

GLASGOW CITY ARCHIVES

Caring for Community Archives Guidelines

WHO ARE THESE GUIDELINES FOR?

This guide is for any community group, formal or informal, which shares a common interest or goal and which looks after its own archive of material based around that interest or goal. The guidelines aim to provide groups with advice on setting up and managing their archive.

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY ARCHIVES?

Archives are documents of lasting historical value which have been created as part of the day-to-day business of a person, group, organisation or family. A community archive is one managed by a community group, which holds material relating to that particular community. This may include (among others) oral histories, family or personal papers, pictures, artefacts and ephemera.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: TOP TIPS

1. What should our first step be in looking after our archives?

Choose one or two members to act as community archivists for the whole group. It will be their responsibility to manage and document the archive as well as to train others in the role.

2. What should we be collecting?

This will vary from group to group and there's no right or wrong answer. Collections may include objects and / or archives. Have a group discussion to decide what will be collected and why. It may help to write up the outcome of this discussion as a guide for future reference.

3. How do we document our archive?

It's a tricky business keeping track of a growing archive. Documenting your collection will help and it doesn't require a big investment of time. The type of documentation you may find useful will depend on how big your archive is and how it's used. Every group should have an accession register which records details about new additions. If your collection is big or you're expecting additions, create a locations list to help you find particular items. If items from the collection are regularly loaned out, begin a loans register. A long-term plan can also be useful for groups considering the future of their collection.

4. How do we store our archives?

Where possible, always store them in a safe, secure and stable physical environment. The space you choose should help to protect against disastrous events like fire, flooding and chemical spills as well as pests. Professional literature will advise you about the ideal environment for paper, photographs and film but it's not critical if your storage area can't provide this. While extremes of temperature and relative humidity should be avoided, it's much more important that the environment is stable – fluctuating conditions can damage archives.

Specialist archival packaging and boxes can provide an extra layer of protection. For example, acid-free boxes and folders can house most items. Please think carefully about storing photographs! Adhesive albums can destroy photographs so choose albums with slip-in pockets or consider investing in albums with specialist archival polyester enclosures.

5. Do we need to catalogue our collections?

You don't need to! However, catalogues will be of enormous help if you regularly provide access to your collections or decide to deposit them with a local archive. A catalogue is a concise description of a collection and how it is arranged. Users can read a catalogue to identify any items which could help them rather than physically look through the collection.

It may be tempting to catalogue on a word-processed document but this can make it difficult to transfer the data to another format in the future. It is better to use a spreadsheet or database. You can even buy a specialist program if you want to go down this route. Advice on how to catalogue is available on the Community Archive Heritage Group (CAHG) website. If you are planning on depositing your collection with a local archive, it's worthwhile contacting them in advance of any cataloguing you do. They can advise you on what is compatible with their system and what their standard cataloguing fields are.

6. If we would like to provide access to our archives, how do we do that?

First, decide where you're going to provide access. Think about what resources you might need like a quiet room, desks and chairs. Then, you need to decide whether you'll have someone available to staff your research service. Will you allow access to the original materials or create surrogates or digital copies for users?

7. Do we need to worry about data protection and copyright?

Yes. Your archive may contain personal information which relates to living people who can be identified from the records. Membership records or financial files usually fall into this category. It is the group's collective responsibility to ensure that this personal data is stored securely and has restricted access.

While your group will usually have the physical ownership of any archives or objects, it may not have copyright of them. Without copyright, you will not be able to freely copy items without permission from the copyright owner. It may be worthwhile drawing up a licence for contributors to sign confirming that they are happy for the group to copy, share and distribute their material. Copyright can be complex but there are valuable, accessible printed guides available to help you make sense of it.

8. Does it matter if we have archives in different formats?

Yes. Different formats may require different storage conditions as well as specialist equipment to access them with. Paper documents have a different optimal environment to photographs and film. If you manage digital records, you will need to consider what equipment you may need to ensure continued access despite technological changes.

9. Where can we go to for advice?

Issues like data protection, copyright and where to find suppliers of specialist archival materials can be confusing when you're encountering them for the first time. The first port of call may be your local archive (such as Glasgow City Archives). CAHG also has various guides on its website. If you have questions about managing the objects in your collections, Glasgow Museums' Open Museum can offer advice.

Talking to other, similar community groups to yours will help. Sharing your experiences can help you both learn and find the best solutions for your collection. CAHG maintains a list of community archives on its website or you can approach your local archive for suitable contacts.

10. What's involved with transferring our collection to Glasgow City Archives?

Glasgow City Archives is committed to making sure our collections represent the various communities which make up our city. It may be that your project comes to an end or you're finding the practicalities of managing your collection difficult. If you decide to deposit your collection with us, we will store, preserve, manage and provide access to it as we would with our official collections. As professional archives often have collecting policies and (usually) space constraints, it may be that not all of your collection can be transferred e.g. duplicates or objects are not usually accepted. But we can provide advice about other organisations which may accept them. We're happy to talk through the options with you if this is something your group would like to consider.

USEFUL LINKS

Community Archives and Heritage Group,
<http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/>

Glasgow City Archives,
<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/archives>

Information Commissioner's Office Guide to Data Protection,
<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/>.

National Records for Scotland,
<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/record-keepingArchivePreservationGuidelinesForPrivateOwners10thEdition.pdf>.

Open Museum,
<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums>

UK Copyright Legislation for Users,
<http://copyrightuser.org/>.

