



Historical Records Theft: Strategies for Prevention and Response

Key Control Guidelines

Purpose

Although electronic access control systems are used today in larger archives, many smaller repositories continue to rely on mechanical keys to control access to their holdings storage and other secure areas. All repositories should have a documented process for issuing keys. Procedures will define the roles and responsibilities of staff involved in managing keys as well as criteria for issuing keys to selected individuals and expectations of staff entrusted with keys.

Scope of procedures

Your procedures should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Criteria for granting access to a space
- Requesting a key for an existing lock
- Installing a new lockset for collection storage or other secure area
- Installing a replacement of lockset in collection storage
- Requesting duplicate keys and replacing lost keys
- Securing keys
- Documenting key transactions
- Process and schedule for conducting a key inventory

Who is eligible for keys?

Only individuals requiring routine access to a given area should be granted keys to that area. Evaluate the access needs of employees, maintenance staff, volunteers, board members, and contractors. Issue keys only when there is a demonstrable need for access. Keys should not be issued to interns, volunteers, or contractors.

Which areas should have controlled key access?

All collection storage areas should be secured via keys or electronic access control. Any work area where collections items are temporarily located should be secured as should areas where essential records, e.g., master files, and registration records are stored.

Who can request keys/locks?

Key requests should be made by the supervisor of the intended recipient.

Who approves key requests?

Assign responsibility for approval to a small team of staff who are able to evaluate key requests according to established criteria. The responsibility should be shared; approval should not be granted by a single individual. All approvals and denials must be documented.

How should you document your key controls?

One way to manage your keys is with a key inventory form that documents the request, approval, issuance, and return of keys. Assign one member of your key approval team to maintain the inventory. All keys issued to employees should bear unique identifiers that are meaningless to an outsider, should the key be lost or stolen.