

**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES**  
**COMMITTEE ON BEST PRACTICES AND STANDARDS**  
**WORKING GROUP ON ACCESS**

**Principles of Access to Archives**

**DRAFT**

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## PREFACE

Access is the availability of records for consultation as a result both of legal authorization and the existence of finding aids. Since 1994 the International Council on Archives (ICA) has published four standards on archival description: ISAD(G) in 1994, ISAAR(CPF) in 1996, ISDF in 2008, and ISDIAH in 2008. These standards cover finding aids, one of the two key elements of archival access; they have transformed the practice of description. This statement of *Principles* focuses on the other element of access: the legal authority to consult archives.

The International Council on Archives has long been concerned with the question of access to archives. In the wake of the political changes in Europe at the beginning of the 1990s, European archivists developed an “Outline of a Standard European Policy on Access to Archives,” which was adopted as an ICA position at the Annual General Meeting in Edinburgh in 1997. The Outline, however, focuses almost entirely on access to official governmental archives, with only one statement on access to non-governmental records: “It is recommended that attempts should be made to bring arrangements for access to private archives in line with those for official archives, whenever that is possible.”

Two additional ICA documents underscore the importance of access as an element of archival practice: the *Code of Ethics* of 1996 and the *Universal Declaration on Archives* of 2010. The *Code of Ethics* states in principles 6 and 7:

*Principle 6. Archivists should promote the widest possible access to archival materials and provide an impartial service to all users.*

*Principle 7. Archivists should respect both access and privacy, and act within the boundaries of relevant legislation.*

The *Universal Declaration on Archives* notes

*the vital necessity of archives for supporting business efficiency, accountability and transparency, for protecting citizens rights, for establishing individual and collective memory, for understanding the past, and for documenting the present to guide future actions,*

identifies one of the vital roles of archivists as

*making these records available for use,*

and pledges that archivists will work together in order that

*archives are made accessible to everyone, while respecting the pertinent laws and the rights of individuals, creators, owners and users.*

In the spring of 2010 the ICA Committee on Best Practices and Standards asked a small group of archivists to discuss whether it was possible to develop a standard of good practice for public access to all archives, governmental and non-governmental. The people of the Working Group represented a variety of archival traditions: Trudy Huskamp Peterson, United

States, Section of Professional Associations, served as chair, with members Sarah Choy, Hong Kong Legislative Council Archives, East Asian Regional Branch; Victoras Domarkas, director of the national archives of Lithuania, European Regional Branch (EURBICA); Chido Houbraken, The Netherlands, records management consultant, EURBICA; Silvia Ninita de Moura Esteveao, national archives of Brazil, Association of Latin American Archivists; Helene Servant, Service interministeriel des archives de France, EURBICA; Maggie Shapley, archives of Australian National University, Section on University Archives and Research Institutions (SUV).<sup>1</sup>

Following an initial meeting in Paris in May 2010, the members of the group drafted two principal documents: a statement of *Principles of Access to Archives* and a technical report providing advice on implementing the *Principles*. The Working Group then invited the chairs of ICA bodies whose members were not represented on the Working Group and whose work often encounters access issues to name a member read the draft, comment on it, and attend a consultative meeting about the *Principles* in Paris in February 2011. The Consultative Group included Didier Bondue representing the Section for Business and Labour Archives, Fatoumatta Cisse of the West African Regional Branch, Kim Eberhard of the Section of Archives of Churches and Religious Denominations; Soufi Fouad of the Arab Regional Branch, Deborah Jenkins of the Section of Local, Municipal and Territorial Archives, Jan Lohman of the Section of International Organizations, Ivan Murambiwa of Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch, Gunther Schefbeck of the Section for Archives of Parliaments and Political Parties, and David Sutton of the Section on Literary and Artistic Archives. The Consultative Group agreed that ICA should adopt a set of access principles and made numerous suggestions about the text of the two principal documents.

The Working Group redrafted the two documents, circulated them to the Consultative Group, and again edited the documents. The revised *Principles of Access to Archives*, along with a plan and timeline for general debate on it, was considered by the ICA Executive Board at its meeting in March 2010. The Board adopted the plan and timeline for consultation; because access is a major concern of user groups, the plan sharing the draft with user groups and allied organizations and asking for their comments. The Executive Board also commented on the *Principles*, which were revised taking into account the opinions expressed.

The *Principles of Access to Archives* consists of 10 Principles with a commentary explaining each Principle; the *Principles* and the commentary taken together constitute the statement of professional practice. (This follows the format of the ICA *Code of Ethics*.) The *Principles* are accompanied by *Technical Guidelines* and a brief glossary.

The timeline and plan for consultation is:

2011 June	Draft completed, translated, and sent to ICA membership and stakeholders; comment period opens
2011 September	Second World Conference of Archives Associations, workshop on <i>Principles</i>
2011 October	CITRA, open forum on the draft
2012 February	Comment period closes, revisions completed, sent to Executive Board

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<sup>1</sup>Please note that the members served on the Working Group in their individual expert capacities. The statement of professional practice does not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the governmental bodies, institutions or organizations with which these members are employed or affiliated.

2012 April                      Executive Board considers draft  
2012 August                    General Assembly considers the *Principles*

The members of both the Consultative Group and the Working Group very much hope that all ICA sections and branches will discuss the draft *Principles* during their meetings between now and February 2012. We would be grateful for any guidance on user groups and other groups that might be asked to comment; please send suggestions to [access@ica.org](mailto:access@ica.org).

The archivists who have worked on the *Principles* have found it challenging to encompass the variety of world practices in a single document, but we all believe it is an important initiative for ICA. We recognize that most governments and many institutions have a rich history of managing access. For them, this statement of professional practice is a supplement to those existing processes, permitting those archivists to measure their institutional practices against an external baseline and to strengthen them where appropriate. In those institutions where access practices have been weak or contested, the statement of professional practice provides a guideline to reviewing and revising processes. The members of the Working Group and the larger Consultative Group fully expect vigorous debate about the draft, and we welcome it. Spirited participation will make the final document a robust statement of practice that all archivists will respect. Please join the discussion.

## INTRODUCTION

The fundamental purpose of archives is use. Access service links archives to the public; it determines the information users have about the institution and its holdings; it influences whether the public will trust the custodians of archives institution and the service they provide. Archivists support a culture of openness, but impose restrictions as required by laws and other authorities, ethics, or donor requirements. When restrictions are unavoidable, they must be clear and limited in scope and duration. Archivists encourage responsible parties to formulate clear mandates and consistent rules for access, but in the absence of unambiguous guidelines, archivists determine the appropriateness of access by considering professional ethics, equity and fairness, legal requirements and social traditions, and cultural sensibilities. Archivists have the responsibility to prevent unauthorized access and at the same time provide the widest possible use of archives by monitoring restrictions and promptly removing those no longer warranted. Archivists adhere to the *Principles of Access to Archives* in formulating and implementing access policies.

### **Purpose of the *Principles of Access to Archives***

The *Principles of Access to Archives* provide archivists with an external baseline against which to measure their existing access practices and to support archivists who seek to adopt new or modify existing access rules.

### **Scope of the *Principles of Access to Archives***

The *Principles of Access to Archives* cover both the rights of access by the public and the responsibilities of archivists in providing access to archives and to information about them.

The *Principles* recognize that administering access may also involve restricting access based on the information contained in the archives.

The *Principles* further recognize that in some countries several laws codify access rules that are inconsistent with each other. This is true both of laws covering archives in government custody and laws pertaining to archives in private, non-governmental bodies. Archivists actively encourage governments, parliaments and courts to harmonize access laws.

The *Principles* apply to both government and non-government archives. Differences in the implementation of the principles for public and private archives may occur.

The *Principles* assume that archivists are proactively involved in ensuring the transfer of permanently valuable archives to archival custody where access is more readily available to the public than it is when the archives are in the custody of the originating office.

The *Principles* do not cover general reference service operations and standards of service delivery, nor do they cover the restrictions on access to original items for the purpose of preservation.

Each Principle is accompanied by a commentary; the principles and commentary taken together constitute the *Principles of Access to Archives*.

Following the *Principles* is a technical report. The report does not form part of the *Principles*; rather, it provides a methodology that may be used to implement the *Principles* and provides sample forms that may be adapted for use in various access processes.

### **Responsibilities for implementing the *Principles of Access to Archives***

Primary responsibilities for implementing the *Principles* are shared by administrators, archivists, donors and the personnel of institutions transferring their records to the archival custody.

\*A person within the archival institution or its parent body must have leadership responsibility and accountability for the access program. This official should have sufficient authority to ensure both the timely release and the secure protection of information. Executives of the parent body are responsible for supporting the access programs of the archival institution, providing adequate funding for it and ensuring that its staff members have the professional training and support needed to perform their duties competently in the best interests of users, archives, records creators and donors.

\*Archivists are responsible for all aspects of access control, including the design, implementation and maintenance of access control systems. All staff members must understand the basic principles of access, the need for secure handling of restricted information, and the responsibility not to divulge information unless it has been made public through approved processes. Archivists train new staff members in the operation of the access regime to the extent that their jobs require it

\*Donors and institutional personnel transferring archives to the custody an archival institution recognize that the archives are preserved for access. If certain information must be withheld from public use for a period of time, they are responsible for clearly stating what the information is, the reasons for restriction, and the period of the restriction. Institutional personnel and donors negotiate with the archivists in a spirit of cooperation and trust.

Support for the access program comes from lawyers, computer and security professionals, and declassification specialists. Lawyers must understand the basic principles of archival management and support the archival institution as it balances institutional and user needs within the applicable legal framework. Computer systems administrators are responsible for ensuring that all documentation is accurate and available to archivists and users when required and that restricted material is securely protected from unauthorized access. Security personnel are responsible for securing and monitoring access to archives storage areas, with special vigilance for locations where restricted materials are held. External declassification specialists must provide timely declassification review. They are responsible for knowing both declassification policies and what information is already in the public domain and for making consistent judgments that release as much information as possible.

*Note: In both the Principles and the Technical Guidelines, the word “archives” refers to the archival holdings of an institution, rather than the institution itself.*

## PRINCIPLES OF ACCESS TO ARCHIVES

### **1. The public has the right of access to archives of public bodies. Both public and private entities should open their archives to the greatest extent possible.**

Access to the archives of government is essential for an informed society. Democracy, accountability, good governance and civic engagement require a legal guarantee that persons will have access to the archives of public bodies established by national, self-governing territories and local governments, intergovernmental institutions, and any organization and any legal or natural person performing public functions and operating with public funds. All archives of public bodies are open to the public unless they fall under an exception grounded in law.

Institutions holding private archives do not have a legal obligation to open their archives to external users unless specific legislation imposes this responsibility on them. However, many private archives hold institutional records and personal papers that have significant value for understanding social, economic, religious, community and personal history as well as for generating ideas and supporting development. Archivists working in private institutions encourage their organizations to provide public access to their archives, especially if the holdings will help protect rights or will benefit public interests. Archivists stress that opening institutional archives helps maintain institutional transparency and credibility, improves public understanding of the institution's unique history and its contributions to society, helps the institution fulfill its social responsibility to share information for the public good, and enhances the institution's image.

### **2. Institutions holding archives make known the existence of the archives, including the existence of closed materials, and disclose the existence of restrictions that affect access to the archives.**

Users must be able to locate the archival institution that holds material of interest to them. Archivists freely provide information about their institution and the archives it holds. They inform the public of the general rules for use of the holdings in accordance with the institution's legal mandates, policies and regulations. They ensure that descriptions of the holdings of their archives are current, accurate and comply with international descriptive standards. Archivists share draft descriptions of archives with users if final versions are lacking.

Institutions that give the public access to any part of their archives publish an access policy. Archivists begin with a presumption of openness; they ensure that any access restrictions are written clearly to enable the public to understand them and to enhance consistency in their application.

Users have the right to know whether or not a specific series, file, item or portion of an item exists even though it is withheld from use. Archivists reveal the fact that closed records exist through accurate description and insertion of withdrawal sheets or electronic markers. Archivists provide the maximum information about the restricted material, so long as the description does not disclose the information that is the reason for the restriction. Users have the right to know the reason for the restriction, the date the item was reviewed for access, the

review authority, all records declassification decisions and, if applicable, the date at which the restriction will expire.

### **3. Institutions holding archives adopt a pro-active approach to access.**

Archivists have a professional responsibility to promote access to archives. Archivists use many means to make archives known, including Internet and web-based publications, printed materials, public programs, commercial media and outreach activities. They are continually alert to changing technologies of communication and use those that are available to promote the knowledge of archives. Archivists cooperate with other archives in preparing location registers, guides, archival portals and gateways to assist users in locating records. They proactively provide access to the parts of their holdings that are of wide interest to the public through print publication, posts on the institution's website, or by cooperating with external publication projects. Archivists consider user needs when determining how the archives are published.

### **4. Institutions holding archives ensure that restrictions on access are clear and of stated duration, are based on pertinent legislation, acknowledge the right of privacy in accordance with cultural norms, and respect the rights of owners of private materials.**

Archivists provide the widest possible access to archives, but they recognize and accept the need for some restrictions. Restrictions are imposed by legislation or by institutional policy, either of the archival institution or its parent body, or by a donor. Restrictions ultimately run counter to the societal purpose of archival preservation for accountability and for heritage, and archivists seek to limit the scope of restrictions to information that truly needs temporary withholding.

General restrictions apply to all the archival holdings; as appropriate to the nature of the institution, they cover the protection of privacy, safety, investigatory or law enforcement information, commercial secrets, and national security. The scope and duration of the general restrictions must be clear and public.

Specific restrictions apply only to designated bodies of institutional records and personal papers; they apply for a limited duration. A clear statement of the specific restriction is included in the public archival description of the designated materials.

Access to donated records and personal papers is limited by the conditions established in the instrument of transfer such as a deed of gift, a will, or an exchange of letters. Archivists negotiate and accept donor restrictions on access that are clear, of limited duration and can be administered on equitable terms.

### **5. Archives are available on equal terms of access.**

Archivists provide users with fair, equitable and timely access to archives. Many different categories of persons use archives and access rules may differentiate between categories of users (for example, the general public, adoptees seeking information on birth parents, medical researchers seeking statistical information from hospital records, victims of human rights

violations), but the rules should apply equally to all persons within each category without discrimination. When a closed item is reviewed and access to it is granted to a member of the general public, the item is available to all other members of the public under the same terms and conditions.

Access determinations are made as rapidly as possible following receipt of the access request. Records of public bodies that have been disclosed to the public before transfer to the archival institution, except those made public through illegal or unauthorized means, remain accessible after they are transferred regardless of their content, form or age. If only part of the information in an item has been published or is readily available to the public, access to the released information remains open after transfer; the unreleased information is subject to the normal access policy and procedures. Archivists actively discourage and oppose attempts by governments to enact legislation or issue regulations that close information previously made public, either by reclassifying or by ordering destruction of the materials.

Private institutions holding archives provide equal access to users; however, existing donor agreements and institutional security needs and related constraints may require archivists to make distinctions between researchers. The criteria used by the private institutions for determining selective access are stated in its public access policy, and archivists encourage their institutions to reduce these exceptions to the greatest extent possible.

## **6. Institutions holding archives ensure the preservation of, and access to, records that provide evidence needed to assert human rights and to document violations of them, even if those records are closed to the general public.**

The *Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity (2005)* of the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights declares that victims of human rights abuses and their families have a right to know the truth about the violations. The *Principles* emphasize the vital role that access to archives plays in learning the truth, holding persons accountable for human right violations, claiming compensation, and defending against charges of human rights violations. The *Principles* state that each person is entitled to know whether his or her name appears in State archives and, if it does, to challenge the validity of the information by submitting to the archival institution a statement that will be made available by the archivists whenever the file containing the name is requested for research use.

Many archival institutions obtain and hold the evidence needed to protect human rights and to contest the violation of human rights. Persons seeking access to archives for human rights purposes are given access to the relevant archives, even if those archives are closed to the general public. The right of access for human rights purposes applies to both public and private archives.

## **7. Users have the right to appeal a denial of access.**

When a request for access to archives is denied, the reasons for the denial are stated clearly in writing and conveyed to the applicant as soon as possible. Users denied access are informed

of their right to appeal the denial of access and the procedures and time limits, if any, for doing so.

For public archives, several levels of appeal may exist, such as a first internal review and a second appeal an independent and impartial authority established by law. For non-public archives, the appeal process may be internal, but it should follow the same general approach with more than one level of appeal. Archivists who participate in the initial denial provide the reviewing authority with information relevant to the case but do not take part in the decision-making on the appeal.

#### **8. Institutions holding archives ensure that operational constraints do not prevent access to archives.**

The equal right to access archival records is not simply equal treatment but also includes the equal right to benefit from the archives.

Governmental archival institutions do not charge a fee for access to archives for either national or foreign users. When private archival institutions charge admission fees, they should consider the applicant's ability to pay and the fee charged must not be a bar to use of the archives.

Users living at a distance from the institution holding the archives can obtain copies in a variety of formats in lieu of personal visits. Institutions may charge reasonable fees for timely copying service on demand.

Partial release of archives is a means to provide access when the entire file or item cannot be released. If an archival item contains sensitive information in a few sentences or a limited number of pages, that information is removed and the remainder of the item released for public access. To the greatest extent practicable, archivists do not refuse to redact archives because of the labor required to make redactions; however, if redaction makes the requested item or file misleading or unintelligible, archivists do not redact and the material remains closed.

Archivists do not give special access privileges to preferred groups or individuals. However, the user who is disabled or illiterate may be given special assistance, especially if the research relates to a human rights question.

#### **9. Archivists have access to all closed archives and perform necessary archival work on them.**

Archivists have access to all closed archives in order to analyze, preserve, arrange and describe them so that their existence and the reasons for their restriction are known. This archival work helps prevent the archives from being destroyed or forgotten advertently or inadvertently and helps assure the integrity of the archives. Preservation and description of closed archives promotes public confidence in the archival institution and in the archives profession, for it enables archivists to assist the public in tracing the existence and general nature of closed records and learning when and how they will be available for access. If the closed archives have national security classifications or other restrictions that require special

clearances, archivists comply with the requisite clearance procedures to gain access.

#### **10. Archivists participate in the decision-making process on access.**

Archivists help their institutions establish access policies and procedures and review archives for possible release under existing access guidelines. Archivists work with lawyers and other partners in deciding on the basic framework and interpretation of restrictions, which the archivists then implement. Archivists know the archives, the access restrictions, the needs and requirements of the stakeholders and what information is already in the public domain on the subject to which the records relate; archivists apply that knowledge when making access decisions. Archivists help the institution achieve informed decisions and consistent, reasonable outcomes.

Archivists monitor restrictions, reviewing materials and removing restrictions that are no longer applicable. Closed archives are released when the public interest in the information in the archives outweighs the harm that might be caused by disclosure.

# PRINCIPLES OF ACCESS TO ARCHIVES

## TECHNICAL GUIDELINES

### **A. Develop an access policy.**

1. A written access policy sets out the basis on which access decisions are made. The access policy refers to any laws, orders and judicial decisions, regulations and donor agreements that apply to the archives. It may also refer to the ICA *Principles of Access to Archives*.

- a. Laws include a specific law on the archives; freedom of information, privacy, data protection, and privacy acts; legislation that includes general access or secrecy provisions; and laws applying to private sector records such as legislation on corporations, educational institutions, and notary publics.
- b. Orders and judicial decisions include executive orders, such as those on executive branch secrecy, and court orders and judicial decisions with broad impact on records, such as decisions interpreting the standard for access to the records of grand juries or investigating magistrates.
- c. Regulations include the internal regulations of the archival institution as well as decisions of a board or governing council, statutes of universities and religious organizations, and company policies.
- d. Donor agreements include all legally authoritative documentation of transactions between the archival institution and the external entity or individual donating the archives. These include deeds of gift, wills, letters of donation and deposit agreements.

2. Access policy for a government archival institution relies upon law, orders, regulations and donor agreements. Access policy for an archival institution that is a subordinate part of a non-government entity, such as an archives within a corporation or a religious establishment, includes any applicable law but relies primarily on internal regulations and, if the archival institution accepts donations, donor agreements. Access policy for an archival institution that exists independently of a parent body or whose principal purpose is to obtain donations relies on regulations and donor agreements.

3. An access policy describes the general and specific restrictions that apply to the archives. General restrictions apply to particular kinds of information or designated classes of material wherever they are found in the archives. Specific restrictions are specified by the transferring entity and apply only to the archives of a particular creator or donor. The access policy includes a generic reference to specific restrictions to alert users that such restrictions exist, although including each specific restriction in the policy would make a cumbersome and confusing policy and is usually not recommended.

4. General restriction statements define the categories of restriction and set out any exceptions to them. Restrictions are identified by number and short descriptive title and provide sufficient detail of the circumstances in which they are applied to ensure that users will understand the nature of the material being restricted. Examples of common restrictions are materials containing information, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy of a living person; materials restricted by statute,

executive order, or court order; and materials containing confidential business and financial information.

5. Exceptions to general restrictions are stated in the access policy, such as when persons may be granted special access to records about themselves or which they have created.
6. The access policy may also cover administrative processes, such as how to apply for access and how to appeal an access decision. Service delivery standards, such as the expected time period for a response to a request, may be specified.
7. The access policy is approved at a high level within the archival institution or the archival institution's parent administration. For example, in non-government archival institutions, a board of directors, a governing council, or a senior cleric may authorize the access policy.
8. An example of an access policy is at Appendix A.

#### **B. Agree on access restrictions at the time of transfer.**

9. Access restrictions are discussed and agreed upon between the archival institution and the transferring organization or person prior to or at the time the archives are transferred. The archival institution's general access policy will form the basis of these discussions. Any specific restrictions are listed in the transfer document.
10. In government archival institutions, the transfer document may confirm simply that the records are subject to archival or other relevant legislation, it may state that the records will be restricted for a set time period and then reviewed for possible release, or it may state that the records will be restricted for a set time period and automatically released at the expiration of the period. The transfer document states whether the records are covered by national security restrictions, contain information that would invade a person's privacy, or are subject to specific legal provisions or court orders.
11. In non-governmental archival institutions whose primary purpose is to preserve the records of the archival institution's parent organization, the transfer document may simply confirm that the records are subject to the access policy of the archival institution.
12. Before accepting donations of personal papers or records of an organization, the archivist and the donor discuss the archival institution's access policy, the nature of the materials in the proposed donation and how the access policy would apply to them. The donor may request that specific items or categories of material be restricted for a stated period of years or until a particular event occurs such as the death of a named individual. The donor may ask to be consulted before the restricted materials are opened, either to specific individuals or for general use; such conditions should be discouraged but if necessary should be valid for only a limited time or until a specific event occurs. The agreed access conditions for the donation are confirmed in writing in the instrument of gift.

#### **C. Control physical access to restricted records.**

13. Physical access to records storage areas is controlled to prevent unauthorized entry and to limit the opportunity for access to restricted information by those not authorized to do so.

14. Housing restricted material in a separate area will reduce the likelihood of inadvertent use of them in reference service. This may be a separate room or a separate area within a common storage room; in the latter case, the area may be caged or mobile shelving locked to prevent unauthorized access.

15. National security-classified material may require additional security measures and protocols, such as two staff members being present when a security vault is opened or each person entering signing a register to confirm entry at a specific date and time for a particular purpose.

16. Access to information about the location of material within the repository is restricted to those staff members who need to retrieve records for official purposes. This restriction may include the location register indicating the shelf location of particular records; an electronic location register should be protected by a password that is regularly changed and known only to those who need the information.

#### **D. Give staff access to restricted records for archival work.**

17. Staff members have access to holdings containing restricted information in order to arrange and describe records and to implement access restrictions. If staff members must work with national security or other specially protected records, the staff member complies with the procedures to be cleared to handle the records.

18. Only staff members whose duties require access to restricted information have access to it (the 'need-to-know' principle). This reduces the possibility of unauthorized disclosure of the restricted information. Role-based access control can be implemented by analyzing the work processes involved in identifying and implementing access restrictions and organizing work to limit the number of staff members that are needed to manage the restricted materials.

19. Staff members do not divulge restricted information to which they have access by virtue of their job. Staff members may be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement or non-disclosure language may be included in a clause in an employment contract that the staff member signs. Staff members in government archival institutions may be covered by more general legislation or regulations for government employees (for example, an Official Secrets Act) that include severe sanctions, such as dismissal, if restricted information is released.

#### **E. Describe restricted records.**

20. The access conditions applying to records are included in finding aids, using element 4.1 of the *International Standard for Archival Description (General)*, "Conditions governing access," including:

- a. the nature of the restriction that applies, including whether the restriction is based only on the date of the material or on its content (without revealing the restricted information),
- b. the extent of the period of closure and the date it will be released when appropriate,
- c. the authority for the restriction, whether legislation, regulation, or legal agreement with donor.

21. General information about the conditions governing access may be given at the fonds or series level, such as "subject to a 30-year rule" or "files relating to student results are subject

to general restriction 2.” Specific information at the file or item level indicates whether or not the material is open for access, in whole or in part, or wholly closed. Wholly restricted items are described in finding aids so that users can request the review of the decision to restrict access.

22. The publicly available finding aid does not reveal restricted information. For instance, if the identity of a person is the restricted element, the name of person in the original title of the case file should be replaced with words that indicate that the name is restricted and has been removed, for example, “Allegations of criminal activity by [name restricted].” If every word in the title is restricted, then the other elements of information about the file (number, date range, etc.) should still appear in the finding aid with the title replaced by a phrase such as “The title of this file is restricted.”

#### **F. Respond to requests for access to restricted records.**

23. When a request for access is received, the archivist determines whether the material is open for public use. If the materials are not open, the archivist determines whether the requester is eligible for access under an exception to a restriction, as listed in the access policy. In some jurisdictions, a person may request special access to records about themselves and be granted access to information restricted from the general public; this is especially true for persons meeting the tests for access set out in the *Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity* of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. See Appendix B for a sample decision chart on preliminary steps in determining access.

24. All users of the archives must show some form of identification and provide information such as name, address and contact details. For certain types of material, the purpose of research may need to be disclosed. Persons requesting access to restricted information under an exemption are asked to show credentials that are sufficient to determine whether the person qualifies for the exception. Persons seeking access to national security classified records must obtain a statement from the classifying agency authorizing access. The personal information obtained in the process of verifying credentials is treated in accordance with privacy legislation or internal regulations; this may require that the information be used only for the purpose for which it is gathered unless the user is notified of potential future uses, such as legal proceedings or statistical purposes.

25. In some jurisdictions, public officials retain a right to have access to records that they created or received in the course of their government service. Current legislation or regulations may need to be consulted or the advice of the previously employing organization obtained to determine whether the person applying to see the records is permitted to do so.

26. If the transfer instrument requires the archival institution to consult with the creator or donor before access is given, the archival institution keeps a record that indicates the date the request is made, the name of the user, and the outcome.

27. The archival institution maintains a record of requests for access to restricted material, including the identity of the user, any reviews undertaken, and the results of those reviews. This information is available only to staff; it is stored in a secure part of the archival institution’s database or paper files. The length of time that this information is retained may be determined by data protection legislation.

## **G. Make access decisions.**

28. When items are requested that have not previously been made available to the public, they are screened to determine whether any access restrictions apply.

29. The principles of risk management can be applied to the screening process: the provenance of the material, the topic of the file, and the age and format of the records may indicate where restricted information is likely to be found and whether detailed examination of the records is required. For example, nineteenth-century military enlistments of deceased soldiers will not require screening, but recent investigatory case files will; photographs of forests will not require screening but current photographs of military installations will; samples of routine correspondence and publications are reviewed rapidly to confirm that no extraneous restricted information is included. Unprocessed material will require closer screening than processed archives.

30. Archivists begin a review of closed materials by reviewing all restrictions that apply, including laws, regulation and orders, specific restrictions, and donor instructions. If the items under review are in a regular format, such as on a form or reports prepared in a standard order or structured case files, the reviewer identifies the places where potentially sensitive information is likely to occur and concentrates on reviewing information found in those locations. Archivists scan files quickly, reading closely only if material that might need to be restricted is located.

31. When information that may need to be restricted is found, the archivist determines whether existing conditions eliminate the need for restriction; for example, the information is already legally in the public domain (the existence of transcripts of open court proceedings or media cuttings in the file may indicate this) or the person is deceased (an obituary on a personnel file or the payment of a pension to dependents may indicate this).

32. If resources are available, another staff member makes a second review. The second reviewer looks at all items proposed for restriction, spot checks those recommended for release, and makes the final decision to release or withhold. The second review may not be needed if there is a well-established precedent for access to the type of information in the materials. If a second review is not done, the supervisor of the first reviewer or other designated official confirms the withholding or release. See a sample reviewer worksheet in Appendix C.

33. It is preferable that staff members other than those providing reference service make the access decisions. This reduces the possibility of staff members inadvertently revealing restricted information to researchers. This is not always possible in small archival institutions.

## **H. Implement access restrictions.**

34. When information that must be restricted is identified, archivists ensure that the restriction is limited to the minimum necessary information to protect the matter. Different physical techniques are used to restrict information in paper, electronic, and audiovisual records. The staff member who completed the review may do the withdrawal or redaction or the decisions may be passed to another staff member who implements them. Alternatives to physical

restriction include requiring users to sign a non-disclosure agreement or to submit a draft manuscript for approval before publication, but these create a substantially higher risk that unauthorized disclosure of information will occur, particularly if the researchers are permitted to possess copies of restricted materials. See Appendix D for a sample non-disclosure agreement.

35. The first decision is whether the item will be withheld in whole or in part. For paper records, if the item must be withheld in its entirety or if the archival institution's policy is to withhold an entire item if so much information in it must be restricted that the redacted item will be misleading or unintelligible, the archivist prepares a withdrawal sheet, places it at the point in the file where the original item is located and withdraws the original item. If many documents in a single file are restricted, a single withdrawal sheet may be inserted at the beginning of the file, listing all the withdrawn items. When completing the withdrawal sheet, the archivist is careful not to reveal the restricted information in recording the title and the creator and recipient of correspondence. Sample withdrawal sheets are found in Appendices E and F, and a definition of terms used in the withdrawal sheets in Appendix G. Masking or bagging restricted items (i.e., placing restricted items in envelopes but leaving them attached to the file) is not recommended because the envelopes add bulk to the file, the process of masking or attaching may damage the item, and the bags may come loose or may be removed by users, thereby exposing the item.

36. If part of a paper item can be made available, the archivist makes a copy of the original document (copy 1), removes the restricted information from the copy, and makes a copy (copy 2) of the redacted copy (copy 1). All redaction is done on a copy, never on the original. Archivists ensure that the redacted copy clearly shows where, why and by what authority the information has been removed.

37. Some methods commonly used to redact paper items are:

- a. cut the restricted information from the copy (the "piano roll" effect), annotate the page with the authority for the restrictions, and copy (photocopy or scan) the page. It is helpful to back the cut page with distinctively marked or colored paper when copying so that the holes are easy to see on the user's copy. The parts removed are destroyed by secure means;
- b. black out the restricted information with thick ink, annotate the page, and copy the page (blacking out by itself may not thoroughly obscure the restricted information, so making a second copy is necessary);
- c. for blocks of text, place a piece of paper over the restricted block, annotate, and copy;
- d. scan the page, redact the information electronically (see paragraph 40 below), annotate the page and either copy it to a publicly accessible site or print it.

38. If resources are available, another staff member checks the withdrawal sheet and the redacted copy to make sure that all restricted information has been removed.

39. The original items removed from the file are held in a parallel file, labeled with the original fonds, series and file titles, and stored separately. The parallel file both reduces the possibility that the original items containing the restricted information will be issued to a user and also facilitates the eventual reintegration of the items.

40. Redacting electronic documents requires good technical knowledge of the properties of the software to ensure that the deletion cannot be reversed and the redacted information recovered from the electronic file provided to the user. Information deleted from an electronic item must be replaced by a mark that takes up the same amount of space as the original text to enable the user to understand the extent of the deletion. If the software available to the archival institution does not allow for secure deletion and space replacement, the archivist chooses an alternate means of redaction, such as printing the item to paper, using a paper redaction technique, and scanning the redacted item.

41. A record of the access decision is maintained in an access control file, either in paper or in a non-public area of the archival institution's computer system. The control file is arranged by fonds or series. The control file contains the working papers on the decision-making process, a duplicate copy of the withdrawal sheet(s) and the first redacted copy from which the use copy was made. If the access decision was difficult or precedent setting, it is useful to make copies of the original item, the redacted copies and the withdrawal sheet and place them in a precedent file for training purposes. The access control file and the precedent file are available to staff members only on a need to know basis.

42. The access decision is documented in the publicly accessible finding aids as positive confirmation of the access status of the material. For example, the entry for the fonds may suggest that many items are restricted, but if an item is determined to be open the entry for the item should confirm this.

43. The user who requested access to the information is informed in writing of the result of the review and is given information about appeal procedures.

#### **I. Review access restrictions.**

44. Access decisions are reviewed either upon the request of a potential user or at the initiative of the archival institution.

45. Users have the right to request a review of a decision to restrict information. The procedure for appeal is governed by legislation or regulations; the regulations may provide a timetable for initiating appeals and for responses by the archival institution or its parent body. The regulations may also proscribe another review for a period after a final appeals decision is made, such as no review for two years following a final decision to withhold.

46. Someone other than the person who did the initial review handles the appeals review; it may be a person within the archival institution or a staff member of the archival institutions' parent body. The decision on the appeal may be final or, in the case of government records, an appeal to an independent tribunal may be possible.

47. The user requesting review of an access decision is informed in writing of the outcome of the appellate review. If a further appeal is possible, the user is informed of the steps and timetables for that appeal.

48. Archivists periodically review restricted records to determine whether any items can be released. If the restriction is based on the age of the material, an annual review will release any material now falling within the 'open access' period. If material is restricted for privacy or other grounds with an indeterminate timetable, the archival institution conducts a periodic

internal review to either confirm or lift the restriction. Archivists also review restricted items after specific events, such as the death of a person who is the subject of the restricted information.

#### **J. Release previously restricted material.**

49. When restricted information can be released, the access restriction process is reversed:

- a. replace the restricted items in the original file;
- b. if paper, remove the withdrawal sheets (or line out the released items if a single withdrawal sheet is used for multiple items) and redacted copies and place them in the access control file;
- c. record the new access decision in publicly accessible finding aids;
- d. if information about the item was restricted in the finding aid, restore the information.

50. The result of the review is recorded in the archival institution's control file: the reason the restricted information was released, under what authority, and the date it was released. Data protection legislation may prohibit the inclusion of the identity of the user whose request led to the release of the information. The control file retains the evidence of which materials were restricted in the past. The control file is retained permanently.

## Appendix A

### Sample Access Policy for an Archival Institution

#### Introduction

The \*\*\*\*\* Archives is committed to making research materials available to users on equal terms of access. It is the responsibility of the \*\*\*\*\* Archives to balance the researcher's need for access with the needs for confidentiality of persons and institutions whose activities are reflected in the materials. Consequently, the use of some materials in the \*\*\*\*\* Archives, especially those of recent date, is subject to restrictions.

The \*\*\*\*\* Archives manages two type of restrictions. General Restrictions apply to particular kinds of information or designated classes of materials wherever they may be found among the holdings of the \*\*\*\*\* Archives. Specific Restrictions are specified by the transferring agency or donor and apply to a specific body of material, sometimes for a specific length of time.

#### Principles

Scope. All records of the \*\*\*\*\* , in any physical format, that have been appraised as permanent because of the information they contain, may be released for public access unless the records contain information that falls within one of the General Restriction categories in paragraph II of this policy or are governed by a Specific Restriction.

General Restrictions. Records containing the following information are restricted until the passage of time is such that, in the judgment of the director of the \*\*\*\*\* Archives or other competent authority, the interests in favor of access outweigh those in favor of confidentiality. These general restrictions are established pursuant to \_\_\_\_\_ (*authority, such as a statute or an action of a governing board*) of \_\_\_\_\_ (*date*). [*Note: If a single authority does not exist, a separate authority line may be added to each of the restrictions as part c.*] These restrictions do not apply to regular employees of the \*\*\* Archives in the performance of normal archival work on such materials.

General Restriction 1. Materials containing information, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy of a living person.

- a. *Definition.* Materials containing information about a living person which reveal details of a highly personal nature which, if released, would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy, including but not limited to information about the physical or mental health or the medical or psychiatric care or treatment of the individual, and which personal information is not known to have been made public previously.
- b. *Restrictions.* Such materials may be disclosed only:
  - i. To the named individual or his authorized representative, provided that access will not be granted if the records are restricted pursuant to any other general or specific restrictions.
  - ii. If the individual or his legal representative agrees to its release.

- iii. To those officers and employees of the office of origin or its successor in function who have a need for the information in their performance of their official duties.
- iv. To the Donor of the materials or to the Donor's designee, pursuant to the provisions of the Donor's deed of gift.
- v. To researchers for the purpose of statistical or quantitative medical or psychiatric research when such researchers have provided the \*\*\*\*\* Archives with written assurance that the information will be used solely for statistical research or reporting and that no individually identifiable information will be disclosed by the researcher's work.

General Restriction 2. Materials restricted by statute, executive order, or court order.

- a. *Definition.* Materials containing information, the access to which is restricted by statute, executive order, or court order.
- b. *Restrictions.* Such information may be disclosed only:
  - i. In accordance with the provisions of such statute, executive order, or court order.

General Restriction 3. Materials containing confidential employment or personnel information.

- a. *Definition.* Materials containing information on terms of appointment, employment, performance evaluation, disciplinary action, and similar personnel matters.
- b. *Restrictions.* Such information may be disclosed only:
  - i. If the information is a summary statement of service
  - ii. If the information does not identify particular individuals.
  - iii. If the individual or his legal representative agrees to its release.
  - iv. If the individual is deceased or the passage of time is such that the individual may be presumed to be deceased.
  - v. To those officers and employees of the office of origin or its successor in function who have a need for the information in their performance of their official duties.
  - vi. To the Donor of the materials or to the Donor's designee, pursuant to the provisions of the Donor's deed of gift.

General Restriction 4. Materials relating to investigations.

- a. *Definition.* Materials containing information related to or compiled during an investigation of individuals or organizations.
- b. *Restrictions.* Such information may be disclosed only:
  - i. If the release of the information does not interfere with ongoing litigation or similar proceedings *and*
  - ii. If confidential sources and information are not revealed *and*
  - iii. If confidential investigative techniques are not described *and*
  - iv. If the release of the information would not endanger the safety of persons, including law enforcement personnel.
  - vii. To those officers and employees of the office of origin or its successor in function who have a need for the information in their performance of their official duties.
  - viii. To the Donor of the materials or to the Donor's designee, pursuant to the provisions of the Donor's deed of gift.

General Restriction 5. Materials containing confidential business and financial information.

- a. *Definition.* Materials containing trade secrets or commercial or financial information that was obtained from a private source with an expressed or implied understanding of confidentiality or information prepared or obtained by the government for the regulation and supervision of financial institutions.
- b. *Restrictions.* Such information may be disclosed only:
  - i. If the information consists of statistical totals or summaries and does not disclose the source of the information or identify individual parties.
  - ii. If the party with whom the confidential relationship has been established agrees to its release.
  - iii. To those officers and employees of the office or origin or its successor in function who have a need for the information in their performance of their official duties.
  - iv. To the Donor of the materials or to the Donor's designee, pursuant to the provisions of the Donor's deed of gift.
  - v. If the passage of time is such that the release of the information would not result in substantial competitive harm to the parties identified in the materials.

General Restriction 6. Materials containing information regarding confidential decision-making.

- a. *Definition.* Materials containing information that was given in confidence in the period before a determination was made, including but not limited to advice given by attorneys, physicians, public accountants, and advisers.
- b. *Restrictions.* Such information may be disclosed only:
  - i. If the decision has been made public and the nature of the determinations leading to the final decision is known.
  - ii. If the passage of time is such that release of the information would not impede current decision-making.
  - iii. If the public interest in disclosure outweighs the continued need for confidentiality.

Prior release. Records that contain information within one of the categories in II above and that officially have been made public before their transfer to the \*\*\*\*\* Archives, regardless of age, shall continue to be public.

Partial release. When only some portions of a document are covered by a restriction, the confidential portions will be redacted and the remainder of the document will be made available, if feasible.

### **Administration of Access**

Research application. Any person may apply to use archival records in the \*\*\*\*\* Archives. The applicant is not obliged to state reasons for the application in order to have access to records. If the application submitted by the person is not sufficiently precise to permit identification of the records sought, the \*\*\*\*\* Archives shall ask the applicant to clarify the

application and shall assist the applicant in doing so, for example, by providing finding aids to the archives.

Initial request determination. Applications for access are answered in 15 working days from date of receipt of the application.

Equal access. Records that have been made available to one member of the general public will be made available to all other members of the general public on the same terms and conditions.

Access for former officials. A former official of an entity whose records are held in the \*\*\*\*\* Archives may have access to records that he/she originated, reviewed, signed, or received while serving as an official of the entity.

Duplication and fees. Records disclosed may be duplicated for applicants, providing that the copyright status of the item permits copying. The costs of producing and sending copies may be charged to the applicant.

Appeals. If access is denied or if the \*\*\* Archives does not respond within 15 working days from receipt of the application, the applicant may appeal to the \*\*\*\*\* appeal body. The appeal board consists of the \*\*\* or their designees. The director of the \*\*\* Archives serves as secretary to the board. The decision of the appeal board is final.

## Appendix B

### Sample Decision Chart: Preliminary Steps in Determining Access

1. Are requested records in the custody of the archival institution? If yes, proceed to question 3. If no, then:
2. Does the archival institution know what institution or person has or is likely to have the records? If yes, transfer the request. If no, write to the requester that the whereabouts are unknown.
3. Are the requested records already public? If yes, inform the requester that the records are available. If no, then:
4. Are the records restricted for a set period of time that has not yet elapsed? If yes, deny the request. If no, then:
5. Have the requested records been reviewed for disclosure within the last two years and denied? If yes, deny the request. If no, then:
6. Are these records prima facie restricted by specific provision of law, regulation, or donor deed? If yes, deny the request and provide user with appeals information. If no, then:
7. Begin review.

**Appendix C**

**Sample Access Review Worksheet**

Request case number:

Fonds, subfonds:

Series:

Files unit(s):

---

**First reviewer**

I have examined the records requested and

recommend that all be disclosed.

have identified and tabbed national security classified records that must be referred for declassification review.

recommend that some records be withheld from public disclosure and have tabbed them.

recommend that all be withheld from public disclosure.

Name:

Date:

---

**Second reviewer**

I have examined the records requested and

recommend that all be disclosed.

have identified and tabbed national security classified records that must be referred for declassification review.

recommend that some records be withheld from public disclosure and have tabbed them.

recommend that all be withheld from public disclosure.

disagree with some recommendations of the First Reviewer (*explain*)

Name:

Date:

**Appendix D**

**Sample Non-Disclosure Agreement**

I, [name], understand that I am granted special access to information that is not otherwise publicly available. This information is contained in the following archives (hereafter the Materials):

[archival description of the materials]

This grant of special access is subject to the condition that the information gained through research shall not be disclosed in any manner, copied, exploited, published, or otherwise used without the express permission of the director of the [name of the archival institution]. If I request a photographic or other reproduction of any item within the Materials, either made by me or by the [names of the archival institution], I agree that the reproduction is to be made solely for my convenience; that it will be returned or destroyed upon completion of my work; that the reproduction will not itself be reproduced; and that it will not be transferred to or deposited with any other person or institutions without the prior permission of the director of the [name of the archival institution]

I agree to make written application to the director for permission to disclose or publish any information from, excerpt from, or entire document that is part of the Materials covered by this agreement. This permission must be sought sufficiently in advance of the proposed use to permit the director to consider the request. I agree to abide by the decision of the director.

I understand further that if the [name of the archival institution] does not own the copyright in any items found within the Material, I am responsible for obtaining the permission of the owner of the copyright prior to publication or dissemination.

In consideration of my being granted permission to examine the listed archives on the terms set forth above, I agree to indemnify and hold harmless the [name of the archival institution], its officers, employees and agents from and against all claims made by any person asserting that (s)he is an owner of the copyright in any of the Materials or that (s) he has been harmed by unauthorized disclosure of information found in the Materials.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Print full name\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_ Address\_\_\_\_\_

Institution, organization or affiliation\_\_\_\_\_ Address\_\_\_\_\_

Title or Position\_\_\_\_\_

References (names and addresses of two persons acquainted with my work):

Name 1\_\_\_\_\_ Title\_\_\_\_\_ Address\_\_\_\_\_

Name 2\_\_\_\_\_ Title\_\_\_\_\_ Address\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix E**

**Sample Withdrawal Sheet (Restriction Notice): Single Item**

In the review of this file the item identified below has been withdrawn according to the restriction noted below.

Fonds, subfonds:

Series:

File title:

Form:

Date:

To:

From:

Subject:

Authority for the restriction

- (1) protection of the privacy of living individuals
- (2) information restricted by statute, executive order, or court order
- (3) confidential employment or personnel information
- (4) information relating to investigations
- (5) confidential business and financial information
- (6) confidential decision-making
- (7) information relating to national security

Authority for the restriction in the donor's deed of gift \_\_\_\_\_ [number of restriction]

---

Withdrawn by:

Date:



## Appendix G

### Sample Withdrawal Sheet (Restriction Notice) Definitions

Form. Form means the type of item: letter, memo, memo with enclosure (memo w/encl), routing slip (rtg slip), routing slip with attachment (rtg slip w/attach), radiogram, telegram, report, email.

To. The person to whom the item is addressed. This can be a person, an organization, or “Files.” Unless the personal name is very short, in which case the whole name can be used, use initials for first and middle names and full surname: T.H. Peterson.

From. The person who created the item. If an item is drafted by one person but authorized by another, use the name of the person authorizing the message.

Date. Use numbers in ISO standard format year-month-day: 1981-04-14.

Title and subject. The title given to the item by the creator and the subject of the item. For formal items sent with control numbers, enter control number of the creator here and the title of the item. If the subject itself would reveal the reason for the restriction (for example, “Allegations of criminal activity by Peterson”) leave it blank.

Number of pages. The number of pages with information. If both sides of a single sheet have information, that is 2.

Classification. National security marking.

Restriction #. This should be the general reason for the restriction, identified by provision of law, regulation, general restriction or donor’s deed of gift; for example, “Freedom of Information Act 16/c” or “deed of gift 4(b).”

# PRINCIPLES OF ACCESS TO ARCHIVES

## GLOSSARY

All definitions are taken from the International Council on Archives Handbooks Series, Volume 7, *Dictionary of Archival Terminology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Munich: K.G. Saur, 1988, unless otherwise indicated.

Access. The availability of records/archives for consultation as a result both of legal authorization and the existence of finding aids.

Confidentiality. The quality or property of privacy or secrecy attaching to certain information and/or records, thereby limiting access.

Data protection. The legal protection of the rights of individuals in respect of the collection, storage and automatic processing of personal data in machine-readable form and the disclosure of such data.

Declassification. The removal of all security classification restrictions on information or records.

Deed. A document under seal, in many countries made before a notary public, which, when delivered, gives effect to some legal disposition or agreement between parties.

Deposit. The placing of documents in the custody of archives without transfer of legal title.

Donor. The source from which a gift originates.

File. An organized unit (folder, volume, etc.) of documents grouped together either for current use by the creator or in the process of archival arrangement, because they relate to the same subject, activity, or transaction. A file is usually the basic unit within a record series. [Source: *General International Standard Archival Description*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition]

Finding aid. The broadest term to cover any description or means of reference made or received by an archives service in the course of establishing administrative or intellectual control over archival material. [Source: *General International Standard Archival Description*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition]

Fonds. The whole of the records, regardless of form or medium, organically created and/or accumulated and used by a particular person, family, or corporate body in the course of that creator's activities and functions. [Source: *General International Standard Archival Description*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition]

Freedom of information. The concept of a legal right of access to information contained in current, semi-current or non-current records as distinct from a legal right of access to archives.

Gift. An addition to holdings acquired without monetary consideration and becoming the sole property of the recipient, frequently effected by a deed or instrument of gift.

Item. The smallest intellectually indivisible archival unit, e.g., a letter, memorandum, report, photograph, sound recording. [Source: *General International Standard Archival Description*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition]

Privacy. The right to be secure from unauthorized disclosure of information contained in records/archives relating to personal and private matters.

Redaction. The process of masking or removing sensitive information in a document before releasing it for public use. [ARMA International, *Glossary of Records and Information Management Terms*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition]

Restricted access. A limitation on access to records/archives or to individual documents or to information of a specified type, imposed by general or specific regulations determining access date or general exclusions from access.

Screening. The examination of records/archives to determine the presence of documents or information subject to restricted access.

Security classification. The restriction on access to and use of records/archives or information therein imposed by a government in the interests of national security. The records/archives or information concerned are referred to as classified records or classified information.