



COUNCIL OF AUSTRALASIAN ARCHIVES
AND RECORDS AUTHORITIES

CAARA Policy 16 -

Statement of Principle – Providing public access to records in Australian government archives

Status: Current
Adopted: March 2007

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

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CAARA Policy 16 – Statement of Principle – Providing public access to records in Australian government archives

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Purpose of the Statement of Principle

The Statement of Principle is intended to guide Australian government archives in providing public access to their collections.

Archives should subscribe to the aims and spirit of the Principle and should be guided by the aims and spirit rather than by a narrow interpretation of the text.

While all archives should aim to meet the Principle it is recognised that financial and legislative requirements may prevent this.

1. Right of access

Access to government archives is a right of all members of the community, limited only in accordance with relevant legislation.

2. Role of archives in providing public access

Providing and facilitating public access to government records is a vital and integral part of the role of Australian government archives.

3. Relationships with users

Archives should identify, and develop channels of communication with their users, potential users and their communities. The inclusion of user

representatives on boards, committees and other such bodies is one way of developing such channels of communication.

Archives should use these channels of communication to consult with users, potential users and their communities in order to:

- understand their needs and expectation
- enable them to provide input into decisions about the nature and development of services to meet their needs
- enable their interests to be taken into account in the processes for selecting records.

4. Serving users and communities

Archives should seek to serve all of their communities with a range of services appropriate to the stated or implied needs of those communities.

Where possible users should have choice in the means of access.

A users location and ability to access a Reading Room should not be a barrier to access to both records and staff expertise.

Users should not face any greater barriers to access within the control of the archives because of their gender, race, location or economic status.

Archives should be aware of the needs of Indigenous Australians in accessing records. Archives should be guided by:

- the COFSTA/CAARA Policy Statement 14 Statement of Principle: Access to records of Indigenous Australians affected by past separation policies <https://www.caara.org.au/Policy/policy14.htm>
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols for libraries, archives and information services <http://www.cdu.edu.au/library/protocol.html>

Exhibitions, including virtual exhibitions, educational materials and programs, publications and websites should be seen as important ways of providing access.

Archives should be able to explain to users and potential users how charges are set and why charges are applied to some services and not others.

5. Provision of information about collections, services and facilities

Archives should educate users and potential users about their existence, role, facilities and services.

Archives should document their collections and make that documentation widely available.

6. Improving accessibility of records

Archives should make their collections more accessible by continually:

- improving the quantity and quality of documentation about them including description, finding aids, guides
- improving the user friendliness of systems and processes
- making more content more widely available.

7. Access facilities

Archives should provide appropriate physical and technical facilities for access to records. These facilities should be appropriate for both the nature of the records and the number and needs of users.

8. Service quality

Archives should publish their standards of service and ensure that these are widely available to users.

Standards of service should be reviewed regularly, in the light of resource changes and in consultation with stakeholders, to ensure that they remain current and appropriate.

Archives should have user feedback mechanisms and complaints procedures. They should respond to and act on feedback and complaints.

9. Copying services

Archives should facilitate access to collections by providing copying services. They should facilitate copying in accordance with copyright law, other statutory requirements and the need to preserve unique and irreplaceable material.

Copying services for remote users should be addressed explicitly.

Any fees charged for copying services should be stated clearly and applied equitably.

10. Release of records

Records should be made available as soon as possible in accordance with statutory and institutional requirements.

Users should be told the reasons for any restrictions, avenues of appeal and any alternative means of applying for access.

Archives should periodically re-evaluate restricted material and work towards the removal of any restrictions.

11. Protection of records

Care should be taken to ensure that records made available for public access are protected from damage, alteration or removal. Access to copies of records rather than originals may be appropriate.

Rules applied to the use of records should be clearly stated to all users and potential users. They should be applied and enforced equally.

12. User input into what is available to be accessed

Archives should take users interests into account in determining what records are made available for access.

13. Performance measurement

Archives should have systems to measure and analyse their performance against this Principle and their access service standards.