

Standard Appraisal

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STATE RECORDS
of South Australia



Government of South Australia
State Records

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Appraisal Standard

The Standard

Authority

This Standard is issued under section 14(1) of the *State Records Act 1997* (the Act). It applies to the official records of all government agencies as defined in section 3(1) of the Act.

‘Official record’ is defined in section 3(1) of the Act and refers to information, data and records, in any format (whether digital or hardcopy), where it is created or received through the conduct of government business. Other State Records policy may refer to ‘information assets’ which should also be taken to mean ‘official records’.

The structure and role of the State Records Council are set out in sections 9(2) and 10 of the Act.

Agencies must appraise official records in accordance with the requirements set out in the Act and this Standard.

This Standard aligns with *ISO TR 21946 Appraisal for Managing Records*. Advice on records of permanent value have also been informed by the commitments in the International Council on Archives *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration* (2019). It also intends to reflect records management recommendations made by various Royal Commissions.

Scope

This Standard establishes themes and general criteria to be used when determining whether records should be kept permanently as part of the State archive.

It determines which official records have enduring historical or community value, must be retained permanently, and transferred to the custody of State Records. It does not apply to records outside the definition of ‘official records’.

This Standard must be used when creating a disposal determination, such as a General Disposal Schedule (GDS) or Records Disposal Schedule (RDS).

Other standards and guidelines cover related activities such as RDS development, sentencing records and undertaking disposal and transfer. The Information Governance Guideline offers direction for a range of these activities.

Defining appraisal

Appraisal is the process of deciding what records should be made and kept. It involves assessing and documenting requirements for record creation, as well as deciding their ongoing value. Subsequent activities include sentencing and disposal.

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One of the main outcomes of appraisal is that records are given a value. Ongoing value includes a potential need for access by a range of stakeholders – government agencies, individuals or communities.

Retaining records is essential to ensure a more complete, balanced, and accountable record of government activity and its impact on society. The themes and criteria in this standard recognise the value of records that document the impact of significant interactions between government, people, places and society.

They also recognise that historical and ongoing government policies have had profound and disproportionate impacts on individuals, including Aboriginal people, care leavers, Forgotten Australians, those under guardianship, and vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Determining what permanent records should be kept about Aboriginal peoples and traditions is complex and should be informed by Aboriginal people as part of their right to self-determination.

Appraisal applies to all types of records, regardless of format. Records may be analogue (such as paper, film, or tape) or digital (such as emails, databases, websites, social media, and audiovisual files). While format does not affect appraisal itself, it can affect how records are managed over time.

Appraisal is undertaken by agencies, State Records and the State Records Council, each contributing their own perspective through their different responsibilities.

Responsibilities

Agencies are responsible for:

- » records management activities as informed by other Standards and guidelines
- » appraising their official records
- » consulting on proposed appraisal decisions with individuals or groups who are the subjects of records, where appropriate
- » using the Appraisal Standard to determine records of permanent value, and
- » documenting appraisal decisions in an RDS, for submission to State Records Council.

State Records is responsible for:

- » reviewing draft RDSs
- » developing GDSs for record types that are common to most agencies, and
- » making disposal determinations.

State Records Council is responsible for:

- » reviewing disposal determinations submitted by agencies,
- » approving disposal determinations including minimum retention periods for temporary value records, and
- » approving records proposed for permanent retention as State archives.

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Determining what records have permanent value

Not all records created by State and Local Government have enduring value. Only a small proportion of all government records generated will be kept as part of the State's archive.

When developing an RDS, justification must be made for the records proposed to be retained permanently as State archives. If records have permanent value to the State, but do not meet any specific appraisal themes or general criteria that appear relevant, contact State Records for advice.

Specific appraisal themes

Appraisal themes have been developed to help agencies decide what records may have permanent value as State archives.

These themes are:

1. **Records supporting rights and entitlements**
2. **Records that document impact on people**
3. **Records that document impact on place**
4. **Records of events and changes in society**
5. **Records documenting public policy**
6. **Records of governance and accountability**
7. **Records documenting government authority**

When determining permanent value records, agencies must meet an appraisal theme or other general criteria detailed in this Standard.

General criteria

Other general criteria may be applied when appraising records that do not fall within one of the appraisal themes:

- » **Rare type or format** - records which may be rare because, due to the passage of time, they may be the only remaining example of a type or format of record that once existed within South Australia. For example, they may be the only official record for a particular place, agency or government function, or may document functions that government agencies in South Australia no longer undertake.
- » **Aesthetic value** - records of artistic significance, or with aesthetic value
- » **Summary or consolidated** – records such as registers, which provide a consolidated summary of business decision or actions, or agency-wide substantive decisions or actions, or
- » **Authoritative source** - records which provide the original, authoritative source of evidence where there are multiple copies of the information held.

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Appraisal themes

1. Records supporting rights and entitlements

Records can provide evidence of a person or organisation's legal identity and status, which in turn can establish rights and entitlements.

Examples include records of civil registration of births, deaths and marriages and records of company or association registration. Civil registration records provide legal identity and support the provision of government and other services.

School admission and employment registers are examples of summary records that can also be used to support rights and entitlements. They can be used for alternative evidential purposes, such as to confirm birth date or spelling of names to support access to various government services.

Records relating to Aboriginal identity, family and kinship connection can provide authoritative evidence for rights to land and waters, and to establish identity and rights and entitlements within settler colonial legal, administrative, and social systems.

Other records can provide evidence of specific rights and entitlements, such as a right to vote (electoral rolls are integral to the conduct of free and fair elections); a right to property (indefeasibility of the Title is guaranteed by the government through the Torrens System of Title Registration); or authority of executors or administrators to administer a deceased estate (administration of wills and estates).

Many records supporting rights and entitlements can also be used for genealogical research to establish legal identity, or a sense of identity, culture or family of origin.

The State requires records to be kept permanently that provide information and evidence of:

- » legal proof of identity or status
- » registration of individuals or organisations to establish rights and entitlements
- » Aboriginal identity, family and kinship relationships and community affiliation
- » civil rights of citizens
- » recognition of Aboriginal rights to land, waters, and resources, including native title determinations and related processes, or
- » current and past ownership of, or rights to (since colonisation) land, property, and waters.

Examples of records not required for permanent retention include individual cases documenting evidence of authority to act for a limited specified period, such as professional, trade, or activity licences or permits.

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2. Records that document impacts on people

State and local governments interact with people every day. These interactions may be recorded as evidence for regulatory, program or service delivery purposes.

Records that document the impacts and experiences on those in state care, the forced removal of children and Aboriginal deaths in custody, hold enduring value for accountability, redress, family reconnection and recognition of lived experience.

Databases and registers often provide a useful summary of people impacted by a government program or receiving a government service and can show basic details of the interaction and outcomes of the program or service. Summary data can be useful for scientific or humanities research, as well as genealogical or family research that can help establish personal and family identity and connections. It can also provide evidence of systemic activities.

Apart from the impact on citizens and customers, records can document the experience of public servants and other government workers. These workers make up a large percentage of the State's workforce and population.

The State requires permanent retention of records that provide information and evidence of:

- » registration of people receiving a service or participating in a program which
 - are required under legislation as a public register, or
 - are unique to South Australia, or
 - provides information establishing relationships of people and places, or
 - provides summary information useful for research.
- » government intervention in people's lives which
 - document government making key decisions on behalf of the person, or
 - show the initial impact of a new government program or service, or
 - establish precedent.
- » government intervention involving Aboriginal peoples and traditions affected by government policies (that may be discriminatory or assimilationist), including removal of children
- » specific programs aimed at supporting Aboriginal people, including those in remote communities
- » issues with services and programs intended to support vulnerable South Australians, such as:
 - appeals and investigations
 - handling of deaths in the care or custody of South Australian public institutions
- » summary records of worker use of or exposure to hazards known to have a cumulative or delayed health effect such as asbestos
- » indicative records about the experience of working for the public service, especially the cultural aspects and response to major events, records of major

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celebrations, or how the public sector broadly handled major impacts such as the COVID-19 pandemic

- » planning and decision making in relation to issues significantly affecting the community or the provision of essential services
- » official proclamations by judicial officers after a hearing, or by agreement, which parties are bound by, or
- » the origin of human remains kept by agencies and consent for their collection and use.

Detailed information such as recorded in case notes and client files can serve as evidence of government actions having a significant impact on people's lives. This includes situations where freedoms are restricted or major decisions are made on individuals' behalf, such as the removal of a child from their family, and imprisonment. For vulnerable people, these records play a critical role in ensuring accountability, including evidence of serious issues in service delivery.

However, detailed case or client records will not always carry permanent value. For example, retention could be for the life of the client or other affected parties. They may be of permanent value when there is significance beyond the life of the individual.

Examples of records not required for permanent retention include:

- » case or client files that document the routine operation of government regulation and service delivery to individuals
- » records where individuals' personal affairs are managed by the government
- » information provided to individuals in their interactions with government
- » records relating to attendance at properties as proof of being onsite such as visitor logs or building admittance registers, or
- » internal management communications to staff.

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3. Records that document impacts on place

The State of South Australia governs a defined geographic area. State and local governments manage this area and create records about how the land and waters are used, protected, and managed. These records can show how the landscape has changed over time and the effects of both pre-colonial and colonial activities on the environment and natural resources.

Records can also show the long-standing relationship between Aboriginal peoples and place, as well as how government actions have affected cultural connections to Country. They may reflect the ongoing care for Country and the continuing custodianship of Aboriginal peoples today, highlighting these as living cultural, environmental, and governance responsibilities, not just historical connections.

Environmental changes (such as those affecting soil, native plants and animals, waterways, and climate) remain important concerns for the community, both locally and globally. Records that describe or track changes in weather, landscapes, water systems, and ecosystems can show gradual changes over time.

Other records show major impacts on South Australia's land and waters, including through the design and construction of infrastructure (such as buildings, roads, railways, bridges, dams, and power lines) and activities like farming, irrigation, mining, and industry. Data recorded in catalogues often provides evidence of the origin and history of geological or biological specimens and are essential for the management of the collections.

Government also has a role in preserving post-colonial built heritage. Decisions about what to preserve can reflect social values and attitudes, and the records help understand heritage sites.

Records of planning and development are important for understanding how the State has changed over time.

Records of responses to environmental change, as well as disaster and emergency management planning and actions, can show the effects of government decisions on the environment and the impacts of both natural and human-caused disasters.

The State requires records to be kept permanently that provide information and evidence of:

- » Aboriginal occupation, land use, cultural landscapes, and enduring connection to land and waters
- » observations and images of the natural environment, such as field books
- » the origin and history of collected items
- » core elements of the project management, design, construction and maintenance of State assets and infrastructure, including assets not owned by the government
- » identification, development and management of sites of conservation, cultural or heritage significance

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- » key aspects of State planning and development that provide evidence of broad impact on the land, waters and Aboriginal heritage sites, including:
 - government policies and programs relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation
 - use and plans for the management of water resources, such as the Murray River.
- » management of national parks including with traditional owners
- » key aspects of the management of natural resources that show substantial incremental and local changes, including damage to ecosystems and loss of habitat, or
- » key aspects of emergency and disaster planning, response and recovery.

Examples of records not required for permanent retention include:

- » detailed records that document the routine operation of government regulation and service delivery (records may need to be retained for the duration of a program or property but not beyond)
- » detailed records summarised or reported elsewhere
- » routine project records for construction of infrastructure, or restoration of the environment, or
- » development applications for every property.

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4. Records of events and changes in society

Archives are a major source of evidence and information about past events, influencing what is remembered and what is forgotten. As well as documenting the history of events, records also provide evidence of how society has changed or is changing. Records documenting social changes are critical to understanding how society has evolved, whose perspectives have been privileged, and whose experiences have been marginalised.

Many types of records can document past events and show social change, so deciding what to keep, and therefore what will be remembered, is one of the most challenging tasks for an archive. Often, it is only over time that the importance of an event or the extent of social change becomes clear.

Social change, in the broadest sense, refers to changes in how people relate to each other in society. Change is always happening. Some changes help society continue as it is, while others reshape or transform it.

The impacts of colonisation and subsequent government actions have been central drivers of social change in South Australia. This has particular impact for Aboriginal peoples and traditions. Lives and relationships with the State have been shaped by changes in policies and administrative responsibilities, including laws affecting Aboriginal people after colonisation, and shifts in responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs following the 1967 Referendum.

Government has a significant role in collecting printed material, objects, and art including those that reflect the history and development of the State. Data recorded in catalogues about items often provide evidence of the origin and history of items and information used for the broader management of collections.

The State requires records to be kept permanently that provide information and evidence of:

- » significant events in Aboriginal community/government relations, including initiatives for reconciliation, reforms and social movements
- » historic incidents including natural disasters and major accidents
- » key aspects of the planning, management, delivery and staging of major or unique events across South Australia, including major or unique artistic and performing arts activities by State run cultural institutions
- » the origin and history of collected items, which may include information and perspectives from the original culture or community
- » changes in government programs and services that demonstrate a new approach or direction, or
- » political and ceremonial engagement between South Australia and other sovereign states and powers.

Examples of records not required for permanent retention include:

- » records documenting the routine approval to conduct events, or
- » records documenting the arrangements and mechanisms for staging and marketing events and productions.

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5. Records documenting public policy

Public policies are initiated by the government of the day, often arising from political parties as part of election campaigns, or developed from within the public service. They may develop from national or international initiatives. Policies often have implications for communities, businesses and individuals in the State.

Public policy sets out the government's position on an issue and can guide the State's strategic direction. It can lead to decisions about governance, management, and changes to government structures. Policies may have intended or unintended impacts, particularly for marginalised groups.

Records of how policies are developed, implemented, and reviewed across areas such as health, education, welfare, justice, land, environment, and economic development are important for understanding government decisions and how they change over time. Public policy can also involve creating or updating laws.

Cabinet is the central decision-making body of the South Australian Government, though it is a product of convention and practice and does not have terms of reference or legal status. The functions of Cabinet include the final determination of policy to be submitted to Parliament.

The State requires records to be kept permanently that provide information and evidence of:

- » new and emerging public policy issues, including national or international issues impacting on South Australia
- » public policy proposals and determination of public policy through Cabinet decisions
- » whole of government policies issued and promoted
- » development, implementation and review of policies directly affecting marginalised groups
- » development, implementation and review of policies directly affecting Aboriginal people or disproportionately impacting Aboriginal communities
- » implementation (especially in the initial stages) of new public policy in relation to public concerns
- » substantive review of the implementation or outcomes of public policy, or
- » development and review of legislation in support of public policy.

Examples of records not required for permanent retention include agency internal policy and procedure documents that interpret and implement across-government public policy. These records may need to be retained for the duration of a program or case but not beyond.

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6. Records of governance and accountability

State and local governments govern with authority within a specific jurisdiction. Formal structures and mechanisms exist to oversee the integrity of public administration in South Australia and provide independent assurance to Parliament that government is operating properly and in accordance with the law.

Records can provide evidence for accountability such as providing proof that a process was fair, impartial and unbiased, consistent with policies and procedures, and able to withstand internal or external scrutiny.

Governance often refers to the activities of boards and councils that have control and oversight over organisations, whereas management often refers to the day-to-day activities of chief executives and managers. Records provide evidence of formal decision-making (such as agenda, papers and minutes) and the implementation or execution of strategy and public policy (such as plans and policy documents).

Records show how government is held accountable for its decisions, programs, and spending over time. This can include broad national or state frameworks, such as 'Closing the Gap'.

Records of monitoring, reporting, independent reviews, and oversight provide important evidence of how the government measures performance, addresses problems, and responds to changing expectations for transparency and accountability.

The State requires records to be kept permanently that provide information and evidence of:

- » formal governance and management by authorised bodies including resolutions and decisions
- » policies and procedures issued by government to regulate an industry or government itself, including establishing standards of professional conduct
- » reviews, inquiries and investigations into government conduct affecting Aboriginal peoples and traditions
- » accounting for public expenditure at the end of financial year
- » management of Crown assets on behalf of the community, including Crown land
- » independent examination of agency financial reports and operations, controls and matters of public interest
- » complaints that have progressed to an investigation, potentially showing issues with decision-making or processes, or
- » the constitutional process of adjusting electoral boundaries to reflect demographic and population changes.

Examples of records not required for permanent retention include:

- » records of sub committees supporting boards or committees, where reports are submitted to the main body, or where decisions are of limited scope or impact, or
- » public registers that provide evidence of accountability for limited periods e.g. registers of local council elected member interests, allowances and benefits.

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7. Records documenting government authority

As a state within Australia, South Australia can make its own laws on matters not controlled by the Commonwealth. Like other states, it has its own constitution and a structure of legislature, executive and judiciary.

The South Australian Parliament follows the British Westminster system. It operates under Cabinet government, where the Governor acts on the advice of Ministers, led by the Premier. Ministers are responsible for government departments, are members of Parliament, and are part of the Executive Council.

Records that show the government's authority, and how it uses that authority, can help create a framework for holding the government accountable. Records documenting government authority must be understood in the context of South Australia's establishment and constitutional development.

The authority to govern and act can be impacted by machinery of government (MOG) changes and reforms. MOG refers to the allocation of functions and responsibilities between departments and ministers. These allocations reflect the government's priorities and may change after an election or to support new policies. MOG changes are decided by the Premier and can include appointing ministers, creating or closing departments, and moving responsibilities between ministers or within the public sector.

The Governor in Executive Council, on the advice of the Premier, appoints ministers, establishes administrative units (departments) and formally allocates responsibilities to ministers.

The State requires records to be kept permanently that provide information and evidence of:

- » the delegation of legislated authority to appointed officials at points in time, documenting the right to perform duties and functions of the State
- » formal arrangements of governing bodies including terms of reference, constitution, and business registration
- » government authority over Aboriginal people, communities or land
- » agreements between governments including defining how the tiers of government will work together
- » assent of legislation, and the making of regulations, rules, proclamations and notices by the Governor
- » the publication of government proceedings in the South Australian Government Gazette
- » judgements or rulings determining the extent of jurisdictions and powers, or
- » formal instruments, delegations or authorities establishing the functions, jurisdictions, boundaries and operations of government.

Examples of records not required for permanent retention include records of operational delegations to employees within agencies.

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