

Dance Heritage Coalition Artist's Legacy Toolkit & Records Management Guide



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Artist's Toolkit Introduction

Your Legacy

Your legacy is important. As dancers, choreographers, and artists, we have a responsibility to document and preserve our art form for future generations. Even if you are at the beginning of your artistic career, the benefits of developing your archive include improving your organization's administrative efficiency, strengthening its self-knowledge, enhancing its public image, and contributing to scholarship and public education. The **Artist's Legacy Toolkit** will help you organize and preserve your materials in ways that are practical but neither time-intensive nor expensive. See below for guidelines on how to use the Toolkit depending on where you are in your career.



Pictured: Images of the Dance Theatre of Harlem archive room before and after an archive project. Photos by Judy Tyrus.

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How to Use This Toolkit

The Artist's Legacy Toolkit provides guidelines and tips for preserving your history. Tools, including templates and charts that can be adapted for use, are available to download as a zip file. When you see the **See Legacy Tool** symbol, you can reference the appropriate tool. Below is a list of all the tools.

Toolkit Tools

1. Types of Archival Materials
2. Archival Formats
3. Document Retention and Destruction Schedule
4. How to Label
5. Digital Materials data sheet
6. Photo Materials data sheet
7. Inventory Template Guidelines
8. Sample Inventory Template
9. Preservation Resources
10. Access Guidelines and Procedures
11. Access Survey
12. Social Media Archiving
13. Free Tools Library
14. AV Digitization Best Practices
15. AV Metadata Template

Records Management Tools

1. Record Organization Chart
2. Controlled Vocabularies
3. Storage Guidelines

Using the toolkit

Early-career dance artists and young companies

If you are just starting out, you may not know what you should keep and how you can organize your records. Ten years from now, will those research notes still be useful? How useful is any of your research if it is all just thrown in a box under your bed with all your other source materials?

Use these resources in the Toolkit to begin to:



Identify: Determine what materials you possess.

Organize: Sort and arrange your saved materials, a crucial step in developing an efficient archive.

Label: Describe your materials now for easier identification in the future.

Preserve: Store your materials safely to extend the longevity as items in poor condition threaten your legacy.

Copyright: The section Copyright and Art-making explains how to secure the rights to your own work. Think about what role technology plays in the way you document and preserve your legacy. How will you be able to access digital materials you create now over the lifespan of your career? Also, keep in mind that the issues addressed under **Access**, **Resources**, and **Copyright** may not be important to you right now, but will be in the future, and should be part of your long-term thinking.

Mid-Career artists and companies

At this point in your career, you may have an overwhelming amount of material you've kept over years. Organization is key – if you needed to find the rental agreement for a theatre your company performed in fifteen years ago, could you find it? How fast could you locate that agreement?



Use the following tools to help move you in the right direction:

Inventory Summary: Document what materials you have and how they are organized. An inventory may help you find and tackle obstacles hindering your organization system.

Label: Describe your materials now for easier identification in the future.

Preserve: Have you noticed some items important to your legacy are deteriorating?

Think about what role technology plays in the way you document and preserve your legacy. How will you be able to access digital materials you create now over the lifespan of your career?

Resources: Now is a good time to seek out funding sources and people power.

Copyright: The section Copyright and Art-making explains how to secure the rights to your own work.

Seasoned artists and companies

By now, you've likely collected decades worth of material that documents your career. Are you thinking about the future of your legacy and how it will continue after you? Then you may fall into this category.

Follow these resources in the Toolkit to secure your legacy:



Copyright: Secure the rights to your work.

Inventory: Document what materials you have and how they are organized.

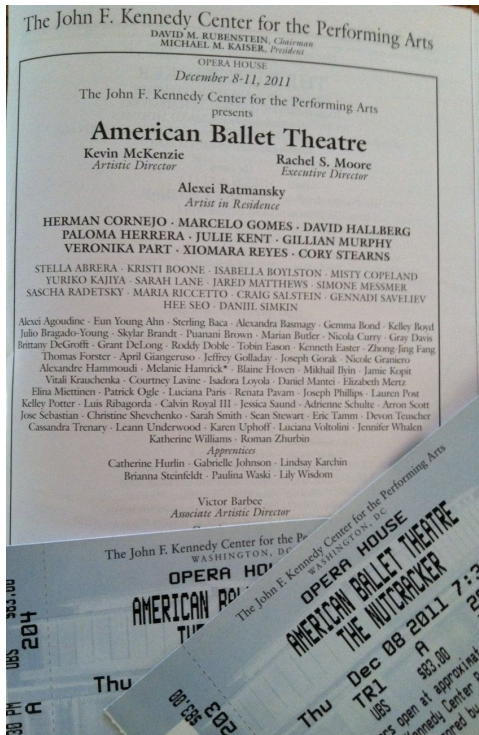
Preserve: You may have items important to your legacy that have deteriorated or become damaged. Protect against future damage with this tool.

Access: Share your materials with others.

Resources: Seek out the expertise of others to help you with what may seem to be a daunting project.

Identify

What Gets Archived?



Not everything in your files needs to become part of your archive. However, some items you might not think you want to keep could be fascinating and important to researchers.

What should you be looking for? Most of your files will fall into the content categories as shown in the tool below. If you are just now developing a system, these categories can help you separate your files. If you are later in your career, see if you can locate these types of records in your files. Are you missing any documentation?

See Legacy Tool #1: Record Identification Chart

These materials may be in a variety of formats that require different storage situations. Use this tool to see what formats are in your collection and continue on to the Preserve section to view how best to care for different formats.

See Legacy Tool #2: Archival Formats

Choose What YOU Want to Save

Ask yourself the following questions when deciding what is important for your archive:

(Note: a positive answer indicates the need to save the materials)

Would loss of the item decrease understanding of your work, company, or organization?

Could the item be of interest to a researcher or beneficial to future generations?

Is the item unique, or does it help bring context to another item in your archive?

Is the item in usable condition?

Are these records that protect the legal rights of stakeholders in your organization?

Organize

How Will You Need to Access Your Materials?

Your answer to this question will help you decide what method of organization is best. Regardless of your career level, a good **records management system** (how documents are organized within a filing system and how information about records is kept) can improve the efficiency of your business and your ability to archive your artistry. Many systems are organized chronologically, but you may want to organize by choreographic work, material format, content, event, etc. However you organize your files, programs, costumes, media, and other objects, remember that consistency is the key for future retrieval.



1. Designate storage areas for each of the main categories of your system. This could be labeled folders, drawers, boxes, and shelves.
2. Eliminate unneeded duplicate copies, saving a small number of older items and a larger, but limited, number of more current items that you might use for reporting or development purposes. DHC recommends saving 5 copies, however you might add more or less depending on the needs of your organization.

How long should you keep materials? Your organization should have a formal records retention schedule that staff can consult to determine whether records need to be kept or may be securely discarded. If you don't have a records retention schedule, this tool will help provide some guidelines:

See Legacy Tool #3: Document Retention and Destruction Schedule

3. Label media, artifacts, and paper materials using a consistent system. Label items as they are created – taking the time now will ensure items are identified fully. You may not remember where a photograph was taken, by whom, and who is in it ten years down the road.

See Legacy Tool #4: How to Label

For best practices in labeling digital, photo, and audiovisual materials:

See Legacy Tool #5: Digital Material Data Sheet

See Legacy Tool #6: Photo Materials Data Sheet

If you are further along in your career, examine what you have and your methods for collecting and saving materials. Are you missing information or is there a discernible pattern to gaps in your documentation? Determine what you need to locate or create. Identify possible sources for obtaining missing materials such as former company members, board members, friends, relatives, venues where you performed, and videographers who may have items that belong in your archive.



Take Inventory

An inventory not only helps you locate your materials, but it is vital when calculating insurance needs, transferring your files to another organization, or developing a disaster plan. We've provided a sample document that gives you the flexibility to develop an inventory only as detailed as you need. Think about how items are already labeled and how that information can be transferred to a spreadsheet. If you need assistance with your inventory, contact us!

**See Legacy Tool #7: Inventory
Template Guidelines**

**See Legacy Tool #8: Sample
Inventory Template**

Preserve

The Dos and Don'ts of Preservation

Do

DO store materials in an environmentally controlled climate, a room where the temperature and humidity are stable (68° Fahrenheit and 30% humidity are the ideal numbers). Windows and outside walls affect your ability to control those factors, so if possible, store your items in an interior room. Lights can also damage materials, so keep items in darkened rooms, closets, boxes, or cabinets.

DO use steel file cabinets and shelving. Keep folders upright and don't overcrowd drawers. Beware of wood shelving – the gasses let off by wood may damage materials.

DO scan and print or copy old newspaper clippings. Newsprint is highly acidic and contributes to decay of any surrounding materials, so either discard the original newspaper or put in a separate folder.

DO use archival-quality storage such as acid-free envelopes, folders, and boxes and mylar sleeves, however, be aware these supplies are expensive. If your materials will be transferred to an archive, the archive may prefer to rehouse your items in their own storage materials. If you plan to hold on to fragile items for a long time, acid-free storage may be purchased to better store those items that are in danger of deteriorating.

DO create a plan to save your materials in case of a disaster.



Read "[Before Disaster Strikes Protect Your Heritage](#)" by Patsy Gay, DHC's Project Associate. This post provides easy guidelines to prepare your organization, plus many resource links for more information.

More Resources

[Disaster Preparedness: a Primer](#), on paper materials, from the National Archives

[Disaster Recovery for Films in Flooded Areas](#), by the Association of Moving Image Archivists

[Salvaging Belongings after a Fire](#), by the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials

Don't

DON'T eat, or drink, or smoke when working with or near records.

DON'T use staples, paperclips, or rubber bands on records. Temporary use is ok, and don't try to remove these items if the material is fragile or could easily get mixed up. Vinyl-coated paperclips are better to use to keep papers together.



DON'T use adhesives such as tape or glue. However, do not attempt to remove old tape or peel off glued-on items as doing so may leave behind a sticky residue and/or damage items.

DON'T fold or roll documents. If you have documents that have been folded or rolled for a long time, don't immediately unfold or unroll them. Consult preservation professionals for techniques on how to safely relax documents.

DON'T digitize as your only method of preservation, and keep originals when you do digitize. When's the last time you looked at the old computers and hard drives you have in storage? Do you know what's on them or the technology to look at the files? It's nearly impossible to retrieve corrupt digital files. Keep hard copies of your materials and consult the **Digital Files** section for more information.

See Legacy Tool #9: Preservation Resources

Access

Why Provide Access?

A well-organized records system has many benefits. Easy access to your materials can help when you are creating new work, restaging an older work, applying for grants, responding to requests from researchers, loaning items for exhibitions, transferring your archive to another organization, or selling your business. If you needed to pull your lease, 501(c) status, budgets, and resumes for all your employees for an audit or grant application, how long would it take you to find these materials?



Sharing Your Materials

Policies protect your materials when accessed by, borrowed by, or transferred to outside people and institutions. Segregate sensitive files, keeping files with information such as passport or social security numbers separate so that they can be removed before outside access is given to the materials. If you are lending materials for an exhibition, the borrowing institution may have policies in place that you will be asked to read and sign. See the guidelines below for more information on lending. If you are a seasoned artist ready to part with your materials, you will need to speak directly with the institution you wish to give your archive to.

Need further assistance? View the Society of American Archivists' [Guide to Donating Your Organizational Records to a Repository](#)

The following links contain examples of policies that you may encounter:

[Shambhala Acquisition Policy](#)

[George Washington University Library Policy](#)

[Northwestern University Library Policy](#)

[UNLV Loan and Borrowing Policy](#)

Deeds of Gift

If you donate your materials to an archival repository, you will be asked to sign a Deed of Gift, a formal legal agreement that transfers ownership and legal rights to the collection. Read a brochure from the Society of American Archivist that provides information about what you can expect:

[A Guide to Deeds of Gift](#)

Look at sample deeds of gift:

[Dartmouth College](#)

[Wayne State University](#)

Building an In-House Archive? Develop Access Procedures

If you plan to provide research access to your materials while they remain in your possession, develop written procedures for how people can gain access. This will protect your materials and save time when you deal with research requests.

See Legacy Tool #10: Developing Access Guides and Procedures

What are your in-house access needs?

Before setting up guidelines for access procedures, be sure you understand how your staff is using materials and how systems might be made more efficient. Use or adapt this survey text to gather information.

See Legacy Tool #11: Access Survey

Lending Your Items for an Exhibition?

Lending institutions bear the dual responsibility of making their holdings as accessible as possible while setting conditions and methods for lending materials that minimize the risks to the materials. In balancing these

responsibilities, lending institutions generally should give priority to the safeguarding and long-term preservation of the materials requested for loan. In determining whether materials should be loaned and for how long, lending institutions may also consider the needs of users who may expect to have ready access to materials locally.

Final authority regarding whether to lend the requested materials, to provide or allow reproductions, or to accept any specific loan arrangement or terms rests with the lending institution in keeping with its ultimate responsibility as the owner or legal custodian of the materials.

- 1. Review** requests to borrow special collections materials with due regard for the access, security, and preservation needs of the requested materials.
 - a. Lending institutions should have a conservator or other appropriately trained personnel evaluate the condition of the requested materials prior to making a commitment to lend them.
 - b. Individuals who exercise direct curatorial responsibility for the requested materials should be involved in the approval process. In some cases, such as those involving materials with high financial and cultural value, higher levels of institutional authority may be required for final approval.
- 2. Ensure** that the institution has proper ownership or authority to lend the requested materials.
 - a. This is especially important in cases in which loaned materials are owned by a depositor or third party, or when materials will cross international borders and be subject to customs inspections.
- 3. Determine** the measures needed to safeguard the materials throughout the loan process and term.
 - a. Such measures may include conservation repair or stabilization, special packaging and shipment, insurance, specific environmental conditions, and special instructions for handling and display.
 - b. The measures should be adequately described and documented in the written loan agreement.
- 4. Inform** the borrowing institution in writing of any legal requirements or other restrictions and conditions concerning the use, display, reproduction, or citation of the loaned materials.
- 5. Respond** to all loan requests in a timely and professional manner.
- 6. Offer** to provide appropriate substitutes, such as reproductions or related materials, if the original materials cannot be lent.

Source: [ACRL/RBMS Guidelines For Interlibrary And Exhibition Loan Of Special Collections Materials](#)

Resources

Are You Excited About Archiving Your Work?



You don't have to do this alone. Here are some resources that address big factors like money, time, space, and expertise. To assess what resources you already have and what you will need, consider who is going to do the tasks described in this toolkit, where the work will be done, where the records will be kept, when the work will occur, and how long the project may take. If you are working in an organization, start building support within your organization and among your board members for the investment of resources. Hold meetings to increase awareness of both the benefits of protecting your legacy and the resources required to do it. Have any of your peer organizations or artists embarked on their own archive project? They may be a good contact for advice.

Money

Can you work the cost to document and preserve a grant-supported work into the grant budget? Apply for a grant specific to archive projects. See DHC's [Funding Source Guide](#) for more information. Ask your funders or make room in your budget for funds to support projects to preserve your legacy – even a small amount can get the ball rolling. Seek out pro bono services. [Taproot Foundation](#) can help you connect to professionals with specialized skills.

Time

Know you will need to spend your own time to figure out how to save time. Think about what needs to be done, or something that might help the project. Is this something an intern could do? Remember, you don't have to do this alone. Local dance studios or library/archive programs may have students that are interested and qualified to work with your materials. To find

accredited library science programs in your area with contact information, use the [American Library Association's directory](#).

Space

Seek presenters who incorporate documentation into their programs (such as [New York Live Arts](#) in New York, [Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival](#) in Massachusetts, [American Dance Festival](#) in North Carolina, the [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#)). Encourage other presenters to do more documentation. This will help you capture quality-video of your work in appropriate spaces, saving you both money and time. Contact a local television station, media center, or university dance (or video) program about free, bartered, or low-cost use of equipment, recording space, and expertise.

Expertise

Form a relationship with a local library, museum, or archive; national performing arts library; the archivist at your alma mater; an historical society; or an ethnic studies institute. Look for regional non-profit video preservation and digitization groups such as the [Mid-Atlantic Regional Moving Image Archive](#) (MARMIA), [Moving Image Preservation of Puget Sound](#) (MIPoPS) and New York's [XFR Collective](#).

We are happy to answer your questions. We are also able to provide assessments, and though these generally do cost your organization money, it is our first step to helping all dance organizations with their archive needs. Reach out to [ismith \[at\] danceusa.org](mailto:ismith@danceusa.org).

Copyright

Copyright Law: Essential Points to Know

Copyright law is the protection of artistic expression. These expressions may be in the form of letters, photographs, videos, and choreography.

Copyright and Art-Making

Who Owns the Copyright? Generally, the person who created the artistic expression is the owner of the copyright. For example, the painter owns the rights to the painting he created. The person who wrote the letter is the copyright owner, not the recipient of the letter. However, sometimes the person who created the work is not the rights holder because of a contract or employment situation. Please read employment contracts to make sure that you are not unintentionally transferring your rights to your employer.

What Does It Mean When You Own a Copyright? If you own the copyright to a work, no one else may use, reproduce, disseminate, or perform the work without your permission. This does not, however, prevent uses that fall under the [Fair Use Doctrine](#), such as when others use your work for teaching, scholarship, research, and criticism. Like the teacher who copies a poem to distribute to his class and the movie critic who quotes the movie in her scathing review, the Fair Use Doctrine prevents copyright law from squelching our freedom of speech. For a helpful guide to fair use, check out the [Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use of Dance-Related Materials](#).

If I Own the Physical Item, Do I Own Its Copyright? Please be aware that ownership of the physical item does not equal ownership of the copyright. For example, if you own a Degas painting, you do not also own the rights to make copies of the painting and sell them. Under the First Sale Doctrine, you are allowed to sell physical items on Ebay or donate them to museums; you would just not have any copyright ownership in the item to transfer (and so the new owner may not make copies and sell them either).

Copyright and Collection Transfer

What Happens to My Copyrights After I Die? Like property, copyright ownership passes to your heirs. It is best to have a will or some kind of document describing the disposition of your assets, including the explicit transfer of your intellectual property.

To Whom Should I Bequeath My Copyrights? If you have many potential heirs, please rethink bequeathing your copyright to be shared among many. If one heir attempts to donate your materials to an archive, the

archive might require permission from all owners. Please also consider bequeathing your copyrights to an archival institution.

Copyright and Estate Planning

Why Would an Archive Want My Copyrights? To meet their mission, libraries and archives may request for you to transfer your copyright in the physical materials you are donating. Libraries are interested in having the ability to give unencumbered permission to researchers and scholars. By transferring ownership, the libraries can meet their mission to make historical records accessible to the public.

How Do I Transfer My Copyrights to an Archive? Generally you will sign a [Deed of Gift](#). This Deed includes your name, the archive's name, a title and description of the materials donated, and a transfer of ownership. You will also need to consider what happens should the archive not exist anymore. Where should your materials be transferred?

How Do Contracts Affect My Ability to Transfer Copyright? A contract you have signed previously may prevent you from later transferring your copyright. Perhaps you have transferred your copyright to your employer and only retain a license to use your own work. However, limitations on your own usage of an item do not transfer to a library's usage of the work.

Suggested Copyright Resources

[Clearance & Copyright: Everything You Need to Know for Film and Television](#) by Michael C. Donaldson
[Reclaiming Fair Use: How to Put Balance Back in Copyright](#) by Patricia Aufderheide

Digital Files

Born Digital

Born-digital materials are created on a computer, digital camera, or other digital device, and include emails, documents, e-books, websites, forums, communities, wikis, social media sites, digital photographs, videos, and sound recordings. The Library of Congress has developed Personal Digital Archiving, a set of tools to help individuals preserve their digital materials. Click on the links below to learn more about how to identify your materials, select what to save, and organize and store your materials.

[Digital Photographs](#)

[Audio](#)

[Video](#)

[Email](#)

[Digital Records](#)

See Legacy Tool #12: Social Media Archiving

Be aware if you store your digital files on external hardware like CDs, hard drives, or flash drives. These materials don't last forever, as explained in [How Long Will Your Digital Storage Media Last?](#)

It's important to backup these items to an outside source, but how many backup copies should you have? At a minimum, you need 2 copies, in 2 places, in 2 different media types.

A safer plan is to keep 3 copies in 2 places and media types. Make sure to keep an inventory of the location of all the copies. Your organization's needs and resources will determine how much backup you have. For more information, visit the National Digital Stewardship Alliance's [Levels of Preservation](#).

There are free, downloading open source tools that can help manage and preserve your digital assets.

See Legacy Tool #13: Free Tools Library

Archiving Your Website

In 2014, the Library of Congress' Music Division announced a [new initiative](#) to collect and preserve websites about the performing arts. As more institutions see the need to archive websites, you may be able to find a repository to help save your website. Use the resources below to learn how you can archive your own website.

[Building Archivable Websites](#)

Wondering why you should save your website? This article explains why and provides an overview on how to do it.

[Designing Preservable Websites](#)

Here you'll find helpful guidelines on how to create your website in a format that is easily preserved.

[Is Your Website Archive Ready?](#)

Think your website is ready for archiving? Take this test.

[Internet Archive's Wayback Machine](#)

Perhaps your website has been archived by [Internet Archive's Wayback Machine](#). If not, make sure you check the guidelines and add your website to the Internet Archive through "Save Page Now" on the Wayback Machine's homepage.

Special thanks to Nicholas Taylor, Web Archiving Service Manager at Stanford University, for sharing these helpful resources!

Digital Reformatting

Digital Reformatting is the process of digitizing non-digital materials. However, digitizing is not preserving! To digitally preserve non-digital items, the material must be captured in uncompressed or losslessly compressed files during digitization. (Lossless compression creates files that take up less storage space, and the compression can be reversed using an algorithm.) The creation of these lossless files ensures the quality will not decrease as the preservation file is reformatted and migrated to prevent obsolescence as technology changes.

Protect your preservation files. Create compressed access copies for use.

Uncompressed files are large. For example, 1 hour of lossless video is about 100 GB of data. Form partnerships to help maintain safe storage for your large digital files. Preservation files are too big to store in the “Cloud.” Uploading them at regular browser speeds would take several days!

Planning to digitize your AV materials? View our guides for AV Digitization Best Practices and AV Metadata Template.

See Legacy Tool #14: AV Digitization Best Practices

See Legacy Tool #15: AV Metadata Template

Additional resources for digital preservation

ALA Starting Small: <http://www.ala.org/alcts/ano/v23/n4/digitalpres>

Digital Preservation Coalition:

<http://www.dpconline.org/advice/preservationhandbook/institutional-strategies/standards-and-best-practice-guidelines>

Library of Congress Format Recommendations: <http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/formats/>

POWRR (Preserving Objects With Restricted Resources): <http://digitalpowrr.niu.edu/>

WITNESS Activists' Guide to Archiving Video:

http://archiveguide.witness.org/sites/default/files/guide_final_compressed.pdf

XFR Collective Resources: <https://xfrcollective.wordpress.com/resources/>

Intro to Records Management

Introduction

The life of a dance work extends beyond the rise and fall of the stage curtain. As an active company or choreographer, you constantly generate new records and materials crucial to your continued creative output, organizational functions, and legacy. By instating an effective organizational system to ensure that these materials are easy to locate and use when you need them, you are able to better create and promote your work, apply for funding, and build your legacy.

What is records management?

Records management is the ongoing process of establishing and using organizational systems to retain control over your records during their creation, use, maintenance and disposition. The resources in this guide are meant as suggestions for you to consider when establishing your own standards for organizing and describing your materials; before you develop your own systems, consider the ways in which you use your records, and adapt these guides to suite your unique needs.

How will records management help me?

Records will be organized, making it easier to find what you need to run your company, apply for funding, and create promotional materials.

You will save space and money. By implementing a system for determining which records to save and which records to get rid of, you will minimize the amount of storage space you need and time you will spend managing records.

Institutional memory will be preserved on paper, not in people, and hence will not be at risk of being lost.

Legacy materials will be identified and properly cared for. Photographs, videos, and other records documenting your work will be inventoried and stored in a way that makes it easier to identify information about the work and preserves the work for the future.

What are records?

Records are documents or materials that were created as a result of your company's activities. These types of materials range from recordings of rehearsals and performances, publicity materials, photographs, and music scores to administrative and outreach documents like budgets, calendars, correspondence, and mailing lists.

Not all of the records you create need to be saved. If a record does not show evidence of the following characteristics you do not need to save it:

Administrative Value: records that provide information on operating or business procedures.

Fiscal Value: records that detail the use of funds.

Historical Value: records that offer evidence of your company's work, accomplishments, or activities.

Legal Value: records that document business transactions.

Operational Value: records that show actions to accomplish the institution's mission or mandate

Getting Started

It's not as overwhelming as it sounds. You probably already have some kind of organizational system in place, however provisional. Rather than creating a new system, identify and refine what you already have in place. What you come up with will be more sustainable for you if it's based on what you were doing before. Before you start thinking "systematically," write down or collect your answers to these questions:

What are the mission, vision, and goals of my company?

What types of records do I create, and how do I use these records to support these goals?

Are my records currently organized in a way that makes it easy for me to find the documents I need to support these goals?

Which aspects of my current organizational system work well and why?

Which aspects would I like to improve, and why?

Who else handles my records and how are they used?

What resources do I have to assist me (for example: database programs, interns, etc.)

Record Identification Chart

Use the following chart to identify the types of records your company creates, how they are used, and how they are currently organized. This outline will give you a sense of whether your current organizational systems meet your needs.

See Legacy Tool #1: Record Identification Chart

Physical Records: Organization and Storage

When creating a system for organizing your physical records (programs, posters, photographs, videotapes, contracts, tax forms, etc.) consider the ways in which you use these records. For example, you will probably look for creative records such as choreographic notes, rehearsal videos, set designs, etc. first by work and then by date. The table below outlines suggestions for ways in which you might want to organize your records.

Separate materials by format (i.e. group all programs together, all tapes together, etc.). This will help both with consistency in organization and description, and also in preservation. By keeping like materials together, you can better control the conditions in which they are stored. The table below outlines best practices for storing your records.

Organization

Consistency is key. No matter what system you develop for organizing your records, it is important to maintain consistency in the system across time and personnel to avoid lost or duplicate records.

Clearly identify, label, and date all items and storage containers in easy to understand and consistent terms.

Develop a standard set of names and phrases to describe works, events, and places. (This is called a *controlled vocabulary*.) This will help you to avoid labeling and filing items related to the same topic in different ways, thus making it difficult to locate materials.

Once you create a system for organization and description, **create a written document describing the system** to include in staff and volunteer orientations.

Record Organization Chart

The following table provides suggestions for how you might want to organize your records. The first column lists types of materials you may choose to group together, and the second and third columns provide options for how you may want to organize those materials.

These are just a few ways you may choose to organize your materials; the most important aspect of an organizational system is that it makes sense for the organization and is simple to maintain. Use the Record Identification Chart above to see how you are currently organizing your records and how you can expand or refine those systems to better meet your needs.

See Records Management Tool #1: Record Organization Chart

Controlled Vocabularies

The following table provides suggestions for terms you might want to use to describe your records. Using a consistent set of terms will help you to avoid labeling and filing items related to the same topic in different ways, thus making it difficult to locate materials.

See Records Management Tool #2: Controlled Vocabularies

Storage

Store materials in a cool and dry environment with adequate ventilation.

Do not store materials in attics, basements, near water pipes, or in hot and damp places. If materials have to be in a basement or ground floor, elevate them at least 6 inches off the floor.

Use metal shelving, and do not place materials directly on the floor.

Store oversized items flat, not rolled, when possible. If they have to be rolled, do not use rubber bands or stack rolled items.

Make sure magnetic tape (audio and video) are tightly wound and stored upright (like a book) with the wound side down.

Do not expose materials to unnecessary light.

Minimize the use of staples, glue, rubber bands, and other adhesives.

Dust and inspect materials periodically for signs of mold or insect infestation.

Identify and date each item directly on the item itself, using pencil on paper materials, and an acid free archival marker (not a Sharpie) on other materials; labels can be added to tapes using archival cloth tape and acid-free marker.

See Records Management Tool #3: Storage Guidelines

Digital Records: Organization and Storage

Introduction

For many individuals or small companies, systems for managing digital records were developed haphazardly as electronic record keeping and communication became increasingly prevalent. As greater numbers of digital records are created and accumulated, more people begin to interact with the system, and file formats and hardware become obsolete, informal organizational systems are no longer sufficient. Implementing a formal records management program for your digital records, either from scratch or restructuring a current system, may seem daunting. In the long run, by implementing a simple organizational structure and standardizing file names you will be able to increase efficiency in administration, find the records you need to promote your work, and ensure that your legacy is not erased with a crashed hard drive or obsolete file formats.

Use the suggestions in the guide to create a records management system that is tailored to your own needs.

Filing Structure

Developing a structure:

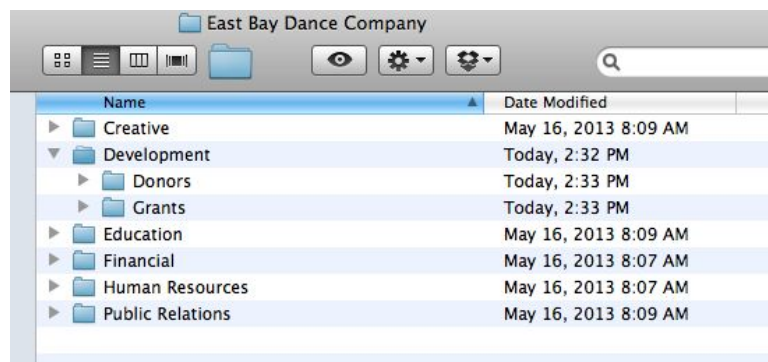
The organizational systems that you use for filing your paper materials may not be the best system for filing electronic records. Quantity, duplication, alterability, and differing file types are only a few of the ways electronic records differ from paper records and therefore demand differing systems of organization and identification.

Filing structures should reflect your organization's activities and how you use your files, so that most records will have a clear home. It is important to develop a system that is simple and intuitive so that you and your staff are inclined to use it! Before you create your filing system, create a list of your organization's departments and/or functions. Some examples of this could be:

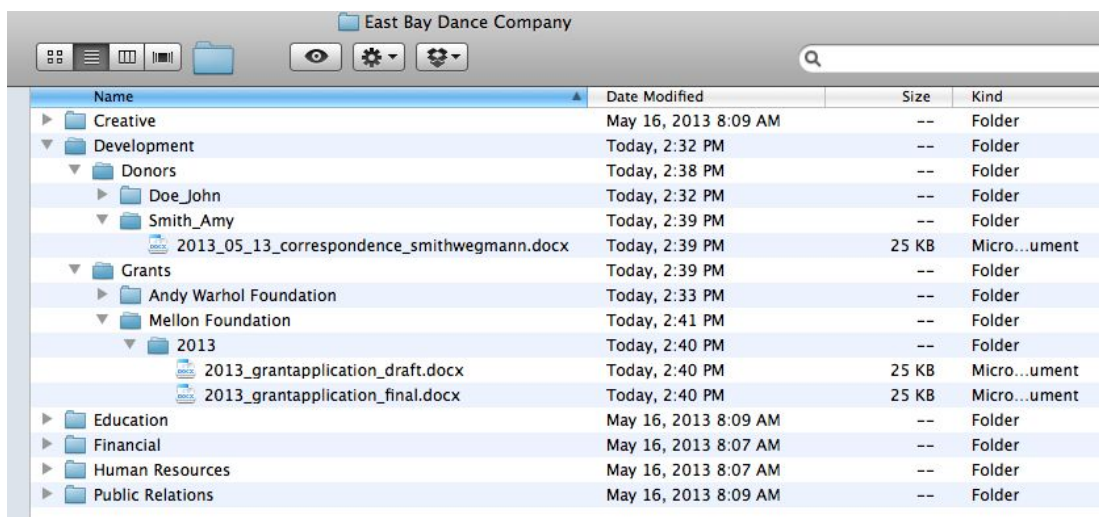
- Creative
- Development
- Education
- Financial
- Human Resources
- Public Relations



After you have established your top level of folders based on departments or functions, create a second level of folders based on activity or project. Some examples of this could be:



Save your records within the activity or project folders, not in the higher level folders.



Best practices

Don't make the organizational system so individualized that people who come after you won't be able to take it over. Before initiating a new system, discuss it with your staff and volunteers to make sure that it is easily understandable and useable by all.

If your organization has several staff members or volunteers managing records, define clear roles and responsibilities.

Having a policy or system in place does not mean that others will follow it. When instituting the system, or training new staff or volunteers, make sure they understand the importance of the system and how it will help them and the organization in the long run.

File Naming Conventions

Establishing a standard format and set of guidelines for naming electronic files will aid organization and identifying the content of the document without opening it. While it is helpful to determine a shared system that everyone follows, it is more important that the titles be clear, consistent, and meaningful rather than overly prescriptive and formalized. It will be helpful to establish a standard set of names and phrases to describe works, document types, and creators. (This is called a *controlled vocabulary*.) This will help you to avoid labeling and filing items related to the same topic in different ways, thus making it difficult to locate materials. An example of a controlled vocabulary is included below.

Best practices

Include DATE, DESCRIPTION, and CREATOR in file names

For example, "2013_05_16_mellongrantapplication_mfw.docx"

"2005_program_nutcracker.psd"

Include DATE, WORK, LOCATION, PHOTOGRAPHER, and NUMBER IN SERIES in photograph names

"2005_nutcracker_oakland_smith_.004.tif"

Use lowercase letters when possible

Eliminate spaces between words, periods, and backslashes in the filename to minimize potential OS and software problems.

Dates should be yyyy_mm_dd

Develop a system for establishing version control

Numerical indicators such as 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, ..., 2.1, 2.2, ...

Phrases such as "draft," "review," and "final"

For example, "2013_05_16_mellongrantapplication_mfw_draft.docx"

Or, "2013_05_16_mellongrantapplication_mfw_1.3.docx"

Create a document outlining your file naming conventions, and share it with all staff and volunteers.

Email

Email is often viewed as different from other types of electronic records, and is subject to highly individualized systems of organization and not incorporated into shared filing systems. Not all emails need to be saved outside of the email client and into the filing system, however many relevant records and correspondence are rendered inaccessible when they remain only in email. Developing a shared understanding of what constitutes an email that is important to save will ensure that important organizational decisions and transactions will remain accessible to everyone even after the current staff members move on or in the event of a malfunction with the email client. Be sure to download important attachments and back them up.

Best practices

Consider saving email messages that:

- Need to be forwarded for information purposes
- Contain discussions relevant to internal operational systems
- Contain information about business transactions
- Contain information about hiring or firing staff or volunteers
- Contain information about or discussions with funders or donors

Determine who is responsible for saving email messages to the filing system

- For internal messages, the sender of the email
- For messages sent externally, the sender of the email
- For external messages received by one person, the receiver of the email
- For external messages received by more than one person, the person responsible for the area of work related to the message

Use meaningful titles in the "Subject" field of the email

When saving emails to the filing system, file them with related materials (i.e. save email correspondence with a donor in the "Development" file) and follow established file naming conventions

Provide clear direction to staff and volunteers regarding when and how to save an email into the filing system

Cloud computing

Cloud computing is a technology that allows you to store and access digital records on multiple servers and through the Internet. Cloud computing is a useful tool when working collaboratively, working from home or on the road, and sharing documents and files with others. While this freedom to share and collaborate on documents is can be conducive to productivity, it also means that files can be easily changed, removed, or deleted by others. It is important to implement a records management plan within these cloud computing environments so that you are able to maintain control over the documents that are important to your organization.

Best practices:

Be selective when granting editing permissions.

Be consistent in your organizational and file naming systems. Follow the same organizational structure and naming conventions in the cloud as you do on your own server. This will help in locating documents across platforms.

Save copies of final documents onto your server. Saving final copies of documents will ensure that future revisions, accidental deletions, or the termination of a user account will not jeopardize the document. These documents should be saved in the filing structure.

Before a user account is terminated, make sure other users will be able to retain access to important emails, documents, calendars, etc.

Preservation and Storage

The most important thing you can do to protect your digital records is to regularly backup your hard drive. An external hard drive is the most reliable format for creating your back-ups. Store these hard drives in as diverse of geographic areas as possible. For example, consider sending a backup hard drive to a board member located in a different city or state. CDs, flash drives, and online services can be used as temporary forms of back-up, but do not rely on these types of media for long term storage as they may become obsolete or inaccessible.

Keep these materials in a cool and dry location away from dust and water pipes. Be sure to save one copy of the hard drive that you do not use to access files on a regular basis.

Inventories

An inventory is a way to get an overview of all materials and set priorities for improving organizational systems. It is a crucial first step, especially for organizations that have existed for several decades, have had staff turnover, and may have materials stored in different locations.

Creating an inventory for your AV materials will help you to keep track of the content and condition of your recordings. Your inventory can range from the most basic, providing minimal information identifying the content and format of the recording, to a more comprehensive inventory that will allow you to track the people involved in the production as well as any copyright or licensing notes.

An inventory not only helps you locate your materials, but it is vital when calculating insurance, applying for funding to work on collections, transferring your files to another organization, or developing a disaster plan. Listed below are sample fields to choose from when you are creating your inventory. By selecting the fields that are relevant to your needs you have the flexibility to develop an inventory only as detailed as you need. Think about how items are already labeled and how that information can be transferred to a spreadsheet as you develop your inventory template.

Best practices

How detailed should it be?

Before you start, decide how detailed you want the inventory to be: consider both your needs for access and what will be feasible to complete. Audiovisual items should be inventoried at the item level (i.e. make an entry in the spreadsheet for every item, with some exceptions for multiple duplicates). For paper materials, you might inventory at the folder level or box level. You may make different choices for different parts of the collection, but be sure decisions are consistent and clearly documented.

First steps: Checklist

Make a complete list of locations where materials are found. Are there materials off-site?

Do you have any partial or incomplete inventories that can provide a starting point? Be sure to evaluate these inventories (is information still accurate?) before using them.

Come up with a project plan determining what order you will inventory the collection. Tip: divide up the collection by format. AV materials will often be the most time-consuming.

Gather supplies you will need, e.g., acid-free markers, labeling tape, folders.

Agree on a final version of the template you will use. You may want to adapt DHC's template, adding or eliminating columns to suit the needs of your organization.

Determine who will be responsible for supplying or vetting information. Tip: A long-time company member may be the best person to supply missing information, such as identifying performers.

Establish a plan for how much time the person is able to contribute and what the protocol is for contacting them.

Decide whether you will perform any other actions during the course of the inventory, such as flagging preservation concerns or re-housing.

Develop a controlled vocabulary for works, locations, etc.

Develop a system of unique IDs for materials to be inventoried at the item level. (See tips)

General Tips

Inventory by material type. Create separate tabs in the spreadsheet for material types, e.g. AV materials, Photo and paper materials, Costumes, Artifacts.

In the process of performing the inventory, you may want to flag any materials that are found to require immediate preservation attention (papers or photos at risk of deterioration, tapes improperly stored or poorly wound, presence of severe dust, mold, etc.). These items can be prioritized or receive remediation (interleaving with acid-free paper, re-housing).

Tips for AV materials

Be sure you know how to identify and describe videotape formats. The [Texas Commission on the Arts' Videotape Identification and Assessment Guide](#) is a useful resource.

Do not play tapes in order to ascertain content unless you have consulted an AV preservation specialist. Older tapes that have not been played in a long time can easily be damaged and can damage playback equipment. Obtain as much information as possible from labels or inventories, or consult a specialist for recommendations on whether it is safe to play tapes.

IDs and labeling: A simple way to create unique IDs is to use a prefix for the company or artist (e.g., DTH for Dance Theatre of Harlem) and start with 001 or 0001 depending on the total number of items. There is no need for IDs to contain information (e.g., codes for types of content, work titles, etc.) If you already have an existing system of IDs, you can continue using these as long as they meet the criteria of being unique numbers. Label items with archival tape and acid-free markers; label the container and the item.

Group items together that are components of a single title (for instance, originals and copies made in other formats, or multi-part items.) Also, group duplicates together; if there are multiple DVD copies of a title, for instance, they do not need a separate line in the inventory. Give related items the same Unique ID with a decimal number to distinguish items: ex. DTH0035.1, DTH0035.2. Determining which tapes are duplicates and which copies are most original may be challenging and time-consuming; however, this is extremely important information if there are plans to digitize the collection.

See Legacy Tool #7: Inventory Template Guidelines

See Legacy Tool #8: Sample Inventory Template

Record Retention Schedule

Once you determine what records your institution has, you can use that information to develop a records retention schedule. The following document is intended to provide guidance in developing your organization's document retention and destruction schedule. Statutes of limitations and state and government agency requirements vary from state to state, therefore each organization should carefully consider its requirements and consult with legal counsel before adopting a Document Retention and Destruction Policy.

See Legacy Tool #3: Document Retention and Destruction Schedule

Additional Resources

[Beyond Memory](#) [PDF]

[Documenting Dance](#) [PDF]

Records Management Resources

Physical Storage and Preservation

The Northeast Document Conservation Center offers storage advice for a variety of paper records.

<http://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preserving-private-and-family-collections/caring-for-private-and-family-collections>

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works

<http://www.conservation-us.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=497&parentID=472>

Digital Storage and Preservation

The Library of Congress' *Personal Archiving: Preserving Your Digital Memories* website provides simple and practical strategies for preserving digital photographs, audio, video, email, personal digital records, and websites.

<http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/>

File Naming Conventions and Electronic Records Management

Best practices for file naming from the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

http://www.records.ncdcr.gov/erecords/filenaming_20080508_final.pdf

Electronic records management and file naming guidelines from the Minnesota State Archives

<http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/electronicrecords/erfnaming.html>

Credits

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