offers greatest flexibility and clarity in reference numbering, and can be used to meet the requirements of NGOs, without any need for them to acquire advanced expertise in such systems.

For example:

The series letter corresponds to the major elements or to the most important subjects within the classification scheme: e.g. using the A-J scheme above we might alternatively devise a classification and numbering scheme such as:

J International aid programmes

A number after the letter allows for the setting up of subseries corresponding to particular subjects or types of document:

J1 Emergency actions

J2 Development programmes

J3 Child sponsorship

A further number after the letter corresponds to the file:

J1/35 Earthquake at XXX

J1/36 Flooding at XXX

J2/1 Construction of a maternity unit in Country A

J3/203 Sponsorship file on Child AB

It is also possible to use the decimal system; it offers ten numbers from 0 to 9, which can be split into ten groups, divisible in their turn into 10 subgroups. It is a system which has been developed for the subject arrangement

of printed books in libraries, but it limits to ten the number of main series within the classification scheme, amongst which the archive files relating to the different activities of the NGO can be distributed. E.g.

Main series can be designated by a round number:

- 100** *Administration*
- 200** *Staff management*
- 500** *Programmes*

Tens and units can be made up to indicate subseries:

- 510** *Emergency programmes*
- 520** *Development programmes*

And so on:

- 511** *Emergency programmes in Africa*
- 512** *Emergency programmes in Asia*

These sub-subseries can be divided by the use of a two part reference number:

- 511-1** *Emergency programmes in Saharan Africa*
- 511-2** *Emergency programmes in Subsaharan Africa.*

classification system. You can use a thesaurus based on your work activities for the choice of key words.

If you have had a well arranged records management systems it should be straightforward to find records which you have decided should be kept permanently, even if 95% of the rest of the fonds has been disposed of. If you have inherited files that were never part of a system then you will have to set up a system retrospectively to deal with these archives. There are international archival professional standards which you should be aware of for describing and providing access to archives; these apply whether records are paper or electronic and can be used to facilitate possible information exchange and the compatibility of information systems.

- The international standard for archival description ISAD/G
- The international archival name authority standard for corporate bodies, persons and families ISAAR/CPF

Information about these standards can be found at www.ica.org.

DESCRIBING FOR EASIER ACCESS

37 How does one find a file in a properly arranged filing system?

Lists of all the files are necessary in order to establish a connection between the content of an archive and its practical or scholarly use. Make a complete list of all the files, group them according to the classification scheme, set up a manual or electronic catalogue, and keep it up to date. Make sure that all your colleagues are aware of its existence – and use it! File titles should include the key words of personal names or geographical terms, which will enable you to set up a database as part of the process of incorporating files into the

38 What use can one make of electronic records management systems?

The purchase of an electronic records management system enables you to set up an electronic classification scheme, hold records electronically, relate those electronic records to their paper counterparts, allocate and implement retention and disposal dates automatically, implement security measures and so. Organisational and external documents can be digitized and added to the database. If the system is web-based it can also allow for global access to an NGO's records by staff working away from the headquarters office. It is essential to prepare and plan the purchase and implementation of such a system with great

consideration, as a good start determines the final outcome. Some guidance and specifications can be found at e.g. from the UK National Archives at

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/electronicrecords/function.htm>

European Community guidelines at

<http://www.cornwell.co.uk/moreq.html>

US National Archives and Records

Administration (NARA) guidelines at

http://www.archives.gov/records_management/policy_and_guidance/system_functions_electronic_recordkeeping_examples.html

39 Are there precautions to be taken in making certain documents available?

Yes. While certain documents produced by an NGO are destined to be made available widely and without delay (for example, publications and reports) the availability of others may have to be **delayed** either because they are initially for internal use only, or because of their confidential nature.

In particular:

- Files containing material which if released would be harmful to the reputation or the privacy of an individual: such as those relating to periods of imprisonment, or to adoption, or to medical matters where names are mentioned.
- Files containing documents which would threaten the safety of individual people - such as political refugees – if they became known.
- Documents relating to the semi-official business of other organisations, or to relations with governments and with other inter- or non-governmental organisations.
- The organisation's personnel files.
- Officials' confidential files.

What should be done with them?

They should not be destroyed, because the information they hold could be valuable in the

future. Care should be taken of them, and access rules set up after consultation with a professional archivist.

Access to sound archives presents its own specific problems. These are linked in particular to the copyright of the interviewer and the rights of the interviewee to exercise control over the use of his reputation and his words.

GOOD MANAGEMENT OF ELECTRONIC RECORDS

40 What practical steps should be taken for the arrangement of electronic archives on a computer?

Set up headings and subheadings which correspond to the major divisions or subdivisions of the classification scheme already established for paper files – and with exactly the same names. You can use the folder system of a word processing application to mirror the hierarchical level of your classification scheme. Fix upon a system of naming computer files which will be adopted throughout the organisation so that the file can be located within the framework of the classification scheme in the same way as a reference number locates a paper file, and save the files under the appropriate subheading.

41 Which electronic documents should be preserved and which destroyed?

The rules for paper records apply equally to e-records. Computers should be regularly cleared, so that e-mails which do no more than arrange meetings, or are personal messages, first drafts of documents, and the equivalent of what would be destroyed if it were on paper, are removed. If you destroy paper records in a certain series according to the

instructions in the retention schedule, you should make sure that e-records are deleted from computers too.

42 Should documents that exist in hard copy be preserved in electronic form?

This depends on the research and information needs of the NGO and its members. While for ergonomic reasons some people prefer to work on paper documents, it is often useful to keep an electronic version of it for reference purposes.

43 What particular precautions must be taken to ensure the survival of electronic documents?

Electronic documents need to be protected against accidents, hacking, viruses, and technical or user error. A password should be used to limit access to specific users. Documents should be saved regularly, and antivirus systems kept up to date. Security copies should be made on tape, video or CD or other media, and stored in off-site secure premises. Note, however, that these copies are only meant for back-up purposes. This means that the long-term preservation issues must be addressed separately; the NGO should produce a disaster plan or business contingency plan which addresses the electronic records explicitly.

44 What happens when there is a change of system or hardware within an organisation?

It is important to know which documents are to be preserved permanently, and to be sure that the new system can read or convert the organisation's electronic archives whether they

are on disk, tape or CD. All e-mails and computer files need to be converted to the new system, and if that is not possible, then they should be printed out and/or preserved in an ASCII file.

45 When should electronic archives be printed out?

In all cases when one cannot be sure of downloading them successfully onto a new system.

Furthermore, in some countries certain documents have to be preserved on paper for legal reasons. It is important to be aware of the legislation in force when management of electronic records is being set up.

46 Where can one find out more about the management of electronic archives?

The following websites which can be consulted. Remember that you can always contact your country's National Archives or, if it doesn't exist, the ICA, because the same principles apply to public as to private archives as far as the preservation of electronic archives is concerned.

The Archives of Ontario (Canada)

<http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/rimdocs/index.html>

National Library of Australia – Preserving Access to Digital Information

<http://www.nla.gov.au/padi/index.html>

UK National Archives:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/electronicrecords/advice/>

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESERVATION OF ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS

In view of the importance our society places on information technology and on telecommunications, preservation of electronically created documents will be one of the great challenges of the twenty first century. In practice, the speed of technological change means that even in the short term we are no longer sure of being able to read the electronic documents created even a few years ago. Three ways out of this difficulty have been suggested:

Migration: updating old computer files by transferring them to more recent systems. The problem here is that each computer file needs to be dealt with separately.

Emulation: simulating the performance of an older computer on a more recent one by allowing the older system to be used to read the older files. The drawback is that it is only a simulation, and there is a constant need for updating and adaptation to new platforms.

Encapsulation is a method still at the development stage. It consists of recording not only the data on a file but also the information which describes their organisation – the digitised object and the instructions for its use. Its complexity is the weakness of this solution.

But what can the ordinary user do? In the first place, you should use current file formats, readable by several different systems on several platforms. So for textual documents you could use RTF (Rich Text Format (though there may be odd format changes when you transfer a file from one word processing system to another). The commonest format on the internet, and which seems in practice to have become standard, is PDF (Portable Document Format) based on the PostScript language.

But do not forget that preservation is also important for hardware – disks, removable hard disks, CDROMs etc. While these items may function well in the short

term, what will happen in ten years' time, and even more in a century? Digital media (CD, DVD) seem to be relatively the most effective. If you still have to keep disks, you should consider reactivating them regularly simply by putting them in a reader and running them through.

RETRIEVING LOST MEMORY

47 How can gaps in the archive be filled?

Emergency operations in a local situation demanding instant action may produce only a fragmentary record. Many initiatives undertaken in emergency circumstances may leave no trace in the files. Here's some advice for this situation:

Bring together any scattered written records. Try to obtain statements from former members of the organisation which will help to reconstruct the outline of its history, and record the chronology, the development and the significant events in its past.

Seek out sources in the press and the media, and in public archives or those of other organisations. With this in mind you should consider gathering and preserving **newspaper articles** about your NGO. They are important because, in the absence of any other record, they preserve the history of minor events. They also provide a view of press relations and of journalistic opinion of the NGO, as well as reflecting its image and the development of that image in the media.

As for documents which your NGO received from other organisations (reviews, invitations to demonstrations etc), they should not necessarily be excluded. They are, after all, an indication of networking and contacts at a particular moment.

Find and investigate places which might hold documents of interest to the NGO. Collections of documents (films, posters, photographs etc) and documentation files have often been set up in organisations which specialise in such things (libraries, documentation and media centres etc) and should not be overlooked either as additional sources of information.

48 What support could I get from former staff?

Former staff can place documents in time and context, by recalling how, where, at what date and in what circumstances they were created. They can identify individual or locations on as well as the date or place at which they were taken.

49 What might be the importance of personal papers for an NGO?

Documents belonging to a private individual can be a mine of information, sometimes unavailable elsewhere, on the activities of the NGO. These include correspondence between members, personal notes of meetings, private diaries giving a record of daily events and accounts of meetings and of programmes in which the writer has been involved, and appointment diaries which contain private observations, or indicate a network of personal relations. In addition the correspondence of chairmen, committee or commission members, or volunteers, the documentation about the preparation for programmes or projects, and the leaflets or posters from the early years of the NGO have often disappeared or have remained in private hands. Former staff or volunteers of an NGO often feel the urge to write their own history and make use of these documents. Even though they may not wish to relinquish their

archives, it is important that the owners make known the existence of these documents, and allow them to be copied for the NGO, as well as taking steps to ensure that they survive after their owner's death.

50 Can a volunteer programme for the collection of oral history go some way towards making up for the absence of original documents?

Yes, but the work is difficult, and requires a social science researcher who is a specialist in sociological and ethnographical field work. It would be this person's task to establish in advance a set of questions, and a model identification sheet, carrying the fixed objective information which would be necessary for the identification, processing and use of each conversation: date, place, name of interviewee, biographical and career information, current employment, subjects to be discussed, name and position of the interviewer etc.

There is a real need to build multidisciplinary partnerships to carry out this work successfully.

VI. A PLACE FOR THE RECORDS

51 What kind of building is suitable?

To begin with, the preservation of records and archives is the responsibility of the organisation as a whole rather than of the individuals who manage them. The place for the records is not, therefore, those people's homes.

The building chosen should not just be a dump for stocks of unused documentation, or for material which is otherwise useless or cumbersome.

It should not be open to everyone. It should not be possible for anyone to come and store their own files as they wish, and then to come back and retrieve those they want in an unregulated way. Archives, those records selected for permanent preservation, require a higher standard of care than records which have a short life span.

It should be cleaned regularly.

Its temperature should be maintained at a constant level and checked with a thermometer and hygrometer. Most archives should be stored at a temperature of not more than 18° C, and at a humidity of less than 60%.

52 What are the 'enemies' of archives?

They are numerous and you should be aware of them, assess the risk and the consequences they present, since dust, water and humidity, fire, sunlight, moonlight and artificial light, rodents, flying and crawling insects, mould, and even ill-disposed or careless human beings pose a threat .

53 What precautions should I take?

There are means of protection from each risk. Try to take as many preventative measures as possible:

Pack your files properly:

For archives use acid free folders and boxes. For records which are being stored prior to destruction use strong standard size boxes.

Do not fold newspapers and posters; if possible store them flat and unfolded. Store sound archives vertically and away from any magnetic field.

Do not use plastic file covers, or materials which can degrade or rust, such as staples or metal film boxes.

Do not use elastic bands which dry out and break, or pins and paperclips which rust.

Protect files against water and humidity which can cause mould:

Store files at least 15cms above the floor, in order to protect them from flooding.

Check humidity levels regularly.

Note that water pipes should never pass above archive shelving.

Check that the roof is sound.

Protect files against fungus:

Dust files regularly.

Make sure that cupboards and shelving are off the floor.

Use cupboards and containers with bases.

Protect them against fire:

Be aware of fire protection standards in force in the country where the archives are held.

Keep away from flammable materials.

Check the electricity systems of the building. Provide manual, powder or CO₂ fire extinguishers.

No smoking in the building.

Protect files against natural and artificial light which damages paper and discolours inks:

Provide blinds, shutters or thick curtains for the windows.

Use only low lighting in the building.

Protect files against rodents (mice, rats, fieldmice):

Treat wooden surfaces.

Make sure there is a regular rat killing programme.

Block up all holes.

Make sure that external conduits are water tight.

Protect files against flying insects ...

Cover the windows with fine netting.

... and against crawling insects (termites, cockroaches):

Allow minimal natural light.

Keep the building well ventilated.

In countries where termites are a problem, remember that basements are the worst possible places for storing archives.

Termites do not like daylight.

Protect files against theft:

Provide keys or padlocks for the outside door of the building; lock it.

Let only the one or two people who are responsible for the building have access to the key.

Stamp every paper if possible; if not, then every paper considered sensitive or essential for the organisation (an inked stamp showing the logo of the organisation is enough).

Set up a supervised and dedicated consultation area.

Protect files against loss or disorder:

Never lend originals outside the organization. Make photocopies.

If compelled to do so, make two copies of a precise list of the documents lent and the date for their return, and get it signed by the borrower. Remember to put a slip into the file in the place of the document which has been withdrawn.

54 What particular precautions are needed in dealing with sound archives?

Be careful to provide a reference copy, known as a master, of the original so as to ensure its survival.

Make consultation copies to a convenient and economical standard. For example for an analogue audiovisual recording, the master might be betacam, and the reference copy VHS. Since the arrival of digitization, the choice is more and more between CD and DVD whose durability is improving all the time.

Avoid proximity to a magnetic field.

55 How should files be stored?

Once the folders and the boxes which hold them have been given an identifying reference number so that they can easily be found, you have a choice as to how you arrange them.

By series:

The physical arrangement of the files reflects the classification scheme of the archives. This method demands an elaborate reference numbering system. It has the additional drawback that gaps need to be left to accommodate future intakes of documents. It is always difficult to foresee how large these will be, and you could be forced to move or reshelve quantities of boxes.

or by order of arrival:

That is to say by the order in which the boxes arrive. This system is very economical in terms of space if you have a lot of files to manage. Each box is given a simple number in the order of its arrival. It then becomes essential to keep an up to date concordance, either manual or electronic, to enable you to find the files, because the intellectual order given them by the classification scheme no longer corresponds to their order on the shelf. You can also make a plan of the location of the files within.

56 And in dealing with electronic archives?

They also need to be stored in the dark, away from any magnetic field, and the media should be packaged in appropriate boxes so as to avoid any deformation or loss of content. Establish a timetable for regular testing of readability.

57 What should be done if a document is torn, damp or stained?

Do not use sellotape to repair a torn document. For small tears one can use adhesive Japanese paper.

Never dampen paper: remove dust only with a rubber or a brush.

Dry a document accidentally dampened between two sheets of blotting paper; change them as soon as they have absorbed a certain quantity of moisture.

58 What should be done about the cost of good archive management?

Well run archives save time and increase efficiency... but demand investment in personnel and equipment, as well as a building. Consequently you need a budget.

It is always possible to place semi-current records with a commercial storage company. Archival records can be placed in the custody of an agency (state or specialist archives repository) which specialises in the care of archives. You can make this an element in a cultural programme to raise awareness of the history of your organisation.

It is for you to decide on an appropriate solution for both your working records and those of historical value.

59 Where can one get specialist equipment?

Ask advice from an archive service or professional archival association in your own country.

VII. TO HELP YOU

60 Where can I get help?

NGOs can help you with advice and partnership, and so can public archive services and professional archival associations.

The International Council on Archives

60 rue des Francs-Bourgeois

75003 Paris, France

Email address : ica@ica.org

Website : <http://www.ica.org/>

This is a non-governmental organisation created in 1948 under the auspices of UNESCO. It works to preserve and promote the archival heritage of the world by means of international co-operation amongst archive services. It brings together professional archivists, their associations, and archival institutions which share their knowledge skill and experience. Training seminars, workshops, meetings of branches and sections, including that for international associations, like the four-yearly congresses, are held regularly in all parts of the world and are open to anyone. In common with archival institutions and associations throughout the world, the ICA promotes information exchange and research for, and use of, guidelines and standards in all aspects of the archivist's work.

The Section for Professional Associations is setting up a project to be called 'Archives solidaires'. This project is aimed at the co-ordination of efforts, within the international archival community, to undertake aid projects in other countries, so as to create the tools and expertise needed in developing or transitional societies.

The Union of International Associations

Rue Washington 40, B-1050 Bruxelles,
BELGIUM

Telephone: 32-2-640.18.08 –

Fax: 32-2-643.61.99

Email: uia@uia.be

Website: <http://www.uia.org/>

This is an independent non-profitmaking, non-governmental, and non-political organization. Its work is completely dedicated to the community of international associations, which it serves by undertaking studies, research, and other initiatives.

As beneficiary of a rich documentary heritage in an area which has been little studied, that of international non-governmental associations, the UIA has two main objectives in its work: ensuring that information is up to date, and analysis and research into what lies behind appearances. Amongst its numerous publications are The Yearbook of International Organizations and Transnational Associations / Associations Transnationales which appears every two months, and deals with the administrative, technical and broadly political problems which international NGOs encounter as organisations, quite apart from those they meet in the course of their specific activities

UNESCO

Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris

Website: <http://www.unesco.org>

Unesco was set up in 1945 to 'contribute to the preservation of peace and security by encouraging ever closer collaboration between nations, through education, knowledge and culture, so as to ensure a universal respect for justice and the law, for human rights and for basic freedom for all, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion as recognised universally by the United Nations Charter.' It supports technical, archival programmes by financing audit, technical and aid assignments and has its own archive service: Telephone: 01 45 68 19 45 or 19 46
Website: <http://www.unesco.org/general/fre/infoserv/archives>

It is also possible to consult its thesaurus and to make use of it, subject to certain conditions: <http://www.ulcc.ac.uk/unesco/>

The archive services and the professional archival associations in your own country

For information about laws and standards which apply to archives.

For guidance on whether it is possible that they may take charge of private archives through deposit agreements which guarantee your ownership.

For information about the addresses of suppliers of technical equipment.

You will find their addresses and links to their sites through the UNESCO Archives Portal :

http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_archives/pages/Archives/

International NGOs and NGOs which already have experience of managing archives

They can be found through the International Council on Archives' Section for international organisations.

www.ica.org > Sections

In addition a private website for humanitarian associations has some very useful pages on records management at:

<http://www.aidworkers.net/admin/records.html>

An organization specialized on information and documentation on human rights : HURIDOCS.

You will find there many basic tools and advice, standards, vocabularies, references:

<http://www.huridocs.org>

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