

Appendix A: Appraisal Criteria

Appraisal is the act of determining whether records should be acquired by the Archives, based on their current administrative, legal, or financial value, their historical informational, evidential and research value, as well as their physical condition and accessibility. It is an archivist's most challenging function.

The questions outlined below are some of the criteria that an archivist considers when determining if a group of records merits the public investment of preserving them for long-term access in the Municipal Archives.

Are the records primarily original and unique?

Emphasis is on original records, as primary sources. Published or secondary sources are acquired by libraries. HRM's Corporate Library acquires material published by HRM and its predecessor municipalities. Artifacts or three-dimensional items are acquired by museums.

Was the creator of the records active primarily in the municipal sphere of the HRM?

Records that were created by a person or organization operating at the provincial or national level, or of that level of significance are acquired by provincial and national archives. If there is a local repository acquiring archival records for a particular community within HRM, the donor will be referred to the local repository.

Do the records document a significant or unique time, event, activity or persons in the history of HRM?

While assessing the significance of records is unavoidably subjective, the Municipal Archives looks for records of significance within its municipal sphere that would generate a breadth of interest among researchers.

Are the records what they say they are?

The authenticity and reliability of the records as evidence of the activities of the records creator is very important. Understanding the context of why and how the records were created and used, and who had access to them helps determine records' authenticity and reliability.

Do the records complement records already held by the Municipal Archives?

Community records add to the stories told in government records, such that a Mayor's personal records are an important complement to the official Mayor's Office records. Conversely the Municipal Archives need not acquire records that are very similar to those already in its holdings.

Does the physical extent and date range of the records offer a sufficiently comprehensive view of the activities of the records creator?

More is not always better, but the full set of correspondence with an artist over the length of her career tells much more than one letter. Completeness is an

important criteria. Often single items, unless they are of great significance, are not worth the time and effort to adequately preserve and describe them. Conversely it may not be justifiable to acquire a huge volume of records from one person/organization, especially if there is a possibility that the organization could establish its own archives.

Are the records identified and well-organized?

An unidentified photograph has less informational value than an album of labelled photographs. A meaningful filing system is more useful than a box of jumbled papers. Contact an archivist before re-arranging records you are considering for donation. It is best to preserve the organizational method of the person who created the records rather than imposing your own.

Does the donor have clear title to the records with the right to enter into a donation agreement with the Municipal Archives?

Ownership of the records will be transferred to the Municipal Archives, and so the donor must have the authority to sign the Deed of Gift.

Does the donor want to restrict access or use of the records?

The Archives will only consider reasonable and short-lived restrictions on the access and use of donated records. The effort of preserving and describing the records is so that they can be used by the general public.

What is the physical condition of the records? Will they require conservation or reformatting in order to preserve or view them?

The Municipal Archives can only take on responsibility for records it can afford to preserve and provide access to. It must also protect its holdings from infestations of pests or mould from new acquisitions. It is important to know the history of where and how the records have been kept.