

Records Management Guidelines for States and Branches

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Caring for your state or branch records may seem like a daunting task. Whether you are faced with sorting through years of untouched records or a well-organized collection, this manual will assist you with the process.

There are many reasons why getting a good handle on your records is essential. Of course, there are the obvious concerns such as overflowing file cabinets, records stored in too many locations, and a lack of decision making about what to save and what to throw away. Not only will a records management process solve these problems, but it will also provide many intangible benefits to your organization, such as

- Improving access, efficiently and accurately, to your records and the information they contain
- Ensuring that your state or branch is complying with financial and legal requirements
- Providing continuity of information through membership and leadership changes
- Ensuring that there is a solid rationale for what is kept and what is discarded
- Freeing up physical storage and computer space
- Safeguarding vital information contained in the records
- Documenting the contributions of your state or branch throughout history to ensure that your legacy is preserved

A record is any document or material produced or received in the course of the work of your state or branch. If you need assistance determining what constitutes a record, ask yourself the following questions with regard to what your state or branch does. If your answer to any of these questions is yes, then you have a record.

- Does the information reflect the activities, purpose, or mission of your AAUW state or branch?
- Do you need it to prove something did or did not occur?
- Are you required to save it for legal, audit, or regulatory purposes?
- Does it document activities regarding an important program, issue, or event?
- Does it have intrinsic historical value?
- Might it have historical value in the future? Does it reflect a program, issue, or event that could become historically significant and that a historian would want to know about in the future?

Here are some examples of materials that are not records:

- Personal information
- Reference material temporarily needed to support your work—often produced externally—such as guidebooks, directories, catalogs, or journals

- Duplicate copies of correspondence, memos, and reports that are produced for convenience purposes
- Drafts or working papers
- Unsolicited e-mail, spam, or Listserv announcements

How to Handle Electronic Records Saved on Your Computer

Applying the same records management principles for paper and electronic records makes this task more manageable. You should ask yourself the same questions about your electronic records that you would for a paper document. There should be no distinction between the two except for where that record will be saved or retained.

If an electronic record, regardless of format, reflects a significant activity, program, or event, you should print out a copy to save in paper format. For example, if your newsletter is produced solely in electronic format, print out a copy and include it in the archives.

This is best practices for electronic records, recommended by the National Archives and Records Administration.

What to Save and What to Toss: A Sample Records Retention Schedule

After you have determined what records you have, you will need to create a records retention schedule. This schedule will help you define what needs to be saved and for how long (a certain period of time or permanently), and it will also identify what can be discarded. The schedule will provide the basis for making sound decisions about the future of your records.

The sample retention schedule below is based on the records that are most commonly created by AAUW states or branches. Remember: If any of these documents are created in electronic format—for example, in an e-mail or saved on a computer hard drive or disc—and belong in the archives, print out a hard copy to retain.

Contents	Instructions
Founding documents: correspondence regarding founding, charter, articles of incorporation, bylaws and any revisions, any records regarding 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) status and 990N filings, and signed affiliate agreements	Archive
Minutes: from membership, board of directors, executive committee, committee, and task force meetings	Archive
Publications: newsletters and brochures—only if they are generated by your state or branch	Archive
Membership directories, rosters, or yearbooks	Archive
Branch or state history booklets	Archive—please also send one copy to the AAUW archivist for collection.
Awards that are given or received by state or branch	Archive

Contents	Instructions
Grants that you received, including grant information and supporting documentation	Archive
Significant correspondence: documenting your mission, programs, services, projects, or events or correspondence with significant individuals or offices regarding these subjects	Archive—if it's in e-mail format, print out a copy to save.
Routine correspondence: administrative matters, requests, or notes of thanks	Retain as long as needed for reference, then discard.
Convention records and planning documents	Archive
Presidents' records, including biographies, speeches, photographs, correspondence	Archive
Press releases issued by your state or branch	Archive
Audio-visual materials: tapes of meetings, events, interviews	Archive
Storage media: CDs, diskettes, and floppy disks	Print out all significant correspondence and photographs found and retain them in the archives.
Final reports and project summaries: supporting documentation of projects, community events and fundraising events sponsored by your state or branch	Archive
Photographs and news clippings of events, programs, and members	Copy news clippings onto acid-free archival paper. Transfer originals and copies to your archives. Transfer photographs to your archives.
Biographical records of officers or prominent members	Archive
Accepted scholarship or fellowship applications	Archive
Rejected scholarship or fellowship applications	Discard
Scholarship or fellowship fundraising records	Archive
Publications generated by the AAUW national office	Discard
Publications generated by your state (if you represent a branch only)	Discard
Letter regarding tax-exempt status	Archive
Bank statements and cancelled checks (if applicable)	Retain for seven years, then discard.
Tax returns	Retain for seven years, then discard.
Receipts for vendors for supplies or services	Retain for seven years, then discard.
Financial review reports (formerly known as the audit)	Archive
Finance officer's financial reports	Archive
Budgets	Archive

Records Management Practice Exercise

You have recently been appointed branch historian and, as such, have the responsibility of organizing and sorting through your branch's records. It seems like a daunting task! Up until now, it has been a mostly individual effort, and the records have been located in various members' homes and offices. In your new role, you have first taken the time to contact the members and ask about the location of the records. You have consolidated all of the records you can locate. You have placed them in file cabinets, and what could not fit in the cabinets have been placed in boxes on the floor.

Step 1: Take a quick inventory of the contents of the file cabinets.

Let's say you find the following:

Drawer 1

- Presidents' correspondence
- Speeches by former presidents

Drawer 2

- Branch newsletters: multiple issues stored in folders, organized roughly by year
- Several copies of different versions of branch history
- Copies of *AAUW Outlook* magazine
- Several copies of various AAUW brochures and publications

Drawer 3

- Bank statements
- Finance officer reports
- Tax returns
- Sales receipts from branch book sales
- Receipts for payments to vendors for services or supplies
- Financial statements prepared by an accountant (e.g., the financial review reports)
- Budgets

Drawer 4

- A file of documents relating to the formation of your branch, including articles of incorporation, the charter, the tax-exempt certificate, bylaws, nonprofit filing status, and correspondence between founding members

Drawer 5

- Minutes

Drawer 6

- Completed applications for scholarships and fellowships, both from those selected and not selected
- Minutes of scholarship and fellowship committee meetings
- Follow-up correspondence, final products, and newspaper clippings about scholarship and fellowship winners

Drawer 7

- Summaries of projects, including correspondence regarding planning, background material, final product

Drawer 8

- Photographs taken by various members of branch events, programs, and members

On the floor

- Three boxes containing numerous audio-visual recordings on VHS and DVD of branch events and activities. Some include press coverage. Boxes also contain floppy disks, diskettes, and CDs with documents and photographs saved on them.

After completing the inventory, you now need to make sense of what is in the collection. The most pressing question you have is this: What needs to be kept, and what can be tossed? The file cabinet is completely full, and you are running out of space because new material is being produced all the time. What do you do next?

Step 2: Create an arrangement for the archival material in the drawers.

First, determine what record groups you can create from the material. A record group is a category of records that is organized based on the office or person of origin for the material.

What record groups can you create from the material in the drawers?

- Drawer 1: presidents' records
- Drawer 2: branch publications
- Drawer 3: financial records
- Drawer 4: founding documents
- Drawer 5: branch and board of directors meeting minutes
- Drawer 6: scholarship records
- Drawer 7: project records
- Drawer 8: photographs
- Boxes: audio-visual material and computer disks

Can all or some of the record groups be subdivided into series? A series is a group of materials of similar formats (e.g., photographs) or materials that have been kept together because they are the result of similar activity.

Here are some ways that the record groups we identified can be divided up into series.

- Presidents' records
 - Correspondence (arranged chronologically by administration)
 - Speeches (arranged chronologically by administration)
- Publications
 - Branch newsletters (arranged chronologically)
- Financial records
 - Financial statements
 - Financial review reports
 - Ledgers or spreadsheets
 - Budgets
- Founding documents
 - Articles of incorporation
 - Bylaws and revisions
 - Charter
 - Tax-exempt certificate
 - Correspondence, arranged chronologically
- Meetings
 - Minutes of branch and board of directors meetings
- Fellowship records
 - Applications for selected scholars and fellows
 - Minutes of scholarship and fellowship committee meetings
 - Correspondence
 - Scholars' and fellows' publications and products
- Project records
 - Project summaries
- Photographs
 - Photographs (organized by event, activity, and member)
 - Slides (organized by event, activity, and member)
- Audio-visual material
 - VHS tapes (organized by subject)
 - DVDs (organized by subject)
 - CDs, diskettes

Regardless of format, print out copies of all significant correspondence, records, and photographs that you find and include them in your archives. Also store the CDs and diskettes in the archives.

Step 3: Create a retention schedule similar to the one below to help your branch identify records that need to be retained for a certain number of years but then can safely be discarded.

Contents	Instructions
Bank statements and, if applicable, deposit slips and cancelled checks	Retain for seven years, then discard.
Tax returns	Retain for seven years, then discard.
Receipts for vendors for supplies or services	Retain for seven years, then discard.
Applications for scholarships or fellowships that were not selected	Retain as long as you need them for reference, then discard.
Material produced externally, from other organizations, that was gathered for reference	Retain as long as you need it for reference, then discard.
Sales receipts from branch book sales	Retain as long as you need them for reference, but that information should be in your financial records.

Note: During the retention period, materials should be kept in an appropriate, accessible storage location such as a filing cabinet in an office. If this is not possible, consider keeping materials at an off-site storage facility.

Step 4: Determine what records you can safely discard immediately.

Contents	Explanation	Instructions
AAUW <i>Outlook</i> magazines or other publications produced by the AAUW national office	Issues are retained in the national office's archives and are generally not of historical value to the branch, unless they are needed for reference	Discard
Routine mailings from the AAUW national office	Not of historical value to branch	Discard
Routine correspondence, notes of thanks, requests, acknowledgements, confirmations of meetings	Not of historical value	Discard
State newsletters (if you represent a branch)	These are retained in the state's archives and are not of historical value to branches.	Discard
Duplicate copies of publications	Retain only three copies	Discard extras