



Guidelines for Preserving State and Branch Archives

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Introduction

Your AAUW records are valuable! They are your state or branch's institutional memory. They document specific achievements of your state, branch, or individual members. They illustrate the contributions local women volunteers make as part of AAUW's mission.

Your records may be in a variety of formats, including paper and electronic documents, books and other publications, photographs, audiovisual materials, and artifacts. This manual is designed to help you make informed decisions about managing your records.

If your state or branch wishes to maintain your own records, this manual provides basic information on how to gather, preserve, and organize state or branch archives. If you have neither the resources nor the appropriate space to maintain your own archives, this guide provides assistance in identifying an institutional repository that will professionally care for your records and make them accessible for research.

Due to limited space and resources, AAUW does not actively collect the records of states and branches. However, AAUW is available to assist you with identifying repositories that might be willing to accept your collection. Please contact the [AAUW archivist](#) for assistance.

If You Do Nothing Else, Do This

If you only have a limited amount of time to devote to your collection, at least do the following:

- Find a safe and secure, yet accessible, location to store your collection.
- Make sure the location is cool and dry.
- Consolidate as much of the collection as possible in one location; thoroughly search meeting places and contact members to determine if they are storing records in their offices or residences.

Preserving AAUW State and Branch History: Establishing Archives

Step one: Identify a permanent location.

- Find a secure, accessible location at a permanent site.
- Avoid attics, basements, and outbuildings that may have large fluctuations in temperature and humidity or pose the threat of water damage. If possible, monitor temperature and humidity to avoid fluctuations.
- Avoid exposure to sunlight and artificial light by using insulated window coverings and turning off the lights when the collection is not in use.

- If the basic physical conditions above cannot be met, your state or branch should seriously consider donating your records to a local or state historical repository for permanent preservation and access.

Step two: Collect and evaluate your records.

- Identify the location of as many of your state or branch records as possible by thoroughly searching meeting places and contacting current and former officers and members.
- Check with local historical societies, libraries, or universities to see if any past records of your state or branch have already been donated. If so, perhaps the institution can continue to receive and preserve them.
- Review and briefly describe the contents of each box, making note of dates, subjects, and types of materials. Keep materials in the order you found them in until you complete the entire inventory so that valuable context is not lost.
- Check to see that documents in folders have been accurately described in the folder headings. Try to determine the usability of any existing arrangement.

Step three: Organize and arrange your records.

- If there is no obvious arrangement to the material, create one based on how your state or branch is organized.
- Keep together records generated by a particular office, such as finance or membership.
- Arrange materials chronologically.
- Group together in their own individual series materials such as artifacts, memorabilia, audiovisual materials, or photographs not produced by a particular office.
- Avoid using generic terms like miscellaneous, unsorted, or unidentified. Try your best to describe what materials you find.

Step four: Process your records.

- Remove materials that do not belong in the archives such as duplicates, receipts, canceled checks, Post-its, or telephone memo slips. Generally, these materials do not contain significant information and do not need to be retained alongside archival records.
- If time permits, photocopy news clippings onto acid-free paper or scan them. Newsprint is highly acidic and will become yellow and brittle with age. The originals can be discarded once duplication is complete.
- Unfold documents whenever possible. Flatten gently by pressing against the crease.
- Move larger materials to oversize folders and boxes.
- Arrange materials chronologically within folders, with the earliest dates in the front of the folder.
- Label archival folders in pencil, not pen.

- Carefully remove metal fasteners that may damage documents.
- Insert fragile documents and photographs into Mylar sleeves.
- Dispose of any attached cards or cardstock used to support photographs by gently pulling away the photographs, as long as it will not cause any damage to the photo!
- Store photographs flat.
- Wrap artifacts and textiles in acid-free tissue and store them in appropriately sized boxes.
- Do not overstuff folders and boxes. Ensure even distribution of materials to avoid putting pressure on fragile documents. If a box is not completely full, use a piece of spacer board to hold up the folders so they do not bend.

Step five: Describe the materials and make the records accessible.

- Create a written inventory of the boxes or, if time permits, an inventory of the collection down to the folder level.
- If possible, write a summary of the collection, including such information as the location, general contents, and date spans of the material. Send a copy of this summary to the AAUW Archives staff for reference.

Recommendations for Handling Archival Materials Properly

- Store boxes on shelves, off the floor, to minimize the risk of pest or water damage.
- Handle material with clean, dry hands. If possible, use cotton gloves to avoid fingerprints when handling photographs, slides, and artifacts.
- Prohibit smoking, eating, and drinking around all collections.
- Remove any dangling jewelry before handling material, as it could damage items.
- Use a stable desk or table that is big enough for the materials you are working with to rest on. Do not rest boxes or materials on the floor.
- Use pencils only when working with documents, researching, or processing materials.
- Do not fold or bend items.
- Do not write on the back of photographs unless you are processing the collection and have been given authority to do so. If so, write lightly in pencil.
- Do not place photographs into albums.
- If newspaper clippings are yellowing and brittle, consider scanning or photocopying them onto acid-free paper for long-term preservation.
- Have only one box open and one folder out for review at a time to avoid mixing up materials.
- Keep archival materials flat and do not write on or rest books or other objects on the surface of other artifacts.
- Maintain the existing order of materials within folders and boxes. Return folders to their original location within the box, and return boxes to their original location on the shelves.

Looking for Some Help?

Local universities with history or library science departments are an excellent resource. Many students are eager to get hands-on practice working with archival collections through internships. Consider that perhaps a student can help you organize your archives and gain valuable work experience at the same time!

Examples of Materials That Belong in Your State or Branch Archives

- Architectural records
- Founding documents such as articles of incorporation or charters
- Artifacts and memorabilia (3-D objects such as pins, badges, gavels)
- Audiovisual recordings (of meetings, events, oral histories)
- Audits and budgets
- Bylaws and revisions
- Clippings (from newspapers and magazines)
- Correspondence of a significant nature that documents a branch or state program, policy, or event
- Directories and membership lists
- E-mails: Significant correspondence should be printed out in hard copy and retained along with correspondence. Routine e-mails can be discarded.
- Financial reports
- Handbooks (branch manuals, guidelines)
- Legal documents (deeds, contracts)
- Minutes of meetings (board, special committees)
- Organizational charts
- Photographs of officers, members, events
- Project summaries
- Press releases
- Programs, handouts, and flyers
- Publications (histories, newsletters, and brochures — only those created by state or branch)
- Reports (annual, board, committee, project)
- Scrapbooks
- Speeches by officers to branch and state members
- State convention program booklets, convention-related materials
- Subject files (only if already in existence for a specific program area — documents listed above should not be arranged by subject)

Examples of Materials That Do Not Belong in Your State or Branch Archives

- Drafts, working copies of documents, publications that are not the final version
- Correspondence of a regular nature including routine questions, notes of acknowledgement, thanks, and reply
- Duplicate copies — retain no more than three of each item for archives
- Publications and reports that are generated externally, not by your branch or state
- AAUW national publications — these are saved in the AAUW Archives.
- Old forms, receipts, requests, orders

Donating Your Archives to a Repository

While AAUW does not collect the archival records of state and branch affiliates, we serve as a valuable resource for researching an appropriate repository for donating your branch or state records. After reading these guidelines, contact AAUW's archivist at 202/785-7776 if you need additional assistance with this process. In addition, a brochure on donating records to a repository is available at the website of the [Society of American Archivists](#).

Research

Take the time to thoroughly research the repository or repositories you are considering. Make an appointment to tour their facilities and talk to the professionals who manage the collections. Consider the following questions when selecting a repository. These are important issues that will affect how your collection is cared for, preserved, and accessed:

- Does the staff include a professional archivist?
- Is the location of the repository accessible to members of your branch or state?
- Does the location have adequate space for your collection?
- Are collections maintained in a dry, climate-controlled, secure facility?
- Are materials processed — organized, labeled, described and stored in acid-free folders and boxes?
- Does the institution digitize collections for long-term preservation? Would your collection be reformatted?
- Does the institution create finding aids for collections? Will they create one for your records?
- Does the institution publicize its collections through the use of websites, brochures, and outreach to educational institutions? Do researchers use the collections?
- What level of access will you and other members maintain to the collection?

Negotiate

When you do decide to donate your records, you will be asked to sign a legal document. It is often referred to as a deed of gift or memorandum of understanding (MOU). Any legal document relating to the transfer of your collection, regardless of its name, should contain the following:

- Name of the donor and recipient
- Title and description of materials donated
- Transfer of ownership
- Services the repository will provide for your collection
- Access rights to the collection and restricted materials, if applicable
- Transfer of copyright
- Policy on weeding and separations

Review this document with other members and, if possible, with any available legal resources to which your branch might have access. Although most repositories prefer donations with as few restrictions as possible, your state or branch may choose to retain copyright to the materials.

Due to the high cost of storing, processing, and preserving archival collections, most repositories will not accept materials through donations without also receiving ownership rights. By signing the deed of gift, you are transferring ownership of both the physical collection and the intellectual property rights of the collection from your branch or state to the repository.

If you are concerned about confidentiality or privacy issues regarding any of your archival records, you may ask that some recent records remain closed for a stated period of time. However, be careful of this as some repositories will not take a collection with too many restrictions. Keep in mind that public research access to scholars is a benefit to AAUW.

Duplicate materials and materials that do not have archival value are routinely removed by archival repositories during the processing of collections. Often, by signing the deed of gift, you are conveying the authority to the repository to remove and destroy such materials. If you would like to have these materials returned to your branch or state, you should discuss this with the repository to ensure that these documents are returned back to you. Never assume this to be the case; this should be stipulated in your legal agreement.

Follow-Up

- Since your state or branch is an existing organization and you will be accruing additional records, it is best to make ongoing donations. Discuss with the repository the appropriate intervals for doing so.



- Rather than write a new agreement each time, if you plan on donating materials in the future, discuss the possibility of a provision stipulating that all subsequent donations be made in accordance with the initial deed.
- Once your collection is donated, this is just the beginning, not the end! Follow up with the repository periodically to inquire about the processing of the collection, any research or exhibits, or other planned projects so that your level of involvement and interest is apparent to the repository and so that a mutually beneficial relationship is maintained.

Resources: Archival Suppliers

Need to get started? Contact these companies for the purchase of archival-quality supplies such as folders, enclosures, boxes, and paper.

- Gaylord, www.gaylord.com, 800/962-9580
- Hollinger Metal Edge, www.hollingermetaledge.com, 800/634-0491
- Light Impressions, www.lightimpressionsdirect.com, 800/828-6216

Resources: Preservation Assistance

Reached a crossroads and looking for help? The following organizations and agencies can serve as a resource to you as you continue organizing and preserving your archives. They provide publications, web resources, training workshops, lists of funding opportunities, and consulting services.

- LyraSis; www.lyrasis.org; 1438 W. Peachtree St. NW, Suite 200, Atlanta, GA 30309; 800/999-8558
- Amigos Library Services; www.amigos.org; 14400 Midway Rd., Dallas, TX 75244-3509; 972/851-8000 or 800/843-8482
- Northeast Document Conservation Center; www.nedcc.org; 100 Brickstone Sq., Andover, MA 01810-1494; 978/470-1010
- Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts; www.ccaha.org; 263 S. 23rd St., Philadelphia, PA 19103; 215/545-0613
- National Archives and Records Administration; www.nara.gov; 8601 Adelphi Rd., College Park, MD 20740-6001; 866/272-6272