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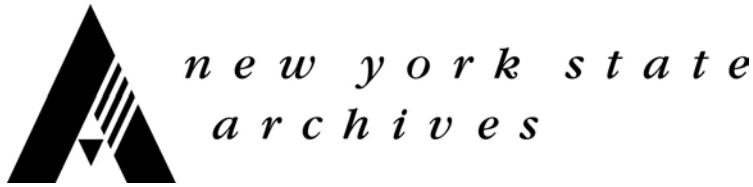
# Archival Needs Assessment Guidelines and Template

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# Archival Needs Assessment Guidelines

## Background

Public or private organizations (governments, historical societies, libraries, not-for-profits, businesses, schools) undertake needs assessments to evaluate and plan for archival program development. A comprehensive needs assessment can pinpoint problems, recommend solutions, set priorities, and guide the development of archival activity. These guidelines will provide anyone conducting a needs assessment with the necessary information to develop a sound, practical planning tool for archival program development.

## Who Conducts the Needs Assessment?

Because of the specialized knowledge necessary for conducting an archival needs assessment, only experienced archivists should be considered. Depending on circumstances, the assessment should be conducted either by qualified staff or a hired consultant.

SEE:

LaFever, Raymond, *Records Management Consultants. Publication #44*. Albany: New York State Archives, New York State Education Department, 2000.

## Elements of the Needs Assessment

The needs assessment should describe the current status of each element below, then provide realistic and attainable recommendations for improvement for each element.

### 1. Elements

#### 1.1 Introductory/Background Statement

The needs assessment should begin with brief background information about the organization (when established, where located, hours open, when archival program was established), the date of the review or visit, and the names and titles of staff consulted. It should also include information about the efforts the organization has made to improve its archival program or archival activities, either on its own or with grant funds (training for staff, budget increases, supplies and equipment purchased).

## **1.2 Purpose and Type of Assessment**

The assessment should discuss why the organization wants to conduct a needs assessment—what situation or circumstances have led up to the needs assessment. It also should indicate the type of assessment to be undertaken, such as a comprehensive archival needs assessment, assessment concerning the facility, various procedures, preservation, or arrangement and description.

SEE:

McCarthy, Paul H., *Archives Assessment and Planning Workbook*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989.

SEE:

New York State Archives and Records Administration, *Strengthening New York's Historical Records Programs: A Self-Study Guide*. Albany: New York State Education Department, 1989.

## **1.3 Legal Authority and Purpose**

The assessment should note and review documentation relating to the legal status and authority for the organization to operate and acquire records (e.g. enabling legislation, resolutions, policies and procedures). An organization should include a formal statement of its purpose. In the event the organization has no such documentation, the needs assessment should include a recommendation that the organization develop one as well as specify any special considerations that the organization needs to address.

SEE:

McCarthy, Paul H., *Archives Assessment and Planning Workbook*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989.

## **1.4 Administration**

The assessment should indicate whether the organization is independent or part of a larger institution. If the archival program exists within an organizational unit or structure of a larger institution, then is it compatible with the goals and functions of that institution? Whether the organization has relationships with any other organizations (relating to cooperative collecting, for instance) should also be noted. The assessment should provide recommendations describing administrative changes or realignments that may enhance the status or credibility of archival activities. Other recommendations relating to cooperative collecting relationships or any other administrative issues of concern, should also be addressed.

## **1.5 Policy Review**

The needs assessment should review existing policies and procedures, including enabling legislation and resolutions (for local governments), mandates and char-

ters (for historical records repositories), and other governing documents as well as policies that relate to ownership and custody of archival records. The assessment should provide recommendations for improving or creating requisite policies and procedures.

#### **1.6 Financial Resources**

The needs assessment should evaluate the organization's budget to determine if it provides dependable, adequate financial resources to carry out the program's stated purpose. The assessment may make recommendations regarding adequate funding levels for the program and strategies for increasing funding levels.

#### **1.7 Personnel**

This element of the assessment should discuss the number of staff working with archival records, their background and training, types of positions held, and current responsibilities. The assessment should provide recommendations for staffing levels and the expertise needed to sustain and develop the program, and may provide suggestions for staff development.

#### **1.8 Physical Facility**

The needs assessment should describe the physical characteristics of the records storage facility, including the physical construction of the building, interior makeup, and environmental conditions. The assessment should also recommend needs to be done to bring conditions to an adequate level.

#### **1.9 Active Records**

While some organizations acquire and manage collections of records transferred or donated by records creators, many maintain their own administrative records. The assessment should address the management of these institutional records from creation to disposition. The assessment should discuss current operating procedures and identify areas where the organization could take steps during the creation or active phase of the records' life cycle to improve access and ensure their longevity.

#### **1.10 Increasing Archival and Manuscript Holdings (Acquisition/Appraisal)**

The assessment should note whether the organization has a formally adopted written acquisition policy that identifies the types of records the archives will acquire, whether it documents the acquisitions process (e.g., records transfers, deeds of gift), and whether it documents the provenance of all accessions. Where appropriate, the assessment should provide recommendations on collection development strategies. The assessment should note if all acquisitions are appraised in order to identify permanently valuable materials. For institutional/ governmental records, the assessment should address whether the organization has evaluated non-permanent records for historical value, or uses State Archives or other records re-

tention and disposition schedules to identify permanent records. In cases where appraisal is not currently undertaken, the assessment should advise the organization on how to identify historical or permanent records. The assessment should address the development of acquisition and appraisal policies and procedures if none or inadequate ones exist.

SEE:

Backman, Prudence, *Appraisal of Local Government Records for Historical Value. Technical Information Series #50*. Albany: New York State Archives and Records Administration, New York State Education Department, 1996.

Cox, Richard J., *Managing Institutional Archives: Foundational Principles and Practices*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.

Ham, Gerald F., *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993.

Huth, Geof, *Using Records Retention and Disposition Schedules: How Long to Keep Records and When to Destroy Them*. Publication # 41. Albany: New York State Archives, New York State Education Department, 2000.

Robinson, Tim and Paul Brunton, "Accessioning." In *Keeping Archives*, 2nd ed., Judith Ellis, ed. Sydney: Australian Society of Archivists Inc., 1993, p. 207–221.

## **1.11 Security**

The assessment should describe the organization's current security measures, including door locks, limited access (who has keys), and alarms, and provide recommendations for ensuring basic security. Recommendations should discuss the handling of records by researchers and research room security procedures in general.

SEE:

Stielow, Frederick J., "Archival Security." In *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*, James Gregory Bradsher, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 207–217.

## **1.12 Preserving Records**

The needs assessment should include a general review of the quantity of records and their general physical condition. The report should note if the organization undertakes preservation activities. Preservation activities include maintaining environmental controls; providing safe, secure and appropriate storage; staff and

user education for handling records; and reformatting (e.g. microfilming, photocopying, etc.). The report should also note whether the principles of archival appraisal govern the selection of materials for preservation. This section should indicate whether the organization addresses damage through intervening conservation treatments, and if so, whether it uses methods consistent with current professional standards. Recommendations should be provided for facility improvement, environmental controls, and proper storage of archival material. After a careful review of archival records, the assessment may recommend records that are good candidates for special conservation treatment, microfilming, or other reformatting.

SEE:

Barclay, Morgan, *Introduction to Micrographics. Technical Information Series #11*. Albany: New York State Archives and Records Administration, New York State Education Department, 1996.

Barclay, Morgan, *Producing High Quality Microfilm, Technical Information Series #9*. Albany: New York State Archives and Records Administration, New York State Education Department, 1998.

Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn, *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993.

### **1.13 Arrangement and Description**

The assessment should review whether records are arranged and described according to accepted archival practices and standards. Provenance and original order should be investigated, along with review of inventory worksheets (if appropriate), transfer sheets, series descriptions, and container lists and/or guides (finding aids). The assessment should note whether records created in all formats are appropriately housed, identified, and stored so that they are easily maintained and readily retrieved. The assessment should provide recommendations relating to policies, procedures, and standards for arrangement and description. Recommendations may also identify potential records for inclusion in a guide, brochure, or other descriptive tool that helps promote the organization, its activities, and its records.

SEE:

Bellardo, Lewis and Lynn Lady Bellardo, *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscripts Curators and Records Managers*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992.

Roe, Kathleen, *Guidelines for Arrangement and Description of Archives and Manuscripts*. Albany: New York State Archives and Records Administration, New York State Education Department, 1991.

Walsh, Victoria Irons, *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993.

#### **1.14 Access Policy and Reference Services**

The assessment should identify who uses the archival records and how often. How the records are used should be considered in addition to a review of any reference/ access policies that might be in place. The needs assessment should also indicate whether the organization is open for research on a regular basis, provides adequate space and facilities for research, makes its records equitably available to all users, and defines and carefully observes any restrictions on access. It should provide recommendations for appropriate access policies and reference procedures.

SEE:

Kepley, David R. "Reference Service and Access." In *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*. James Gregory Bradsher, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 161–173.

#### **1.15 Outreach**

The needs assessment should identify ways for the organization to reach out to the community it serves. This may include workshops, Archives Week activities, conferences, training programs, courses, festivals, exhibits, publications, and similar activities aimed at students, faculty members, scholars, administrators, donors, records creators, governments, or the community at large. Recommendations that address particular outreach activities that the organization can attain should be provided. The needs assessment may recommend outside funding sources to support various outreach activities. For example, a local food chain may underwrite costs of an exhibit or program.

SEE:

Finch, Elsie Freeman, ed., *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists*. Metuchen, N.J.: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1994.

New York State Archives and Records Administration, *Consider the Source: Historical Records in the Classroom*. Albany: New York State Education Department, 1995.

New York State Archives and Records Administration, *Strengthening New York's Historical Records Programs: A Self-Study Guide*. Albany: New York State Education Department, 1989.

#### **1.16 Disaster Preparedness**



The needs assessment should indicate whether the organization has a disaster preparedness plan. If not, the assessment should provide advice on and recommendations for such a plan.

SEE:

Fortson, Judith, "Disaster Planning and Recovery." In *A How-To-Do-It-Manual for Librarians and Archivists*, Bill Katz, ed. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1992.

### **1.17 Information Technology**

Many organizations may not have embarked on technological solutions to records issues. But if an organization has even a single computer, the needs assessment might recommend its potential uses for records management/archival purposes, such as online catalogues, accessioning, and development of guides and outreach tools.

SEE:

New York State Archives and Records Administration, *Managing Records in Automated Office Systems*. Albany: New York State Education Department, 1995.

## **2. Action Plan**

A valuable component of the needs assessment is to provide the organization with immediate direction via a brief, attainable Action Plan. This could be as simple as a list of recommendations relating to each of the points listed in 1.1 through 1.17 above.

## **3. Short-Term and Long-Range Goals**

The Action Plan should include a short list of both short-term and long-range goals to provide the organization with direction, attainable goals, and vision.

*Examples of short-term goals:*

- a. Policies and procedures for records arrangement and description that follow national standards.
- b. Create a staff training policy that stresses the importance of security measures relating to collection access and that limit the number of keys to the records storage area.
- c. Write position descriptions for staff.

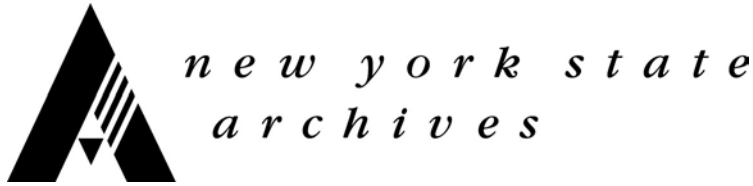
*Examples of long-range goals:*

- a. Budget funds/ increase the budget for the records program.
- b. Publicize holdings via press releases, the Internet, and an open house during Archives Week.
- c. Establish a program for the preservation of archival materials that includes

- various facility improvements, such as the purchase of archival shelving.
- d. Develop expertise in appraisal of records for historical value by attending workshops sponsored by the New York State Archives.

### **Conclusion**

The intent of these guidelines is to assist organizations in developing a comprehensive archival needs assessment that will not only address their needs, but also serve as a sound, practical planning tool. The assessment should also serve as a critical advocacy tool; its findings and recommendations should be presented to the organization's board of directors or administrator to enlist support. Such findings and recommendations provide the basis for applications to funding agencies.



## Needs Assessment Template

### **1. Needs Assessment**

#### **1.1 Introductory/Background Statement**

- a. Date organization was established
- b. Organization's location (include county)
- c. Population served
- d. Approximate date records management program was established (if local government)
- e. Date archival component was established
- f. Hours open
- g. Name/titles of individuals consulted
- h. Archival activities the organization has accomplished to date
- i. Date of visit
- j. Number of days allowed to prepare needs assessment report

#### **1.2 Purpose and Type of Assessment**

- a. Situation or conditions that led to assessment
- b. Type: comprehensive needs assessment of archival program, facility, and procedures
- c. Type: arrangement and description
- d. Type: space, storage, and handling
- e. Type: preservation
- f. Other

#### **1.3 Legal Authority and Purpose**

- a. Review enabling legislation (if local government)
- b. Review resolutions, policies, procedures
- c. Review mission statement, charter, formal statement of organizational purpose
- d. Recommendations

#### **1.4 Administration**

- a. Is the organization independent?
- b. Is the organization part of a larger institution?
- c. Does the organization have a relationship (i.e. cooperative collecting) with another organization?
- d. Recommendations

#### **1.5 Policy Review**

- a. Review enabling legislation for archival needs (for local governments)
- b. Review archival control forms, if present
- c. Review relationship of archival component to overall records management program, if appropriate
- d. Review FOIL request procedures (if local government)
- e. Review/discuss policies relating to ownership/custody of archival records
- f. Recommendations

#### **1.6 Financial Resources**

- a. Has the organization dedicated adequate funds to records management/archives?
- b. Has the organization successfully obtained grants and outside funding?
- c. Recommend ways to improve funding for the archival program

#### **1.7 Personnel**

- a. Total number of staff: \_\_\_ FTE \_\_\_ part time
- b. Total number of volunteers \_\_\_ Number of volunteer hours per week \_\_\_
- c. Total number of students \_\_\_ Number of student hours per week \_\_\_
- d. Recommendations

#### **1.8 Physical Facility (building)**

- a. Year building constructed  
Of what material made (brick, concrete, wood)
- b. Year records moved to this location
- c. Major renovations (past or planned)
- d. Type of roof (flat, pitched)  
Of what material made (rubber membrane, asphalt shingles, slate)  
History of repair/replacement
- e. Problems with the building (describe)  
Structural/engineering  
Basement seepage/drainage  
Plumbing  
Electrical  
Mold/mildew

- Roof leaks
- Heating/cooling system
- f. Is regular building maintenance scheduled? Who is responsible for maintenance?
- g. Is there regular pest control?
  - What chemicals are used? Is it rated on safety for humans?
  - Are traps used? Scheduled spraying/fumigation?
  - Is there a regular housekeeping schedule?
  - Are eating and drinking allowed in the building?
  - Have pests been observed in the building?
- h. Lighting
  - Type (incandescent, florescent)
  - Location
  - UV filtered
  - When are lights on in the records storage area?
  - Are windows in the records storage area UV filtered? covered? painted?
  - When are lights on in the reading area?
  - What type of lighting exists in the reading room?
  - Is the lighting UV-filtered in the reading area?
  - Are windows in the reading area covered? painted?
- i. Records storage/shelving
  - Wooden shelving
  - Steel (baked enamel?)
  - File cabinets (wood/steel)
  - Condition (rusted, painted wood)
- j. Is there a fire detection/suppression system?
  - Smoke detectors? Heat sensors?
  - Sprinkling system: dry pipe or wet pipe?
  - Hand held fire extinguishers: location, number
  - Date system/extinguishers last inspected
- k. Smoking allowed in building?
- l. Recommendations

**1. 8.1 Physical Facility (environment: temperature/humidity/particulates)**

- a. Are environmental conditions monitored?
  - Temperature: \_\_\_\_ daily \_\_\_\_ weekly \_\_\_\_ other
  - R/H: \_\_\_\_ daily \_\_\_\_ weekly \_\_\_\_ other
  - Temperature range F: \_\_\_\_ May–Oct \_\_\_\_ November–April

Humidity range % : \_\_\_\_\_ May–October \_\_\_\_\_ November–April

b. What areas of the building are environmentally monitored?

All areas

Records storage area

Staff area

Exhibit area

What monitoring equipment is used?

Thermostats/humistats

Recording hygrothermographs

Hand-held psychrometers

Dial hygrometers

c. Are filters used to inhibit circulation of particulates/gases?

d. Recommendations

### 1.8.2 Physical Facility (HVAC)

**If this is a central heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) system:**

a. Are all locations in the building included in the system?

b. Describe areas not included

c. Are localized systems such as space heaters and dehumidifiers used? How many? Where located?

d. Are separate zones individually controlled?

e. Who is responsible for monitoring the HVAC system? Describe any problems, repairs, upgrades to system.

f. Are fans used to keep air circulating?

g. Recommendations

**If this is not a central HVAC**

a. Describe the system (forced air, radiant, fan coil, etc.). Is any component centralized? (heating or cooling)

b. Is local environmental equipment used? (fan, window air conditioner, humidifier, dehumidifier, portable heater)

c. Who is responsible for maintaining the above equipment?

d. Are windows and doors left open for purposes of environmental control?

e. Describe any other problems with environmental conditions

f. Recommendations

### 1.9 Active Records

a. Does the organization address management of archival records from creation stage throughout the life cycle?

b. Describe current business operating procedures (manual/automated)

c. Impact of current business operating procedures on management of and

access to archival records.

- d. Recommend steps during the creation/active phases of the records life cycle to improve access/longevity.
- e. Other recommendations

#### **1.10 Increasing Archival and Manuscript Holdings (Acquisitions/Appraisal)**

- a. Does the organization have an acquisition policy?
- b. Does an acquisition strategy exist for active collecting?
- c. Are records or collections appraised before they are acquired?
- d. Are acquisitions documented (i.e., records transfers, deeds of gift)?
- e. Is the provenance of accessions known?
- f. Recommendations

#### **1.11 Security**

- a. Is the building generally secure?
- b. Are records storage areas and stacks generally secured?
- c. Is access controlled? Who has the keys?
- d. Has there been a theft or vandalism?
- e. Are there any current security concerns?
- f. Is there an intrusion system?
  - Motion detectors
  - Alarms (exterior/interior)
  - Centrally monitored? What company or department is responsible?
  - Is the system regularly inspected?
- g. List any areas of concern
- h. Recommendations

#### **1.12 Preserving Records**

- a. Cubic footage of archival records
- b. General condition (describe)
- c. Percentage of records in acid-free/lignin free storage containers
- d. Are acid-free folders used?
- e. How full are the boxes? Are spacers used?
- f. Are records kept in a vault? Are records kept in fire-resistant file cabinets?
- g. Evidence of dust, dirt?
- h. Evidence of mold, mildew, vermin?
- i. Are local government records and historian's manuscript collections housed together? (applicable only for local governments)

- j. Special formats to consider (photographs, maps, blueprints, microfilm, computer tapes, other)
- k. Evidence of deterioration due to handling?
- l. Have any records received conservation treatments?  
Who did them? when? cost? Were treatments documented?
- m. Does the organization attempt in-house repairs? Who is responsible for in-house repairs?
- n. Have records been reformatted?
- o. If microfilmed, have standards been met?
- p. Does the organization undertake document imaging? For what purpose: access? preservation? Is this an appropriate use? Was it done according to accepted guidelines and practices?
- q. Show funds spent annually on:
 

Records storage materials	\$ _____
Conservation treatments	\$ _____
Microfilming	\$ _____
Other reformatting	\$ _____
Commercial binding	\$ _____
Consultants	\$ _____
- r. Are any archival records allowed to circulate?
- s. Recommendations

**1.13 Arrangement and Description**

- a. What percentage of archival records are inventoried?
- b. What percentage of records are accessioned?
- c. What percentage of records are arranged and described?
- d. Do series descriptions meet State Archives/professional guidelines?
- e. Do inventories and series descriptions indicate an understanding of standard archival principles such as provenance and original order?
- f. Have staff attended the State Archives' arrangement or description workshops? Other training? Specify
- g. Does the organization have reference guides, such as a body of articles or a bibliography?
- h. Recommendations

**1.14 Access, Policy, and Reference Services**

- a. Are any archival records allowed to circulate?
- b. Are researchers/visitors allowed in the stack area?
- c. Are researchers supervised (in view of staff at all times)?
- d. Do reading room procedures exist?
- e. While conducting research, users must:



\_\_\_\_ Register                      \_\_\_\_ Complete call slips  
\_\_\_\_ Check bags, coats,        \_\_\_\_ Review policy regarding use  
    brief cases

- f. Who is allowed to make photocopies? Cost of photocopies? Copyright considered?
- g. Recommendations

### **1.15 Outreach**

- a. Does the organization provide statistics and annual reports to a board?
- b. Does the organization participate in Archives Week? In what way?
- c. Has the organization developed press releases?
- d. Has the organization published a guide or brochure to its archival records?
- e. Do staff give talks or presentations?
- f. Do schools visit the organization? Use the records for research projects?
- g. Recommendations

### **1.16 Disaster Preparedness**

- a. Is the building located on a site (bottom of hill, flood plain) prone to natural disasters?
- b. Have records been lost to a disaster in the past? Describe
- c. Are basic emergency supplies on hand? Do staff know immediately where to go for these in case of an emergency?
- d. Does the local government have a disaster preparedness plan for the records storage area? Are archival and vital records part of the plan?
- e. Do staff know whom to call in an emergency?
- f. Has the local fire department been contacted and been given a copy of the plan?
- g. Recommendation

### **1.17 Information Technology**

- a. List number of computers dedicated to records management/archival administration
- b. List software and hardware configuration and manufacturer
- c. Discuss types of records management applications used, if applicable
- d. Discuss effective use of computers in a records management context, if applicable
- e. Does the organization observe electronic records management practices?
- f. How are archival records in electronic format identified, managed, preserved, and accessed?
- g. Recommend records series as potential automation candidates
- h. Describe current business operating practices and recommend electronic solutions, if appropriate

- i. Is the organization microfilming/imaging its archival records?
- j. Recommend records series as potential candidates for microfilming
- k. Can the organization's records locator system, if any, be converted to an automated system?
- l. Recommend records series for description in the MARC format.  
Recommend automated software to create MARC records
- m. Other recommendations

**2. Action Plan**

The assessor should prepare an action plan for the organization based on the findings of this needs assessment.

**3. Short-Term/Long-Range Goals**

The assessment should include a list immediately attainable goals for the organization, as well as a list of long-range goals the organization can work toward, to make the assessment a dynamic planning tool for the future.