Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation

STORING RECORDS

Secure and correct storage of paper-based archives and digital records will ensure preservation of data.

Museums and galleries keep database records of each collection item using specialised digital management systems. Some smaller organisations keep paper-based files or spreadsheets. Whichever system you use to document your collection, it is important is that you backup your records to protect from loss.

PAPER-BASED RECORDS

If paper-based records form part of your collection documentation, it is recommended that at least one copy is made and stored off-site, in a separate location. The second copy could be a digital version. If using digital copies as a secondary version, see information below. Having a second copy will ensure that, should one copy be lost i.e., due to disaster, a second copy will be accessible.

Paper-based records will require storage in stable environmental conditions (temperature, humidity, light), housed appropriately, and kept free from pests. See relevant Fact Sheets for further information relating to paper-based items.

DIGITAL PRESERVATION POLICY

Developing and implementing a digital preservation policy is important for ensuring the long-term integrity and availability of data.

A digital preservation policy should consider:
- Data and hardware storage
- Data backup and restoration
- Periodic review of archival file format and format migration
- Periodic review of hardware and software obsolescence

It is recommended that there is a consideration in the budget for these services.

DIGITAL FILE STORAGE AND BACKUP

Digital files can be stored on-site, on a system server, or online using a cloud service. If using an on-site server, then backing up the server to an off-site location or cloud service is recommended.

Ideally, backups should occur daily. This will ensure that, should any information be lost due to system failure or accidental deletion, important data will not be lost.

It is important to make sure that storage and backup accounts are linked to the organisation, not an individual. Access details should be formally documented for succession management and ongoing, future staff access.

TRANSFERRING AND CONVERTING DATA

Digital records are at risk of obsolescence from:

- Degradation of physical carrier (floppy disks, CDs, DVDs).
- Outmodedness of the hardware needed to access the record (i.e., video player or driver needed to read the media and the computers required to operate them).
- Obsolescence of the software needed to read or write the record and the operating system to run the software.

To minimise the risk of losing information, transferring media to new platforms or migrating files to new formats should be considered. The original media formats can be retained if considered necessary. Remember to transcribe any information recorded on the original format to the new format (i.e., add written information from labels on old media format to the metadata of the new media format).

SECURITY

The information you document about an object should be protected. Access to personal information such as donors or acquisition history should remain private, and special care should be used when documenting restricted or culturally sensitive objects to ensure material is not publicly accessible. Consider restricting access through password protected files.

SUMMARY

Correct storage and back-up systems will ensure preservation of records.

Updating digital media formats will reduce the risk of losing access to data and information due to changes in technology and obsolescence of playback equipment.