



COUNCIL OF AUSTRALASIAN ARCHIVES  
AND RECORDS AUTHORITIES

## CAARA Policy 15 -

# Models for the distributed custody and management of government archival records

*Status: Current*  
*Adopted: 16 March 2006*

CAARA acknowledges the traditional custodians of Country and their continuing connection to land, sea and community.

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# CAARA Policy 15 – Models for the distributed custody and management of government archival records

Adopted: 16 March 2006

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	4
2	Purpose.....	4
3	Scope.....	4
4	Acknowledgements.....	4
5	Managing government archives .....	5
6	Characteristics of an archival management regime .....	5
7	Distributed custody and management arrangements.....	6
7.1	Models for distributed custody and management .....	7
7.1.1	Single agency archives .....	7
7.1.2	Regional archives repository .....	7
7.1.3	Private/community organisation .....	7
7.2	Characteristics of a distributed custody and management arrangement..	8
8	Model distributed custody and management agreement .....	9
8.1	Basis of agreements .....	9
8.2	Flexible approach to distributed custody and management.....	10
	Appendix A: Draft wording for a model distributed custody and management agreement .....	10

1.	Preamble .....	11
2.	Terminology .....	11
3.	Scope.....	12
4.	Transfer of control .....	12
5.	Storage and preservation .....	13
5.1.	Storage facilities.....	13
5.2.	Conservation and imaging .....	13
5.3.	Handling .....	13
6.	Documentation .....	14
7.	Public access.....	14
7.1.	Access .....	14
7.2.	Reading or research area .....	15
8.	Recall/transfer of custody .....	15
9.	Staffing.....	16
10.	Monitoring and reporting.....	16
11.	Insurance .....	16
12.	Compliance timetable .....	17
13.	Amendment/variation.....	17
14.	Dispute resolution.....	17
15.	Duration/termination .....	18
16.	Signatures of the parties.....	18
Appendix B: Requirements for storage of archives.....		19
Table 1: Temperature and Relative Humidity Levels for Storage of archives ..		21

## 1 Introduction

This document has been developed to provide information about practical models for the distributed custody and management of government archives. These models may be used by those CAARA members that choose to enter distributed custody or management arrangements with another party for the management of government archives.

## 2 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to:

- identify and describe practical models for the distributed custody and management of government archives; and
- provide sample clauses that could be included in an agreement for the distributed custody and management of archives.

It should be noted that for the purposes of this document the archives referred to throughout are those government records which have been identified through appropriate disposal authorisation processes (as defined by each national, state and territory jurisdiction) and which are required to be retained permanently as part of the national, state or territory archival holdings. It is not intended to cover government records not required for permanent retention as archives, but which the archival authority may permit to be kept and made available to the community through regional or local facilities.

## 3 Scope

This document is intended to relate to distributed management arrangements made by state, territory or national government archives authorities.

## 4 Acknowledgements

This document has been developed with the assistance of the following organisations:

- State Records Authority of New South Wales
- National Archives of Australia
- Archives Office of Tasmania

- State Records Office of Western Australia
- State Records of South Australia
- Queensland State Archives
- Public Records Office of Victoria
- Northern Territory Archives Service
- Territory Records Office
- Archives New Zealand

In particular, the document has drawn on the distributed custody and management agreement developed by the State Records Authority of New South Wales for its network of regional repositories.

## **5 Managing government archives**

The majority of records which are retained as government archives at a state, territory or national level will be managed in centralised facilities under the direct control of the relevant state, territory or national government archival authority. This arrangement can include branch or regional facilities under the control of the archives authority. This ‘centralised model’ is used by most government archival authorities in Australia.

However, there is an alternative management regime which may be effective for part of the archival holdings – this is the distributed custody and management regime. This is a regime whereby archives (that is those records which are selected to be retained as national, state or territory archives) are managed by another party in facilities not under the control of the archival authority.

## **6 Characteristics of an archival management regime**

In order to manage archives properly and provide the care, protection and access required, an archival/records authority undertakes a range of activities and provides a range of services, or ensures that these are undertaken or provided by another party.<sup>i</sup>

These activities include:

- owning (or leasing) and managing facilities for the storage of archives;

- developing appraisal or selection policies, undertaking appraisal activities and determining what will be part of the archival holdings;
- taking custody and control of archives from the creating/responsible agency;
- managing/undertaking all aspects of the storage and preservation of the archives, including filming and digitisation of archives;
- managing/undertaking all aspects of the intellectual control of archives, including maintaining contextual information;
- insuring archival holdings against damage, theft or loss; and
- providing skilled staff to undertake the activities.

These services include:

- providing public access to the archives in accordance with legislative requirements and appropriate access/privacy regimes/procedures, including providing research facilities and reading rooms;
- providing reference or enquiry services;
- providing copies of records to researchers, in accordance with requirements (including copyright management, deposit agreements (where applicable), policies and procedures);
- providing agency access to the archives (in particular to agency staff) in line with legislative requirements or appropriate procedures; and
- providing suitable finding aids, guides and other tools for researchers.

These activities and services need to be undertaken regardless of how the archives are managed – centrally (and wholly within the control and custody of the archival/records authority) or in a distributed management regime.

## **7 Distributed custody and management arrangements**

The centralised model (including branch structures) for managing archival records provides a cost effective, standardised and efficient model for keeping archives safe. However, it does not address some of the deeper needs that agencies or communities and individuals have for records – these include retaining convenient access to archives which have business, regional, local

and personal significance, and maintaining a local presence for archives which are an integral part of the history of a place, region or community.<sup>ii</sup>

## **7.1 Models for distributed custody and management**

Distributed custody and management arrangements can provide a means of enabling archives to remain at agency, local or regional level. There are three main models for distributed management:

### **7.1.1 Single agency archives**

This is where a government agency has a business need to retain its own archives. Generally the archives are supporting current business needs and can be complimentary to the business itself. Examples include cultural institutions (such as art galleries and museums) where the archives can be integral to managing the collections and where many staff need to use material on a regular basis; and universities (where there are strong traditions of independence in the management of archives).

### **7.1.2 Regional archives repository**

This is where a government agency may manage its own archives and also those of other public sector organisations within a regional or geographic area (for example, universities and local councils managing regional repositories). The role of a regional repository can be seen as prestigious in some cases, providing valuable benefits for the local community or the wider region (archives are retained within local and regional areas, and the records are made accessible in their 'regional' context). Reasons for selecting or approving a public sector organisation for this role include a reasonable expectation of long-term corporate existence, and the fact that the agency is likely to be subject to most or all of the same legislation and regulations as the archival authority (for example, Freedom of Information, privacy legislation). The model could include arrangements made with another government archives authority.

### **7.1.3 Private/community organisation**

This is where community organisations or private organisations (usually not-for-profit non-government organisations) may manage government archives. In such arrangements care may need to be taken to ensure the organisation

selected has a likelihood of long-term corporate existence and that it will adhere to appropriate privacy/access regimes.

## **7.2 Characteristics of a distributed custody and management arrangement**

While each of the arrangements may be different in detail, they all involve taking a common approach to the management of the archives. In addition, they all have some common characteristics:

The archival authority:

- maintains control/ultimate responsibility for the archives;
- sets and monitors policies and procedures for the management of the archives; and
- may provide advice and training, and supplementary financial support.

The archives custodian (by agreement, and in consultation with the archives authority):

- supplies, manages and operates storage and associated facilities, including providing suitable staff;
- has custody of archives;
- may accept new transfers of archives;
- carries out basic monitoring and preservation activities;
- may undertake cataloguing/documentation work on behalf of the archives authority; and
- provides reference, copying and research services.

The archives custodian will generally meet the day-to-day cost of undertaking the above activities and providing the relevant services. These arrangements, as outlined above, are in effect partnerships and should be established by formal agreements, contracts or memorandums of understanding.

## 8 Model distributed custody and management agreement

In any distributed custody and management arrangements certain archival and operational principles need to be established with the archives custodian. In these arrangements acknowledgement may be made of the differing capabilities and resources of the archives custodian undertaking the distributed custody/management work and suitable adjustments may need to be made to the agreement accordingly. To some extent decisions about establishing partnerships to manage archives will be made on the basis of risk assessment.

### 8.1 Basis of agreements

Distributed custody and management arrangements and agreements need to be based on the following two principles:

1. the archival authority has ultimate responsibility for the records transferred to archival care; and
2. arrangements for the archival management regime are made between the archival authority and the archives custodian managing the repository, and should be formally agreed upon and documented.

While the form of the agreement or the memorandum of understanding may vary, they will include common points. A model agreement is attached as Appendix A. While it is a very comprehensive agreement aimed at regional repositories, it still provides useful guidance on the types of matters that need to be considered. Any agreement the archival authority and the archives custodian enter may need to establish:

- the legal basis of control and custody of the archives in accordance with the relevant legislation and administrative requirements of the jurisdiction;
- the minimum acceptable standards for storage and preservation – such as buildings, storage areas, shelving, and equipment, boxing/storing, security and climate control (details in Appendix B.);
- any arrangements for conservation of the archives;
- rules and procedures for handling archives and displaying archives;

- standards and procedures for documentation of archives. This may include a requirement to conform to the documentation standards and procedures of the archival authority or else to use other standards and procedures;
- standards for public access to the archives and reading room policy and procedures;
- procedures for agency access or the temporary recall or removal of archives by the creating agency in conformity with legislative/policy requirements and procedures;
- arrangements for designating responsibility and requirements for staff to have appropriate qualifications;
- a regime of monitoring archival holdings and reporting regularly;
- arrangements for insurance coverage for records in case of a disaster. Consideration should also be given to ensuring that the organisation has liability insurance for readers/researches; and
- mechanisms for dispute resolution, review and termination of arrangements.

## **8.2 Flexible approach to distributed custody and management**

Each distributed custody and management arrangement will be unique. Each archival custodian will have a set of different circumstances and varying resources to manage the archives in its custody. The arrangements or agreements made between the archival institution and the archival custodian may need to reflect these variations in circumstance and resources.

### **Appendix A: Draft wording for a model distributed custody and management agreement**

An archival management agreement will set out clearly the responsibilities and obligations of each party in the management of the distributed archives. Below is an example of the sections and contents that may be used in an agreement. The exact form of the agreement will be a matter decided by the relevant archival authority.

## 1. Preamble

The preamble states the nature of the agreement – for example, the agreement may cover:

1.1. The management of, and access to, specified archival records that are under the control of [name of archival authority], but which remain in the custody of the archives custodian.

1.2 The support to be provided by the archival authority, for example, providing support to the archives custodian in the form of advice on archives management and preservation, and training and assistance in relation to documentation.

1.3 Funding allocations, including grants made to the archives custodian by the archival authority for documentation, preservation and infrastructure projects.

## 2. Terminology

The section on terminology or definitions provides agreed meanings for technical or other terms used in the agreement. Useful terms to include could be:

**Archives storage areas** are those areas that have been specifically designated for archives storage and have been approved by [name of archival authority].

**Retention and disposal authority** is a formal instrument that defines the retention periods and consequent disposal actions authorised by [name of archival authority] for classes of records that are described in it.

**Distributed management** is where a public office (or agency or other commonly used term), through an agreement with ..., maintains *custody* of a record but *control* is passed to [name of archival authority]

**Reader** means a member of the public, staff member of the host institution, the archives custodian or representative of a public office accessing the archives for research or other purposes.

**Reading area** is a room or other space that has been designated for use by the public for access to and inspection of archives.

**[state/national/territory] archive** means (place suitable definition here)

**[state/national/territory] record** means (place suitable definition here).

### 3. Scope

The scope sets out the boundaries of what records are covered by the agreement. This may include:

3.1 This agreement relates to all [state/national/territory] archives, in any format, held in the custody of the archives custodian on the date of commencement.

3.2 This agreement also covers future transfers of [state/national/territory] records, in any format, that have been specifically identified as required as [state/national/territory] archives under a current, authorised retention and disposal authority.

3.3 [State/national/territory] archives are covered by this agreement once in the custody of the archives custodian.

3.4 This agreement does not preclude the archives custodian from keeping as archives any other records, in addition to those identified in 3.1, that it has identified as having ongoing or permanent value. Such records shall not fall within the scope of this agreement.

### 4. Transfer of control

This section sets out the arrangements and ways that records may be transferred to the control of the archives custodian (could refer to relevant statutory provisions or arrangements for transfer of control or possession). This may include:

4.1 When they cease to be of use for official purposes, all records of the archives custodian that are required as [state/national/territory] archives under a current authorised retention and disposal authority shall be transferred to the control of [name of archival authority] in accordance with the requirements (note: refer to relevant legislation or procedures). (Note: this clause covers the records of the host institution itself and would apply only where it is a government agency).

4.2 The archives custodian may accept direct transfers from public offices. This will occur in accordance with the archival authority's procedures.

4.3 Transfer of control to the archival authority is deemed to have taken place once archival authority has given approval for the transfer.

## **5. Storage and preservation**

This section outlines the storage requirements and physical management regime for the records. This may include:

### **5.1. Storage facilities**

5.1.1 [State/national/territory] archives shall be kept by the archives custodian in secure areas or facilities that have been designated for archives storage and that have been approved by the archival authority.

5.1.2 The storage of [state/national/territory] archives shall comply with the minimum compliance requirements in the Appendix to this agreement (see Appendix B).

5.1.3 The temperature and relative humidity in the [state/national/territory] archives storage areas shall be monitored and the results reported to the archival authority in the quarterly report (see 10.1).

### **5.2. Conservation and imaging**

5.2.1 If the archives custodian elects to carry out conservation work on a [state/national/territory] archive or conduct a project that includes the imaging (such as microfilming or digitisation) of [state/national/territory] archives, approval from the archival authority is required prior to commencement of the work.

### **5.3. Handling**

5.3.1 If a [state/national/territory] archive is fragile or in an unstable condition and at risk of further damage through handling, it must be referred to the archival authority for a decision regarding public access (note: any statutory provisions for providing alternative access or denying access to fragile originals can be cited here). This direction/decision may remain in place until such time as conservation can be carried out to stabilise/repair the item or the item is microfilmed/digitised.

5.3.2 Handling of records by archives custodian staff will conform to the principles identified by the archival authority.

5.3.3 Any use of original [state/national/territory] archives for exhibition purposes shall require the approval of the archival authority and be in accordance with best practice (e.g. *BS 5454:2000 British Standard: Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents*).

## **6. Documentation**

This section outlines the documentation requirements for transferred records and any agreed access to or use of common control systems. This may include:

6.1 All records covered by this agreement shall be registered progressively into the archival authority's intellectual control systems. The archival authority agrees to provide the archives custodian with an interface for this purpose and to consult and to provide such advice on procedures as may from time to time be required by the archives custodian staff.

6.2 Registration and description shall conform to standards and procedures approved by the archival authority.

6.3 [State/national/territory] archives shall be clearly labelled so that they can be differentiated from other records in the custody of the archives custodian.

6.4 The archives custodian and the archival authority shall negotiate a mutually acceptable documentation work plan.

## **7. Public access**

This section sets out the agreed regime for public access in accordance with statutory requirements and professional standards. This may include:

### **7.1. Access**

7.1.1 Public access to archives is to be provided free of charge. Appropriate charges may be made for additional services such as copying or research services.

7.1.2 The archives custodian shall maintain regular opening hours for providing access to archives. (Note: time, hours or arrangements could be documented

here, eg these shall allow for a minimum of 21 hours per week over a minimum of 3 days).

7.1.3 Public access to [state/national/territory] archives is to be provided only to those records which are open to public access.

7.1.4 Public access to closed [state/national/territory] archives can only be provided to researchers who have specific written permission from transferring agency (note: any specific access rules or procedures for closed records could be specified here).

## **7.2. Reading or research area**

7.2.1 The archives custodian shall provide a designated reading area sufficient to satisfy normal demand for public access to the archives and suitable for their inspection under constant surveillance by staff.

7.2.2 All archives custodian staff that supervise public access will have received training in the safe handling and provision of access to original [state/national/territory] archives.

7.2.3 The archives custodian shall provide facilities for photocopying of [state/national/territory] archives where appropriate as well as provide and ensure the proper maintenance of any technical facilities necessary for consulting the records as required (eg microfilm reader, microfiche reader, computer etc).

7.2.4 The archives custodian shall enforce the rules stipulated by the archival authority (note: if relevant refer to guidelines or information sheets about institutional reading/search room procedures).

7.2.5 The archives custodian shall make control documentation for the [state/national/territory] archives in their custody available in the reading area and provide information about access provisions.

## **8. Recall/transfer of custody**

This section sets out the agreed regime for recall by the transferring agency of records held by the archives custodian and sets out any statutory requirements or procedures for recall. This may include:

8.1 When a [state/national/territory] archive is temporarily recalled for official purposes by a public office, including the archives custodian itself, this must be done in accordance with standard procedures (note: refer to stated requirements, procedures or rules).

8.2 Members of staff from a public office may not recall [state/national/territory] archives for non-business related research use.

8.2 Any other transfer of custody of [state/national/territory] archives to another party (eg a loan for exhibition purposes) must be approved by the archival authority and comply with relevant standards and procedures.

## **9. Staffing**

This section sets out the agreed staffing levels/requirements for the archives custodian. This may include:

9.1 The senior officer designated as being in charge of the archives operation/facility shall be responsible for the management of, and access to, [state/national/territory] archives.

9.2 At least one staff member of the archives custodian shall have appropriate training, qualifications or equivalent experience in archives management.

## **10. Monitoring and reporting**

This section sets out reporting requirements. This may include:

10.1 The archives custodian shall provide quarterly and annual reports containing basic information about the management of the archives, levels of use and archival operations (such as transfers, registration and descriptive work) in accordance with the archival authority's requirements.

10.2 The archival authority may carry out inspections (annually or at other times as necessary) of the [state/national/territory] archives storage facilities, reading area and archival operations generally. The archival authority agrees to give the archives custodian a minimum of two weeks notice of an inspection.

## **11. Insurance**

This section sets out the agreed insurance coverage. This may include:

11.1 The archives custodian agrees to ensure that the [state/national/territory] archives in its custody are covered by an insurance policy for any recovery, preservation and conservation action that may be required in the case of a disaster and the archival authority agrees to assist the archives custodian in arriving at a mutually agreeable valuation for insurance purposes.

11.3 The archives custodian agrees to ensure that it has liability coverage to cover visits by members of the public to reading room/facilities.

## **12. Compliance timetable**

This section sets out the agreed regime for compliance. Organisations will have varying degrees of compliance for storage conditions, staffing levels, reading room facilities. This section can set out a practical timetable for when the archives custodian must comply with parts of the agreement. This may include:

12.1 A compliance timetable covering elements of the agreement that the archives custodian is not able to comply with at the date of the commencement of this agreement shall be negotiated by the archival authority and the archives custodian.

## **13. Amendment/variation**

This section allows for amendment or change to the agreement. This may include:

13.1 This agreement may be amended in writing at any time by mutual agreement between the archival authority and the archives custodian.

## **14. Dispute resolution**

This section sets out the dispute resolution mechanism that enables matters to be resolved without dissolving the agreement. This may include:

14.1 Should any disputes arise that cannot be solved by agreement between the archival authority and the archives custodian the matter shall be resolved by [set out standard mechanisms used by the archival authority or jurisdiction].

## 15. Duration/termination

This section sets out the duration for the agreement and a mechanism for termination. This may include:

15.1 This agreement shall remain valid until such time as either party terminates it or five years from the commencement date whichever is earlier. The agreement may be reviewed by both parties after two years.

15.2 In the event of the termination by either party the archival authority is responsible for making appropriate custody arrangements for the [state/national/territory] archives in the care of the archives custodian.

## 16. Signatures of the parties

This section contains the details of the senior officers in each organisation responsible for the agreement, their signatures and those witnessing the signing of the agreement. The form of this section will conform to normal practice within each jurisdiction.

## Appendix B: Requirements for storage of archives

<b>1. Location</b>	
1.1	The archival authority shall approve all locations for the storage of [state/national/territory] archives.
1.2	[State/national/territory] archives storage areas shall be dedicated to either archives/records or archives/records and library storage.
1.3	[State/national/territory] archives storage areas shall be weatherproof.
1.4	[State/national/territory] archives storage areas shall not be located near areas of known risk (eg chemical storage areas, kitchens and washrooms, air conditioning units, air filtration and ventilation systems)
1.5	[State/national/territory] archives storage areas shall be intruder resistant and access controlled.
<b>2. Environmental Control</b>	
2.1	The temperature and humidity levels in [state/national/territory] archives storage areas shall be stable and be as close as possible to the levels listed in Table 1 (See below).
2.2	[State/national/territory] archives storage areas shall exclude direct sunlight.
2.3	[State/national/territory] archives storage areas shall be well ventilated.

2.4	Storage areas for magnetic media shall be protected from magnetic fields.
<b>3. Shelving and packaging</b>	
3.1	Shelving and handling equipment shall be clean, in good condition and appropriate to the format and retention period of the records.
3.2	Item containers shall be clean, in good condition and appropriate to the format of the [state/national/territory] archives.
<b>4. Protection from disaster</b>	
4.1	Current disaster reaction and recovery plans shall be in place, which cover each [state/national/territory] archives storage location.
4.2	Staff shall be assigned responsibilities in the disaster management process and shall be trained to meet them.
4.3	Fire prevention and suppression measures shall include heat/smoke detection, fire alarms and extinguishers.
<b>5. Maintenance</b>	
5.1	Archives storage areas and buildings shall be regularly maintained and monitored as part of an ongoing program.
5.2	Repairs to [state/national/territory] archive storage areas and buildings shall be carried out promptly after identification.

5.3	Mould or pest infestation shall be treated promptly and appropriately.
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**Table 1: Temperature and Relative Humidity Levels for Storage of archives**

<b>Format</b>	<b>Temperature C (Acceptable range)</b>	<b>Relative Humidity (Acceptable Range)</b>
<b>Paper</b> (Files, cards, volumes, computer printout, other papers, maps, plans, charts)	20°C	50%RH
	2°C variation Eg (19C – 21C)	5%RH variation Eg (47.5%RH–52.5%RH)
<b>Photographic media (a)</b> <b>Black and White</b> (Sheet film, Cine film, x-rays, microforms, glass plate photographs)	<18°C	<35%RH
	2°C variation Eg (17°C – 19°C)	
<b>Photographic media (b)</b> <b>Colour</b> (Sheet film, Cine Film)	<5°C	35%RH
		5%RH variation Eg (32.5%RH–37.5%RH)
<b>Magnetic media</b>	18°C	35%RH

(Computer tapes and disks, video tapes, audio tapes, magneto-optical disks)	2°C variation Eg (19°C – 20°C)	5%RH variation Eg (32.5%RH–37.5 %RH)
<b>Optical media</b> (Compact and mini disks, laser disks)	18°C	35%RH
	2C variation Eg (19°C – 20°C)	5%RH variation Eg (32.5%RH–37.5 %RH)
<b>Other formats</b> (Gramophone disks, models, objects, mixed media items)	20°C	50%RH
	2°C variation Eg (19°C – 21°C)	5%RH variation Eg (47.5%RH–52.5%RH)

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i This list of activities and services is derived from and expands upon the list of (broad) archival program activities described by Sue McKemmish in her article “Introducing Archives and Archival Programs”, in Judith Ellis, ed., *Keeping Archives*, 2 edn., DW Thorpe, 1993.

ii The United Kingdom has a long established network of places of deposit which manage public records, although the ultimate responsibility for the records remains with the Keeper of Public Records. The Keeper is responsible for approving the places of deposit and these vary from collecting libraries and county records office to government agencies. In The National Archives’

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publication *Standard for Records Repositories*, 2004, four reasons are given for retaining records in places of deposits:

- they were created locally and have a specific local interest;
- the information they contain is of a very specialised or technical nature which requires specialised skills for its interpretation;
- they are in a format, which requires very specialised skills for their preservation and/or use, not available at The National Archives; and
- certain public records bodies (such as national museums and galleries) have an administrative need to keep their own archives.