

ACQUISITION POLICY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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09.03.2017	1.0	The acquisition policy of the National Archives has been approved under the 16.12.2016 and 07.03.2017 decisions of the Consultative Board of the National Archives.

MISSION OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The National Archives acquires and preserves information documenting Estonian history, culture, statehood and social circumstances as well as provides for the convenience of their use.

INTRODUCTION

In formulating their mission, the National Archives has been guided by the fact that **the information acquired should reflect the entire society of Estonia**, that is, provide as many members of society as possible with the ability of to remember. This will help individuals, organisations and the state itself alike to better define and actualise themselves now and in the future. If acquisition focused on just one component of society (e.g. the state, public sector functions or public information), excessive gaps would be left in the information acquired.

Acquisition of information that reflects the entire society is challenging, since society itself is changing faster, and there is more information created than ever before. The same phenomena, processes and functions are documented in both private and public sectors, both digitally and on paper, by means of traditional text documents and photographs and moving images and information systems alike. In various areas of life, one's activities are documented with varying intensity, using different points of view, methods and tools to do so.

Acquisition of information reflecting the entire Estonian society cannot be understood as the indiscriminate collecting of everything. On the contrary, the National Archives makes **conscious choices and states the reasons for them in a manner that can be understood**. Needless to say, the National Archives considers the areas of activity and competence of the other memory institutions in this respect.

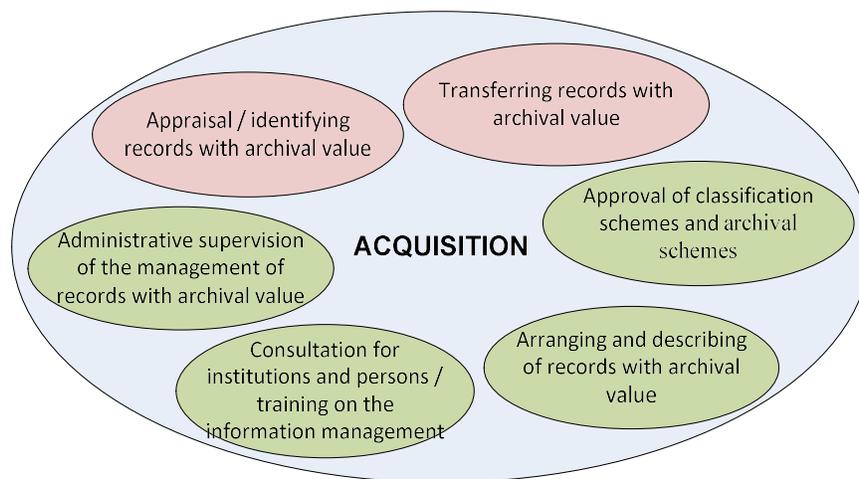
On the one hand, decisions on selection will determine what information is going to be preserved permanently by the National Archives, that is, what information the current and future generations will be able to use. These decisions are irreversible for any information which the National Archives decides to not acquire. On the other hand, **decisions on selection have to be realistically implementable**. It is resource-intensive to acquire a reflection of society and, in particular, to arrange, describe, preserve and make this information available for use. **Consideration has to be given to the budgetary means of both the National Archives and of the transferring organisations that operate predominantly with the support of public funds** (public sector budgetary funds).

I. ACQUISITION

Next to preservation and providing facilities for use (access), acquisition is one of the three primary functions of the National Archives.

Acquisition is a set of processes (see the illustration below) that begins with the assurance of the quality of information with archival value by the creator of archival records and ends with the preparedness of the National Archives to make the acquired information available for use.

Acquisition processes are intertwined to a lesser or greater extent.



II. NORMATIVE REFERENCES

- The National Archives is a governmental authority within the area of government of the Ministry of Education and Research whose main function is to appraise records created or received in the course of performance of public duties by agencies or persons, acquire and preserve archival records, grant access to archival records and organise the use thereof (subsection 3 (1) of the Archives Act).
- The National Archives shall acquire private records of cultural or historical value by agreement with the owner, if possible and public interest therein exists (subsection 3 (1) of the Archives Act).
- The National Archives shall identify agencies and persons performing public duties whose activities may result in archival records, based on the importance of the agency or person to society and the content of the public duties (subsection 7 (1) of the Archives Act).¹

III. OBJECTIVE

The acquisition policy of the National Archives (hereinafter: the policy) establishes for the National Archives **a more defined framework** to carry out their mission and specify the functions assigned to the National Archives in the Archives Act in appraisal and acquisition.

¹ The legislator has delimited the functions of the National Archives specifically. The function of the National Archives is not to resolve all the issues related to the management and preservation of information and records in the public sector.

The policy does not elaborate on the details of acquisition activities or potential exceptions; instead, these are decided on an ongoing basis, **without going beyond the framework set out in the policy.**

IV. TARGET GROUPS:

The policy is intended for:

- employees of the National Archives whose duties are linked to acquiring and preserving information with archival value and to organising the use of information acquired by the National Archives;
- institutions and persons performing public functions who have an obligation to transfer records with archival value to the National Archives under the Archives Act;
- private organisations and individuals possessing information with cultural or historical value;
- any stakeholders or persons whose free self-realisation (section 19 of the Constitution) is linked to the use of the information acquired by the National Archives;
- memory institutions collecting cultural heritage within their area of activity or competence.

V. COLLABORATION

In developing or reviewing their acquisition policy, the National Archives requests the opinions of other memory institutions (other public archives, museums, libraries, research institutions and the like) and provides them with feedback about it.

Acquisition activities (in particular in the case of private records) are organised through good collegial information exchange, and an effort is made to avoid duplication or the breaking-up of archives among various memory institutions.

VI. RESPONSIBILITY

The acquisition policy of the National Archives is shaped, formulated and reviewed by the Appraisal Committee of the National Archives, discussed by the Consultative Board of the National Archives and issued with an opinion by the Archives Board.

VII. PREREQUISITES FOR ACQUISITION

Management of records of institutions or persons performing public functions has to conform to the requirements of the Archives Act and the “Archival rules” and any regulations in the respective areas. Among other things:

- activities are documented;
- the functions and information generated during the performance of functions have been classified;
- a functionality has been created to extract information from information systems;
- creation of information with archival value has taken into account the archival durability requirements (including archival formats);
- records with archival value have been prepared for transfer.

An organisation or individual transferring private information has to be prepared primarily to transfer the ownership of the information and artifacts to the National Archives (that is, the Estonian state).

1. WHAT IS ACQUIRED BY THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES?

1.1 The National Archives acquires **information with archival value**².

1.2 **Having archival value is the prerequisite for information to be acquired.** Archival value is identified by means of appraisal (see item 2.1).

1.3 Archival value is identified by the National Archives.

1.4 Information of archival value may be:

- in any **form** (digital or analogue);
- in any **format** (data set with metadata as part of an information system, PDF file, XML file, text document, photograph, whether born-digital or photochemically produced, sound recording, moving image etc.);
- on any **medium** (paper, parchment, magnetic disk, film, CD-R-disk etc.);

if it is sufficient **to provide evidence about the facts or actions** (that is, has evidential value) or has **intrinsic value**³ (see item 2.1.2.7) and is provided with metadata at a level enabling the management of the information going forward.

1.5 The National Archives considers such information, including data in databases, as **records** and the portion of it with archival value as **archival records** within the meaning of the Archives Act.

NOTE: In acquiring, the National Archives allows for the fact that records as evidence of facts and actions increasingly occur in the form of digital data and links among them in databases.

1.6 Information acquired **has to significantly augment knowledge and understanding of the Estonian society or it has to be important in terms of the functioning of the Estonian nation or society.** This **has to be connected to the areas of activity or functions** that reflect:

- 1.6.1 shaping of national and local government policy, decisions and administrative process;
- 1.6.2 local specific character, including cultural phenomena;
- 1.6.3 impact of national policy on individuals, human communities and society overall;
- 1.6.4 the status, rights and obligations of individuals, groups and public and private organisations;
- 1.6.5 exceptional, unique or previously unknown phenomena, events or situations in society.

NOTE: Information acquired does not have to be linked to these areas of activity or functions **if it has intrinsic value.**

1.7 In acquiring information with archival value, the National Archives focuses on:

- 1.7.1 **the primary and general management functions** of institutions and persons performing public functions, including **national information systems**;

² The term *information* is used throughout in the meaning set out in subsection 2 (1) of the Archives Act.

³ The Estonian equivalent of *intrinsic value* is *olemuslik väärtus*, covered by clause 7 (2) 3) within the meaning of the Archives Act (cultural or historical value).

- 1.7.2 **areas of activity or functions** of private organisations or individuals where these overlap with what is set out in item 1.6;
- 1.7.3 audiovisual information which create information with **intrinsic value**.
- 1.8 As part of information with archival value, the National Archives additionally collects **preservation elements, i.e. master elements, for moving images** within the meaning of 2 (2) 4) of the Legal Deposit Act. Their archival value is identified by means of appraisal, applying this policy.
- 1.9 The National Archives does not acquire:
- 1.9.1 information created **in the performance of the support functions of institutions**;
 - 1.9.2 information created by institutions performing public functions or by persons **who are not creators of archival records**⁴ (see item 2.1.1.4);
 - 1.9.3 **digital information with a long term preservation period** which institutions and persons performing public functions give to the National Archives for preservation in order to avoid the need for the development of fully functional digital archives;⁵
 - 1.9.4 publications or online publications (websites) for the purposes of the Legal Deposit Act;
 - 1.9.5 **things with cultural value collected by museums**.
- 1.10 Besides, the National Archives is guided by the following principles when acquiring information with archival value:
- 1.10.1 The National Archives **appraises functions or areas of activity but transfers information on the basis of organisations or individuals or in collections**.
- NOTE: The National Archives is aware that the proportion of collections may increase in the future, since information accumulated in digital databases or virtual environments cannot always be linked to a specific institution or person, as a result of which it does not make sense to apply the classical principle of origin in relation to it with reasonable effort on each occasion. Often there is also no need for it.
- 1.10.2 The National Archives, allocating resources to pre-ingest activities (consultation, training, supervision etc.) within its competence, **assumes that any information with archival value at the time of its transfer is authentic, reliable and complete**. The National Archives ensures the permanent preservation of these properties together with the information acquired.
 - 1.10.3 **If information with archival value is made up of a database, it is acquired as completely as possible, without selecting data**, on the assumption that all data, the links among them and the algorithms used for queries document areas of activity in their entirety.

⁴ The content of the definition of *a creator of archival records* is provided for in subsection 7 (1) of the Archives Act and 2 (1) 3) of the Regulation of the Government of the Republic, "Archival rules".

⁵ Currently provided for in subsection 47 (1¹) of the Regulation of the Government of the Republic, "Common basic principles of records management procedure".

2. HOW DOES THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES ACQUIRE?

2.1 IDENTIFICATION OF THE ARCHIVAL VALUE OF INFORMATION – APPRAISAL⁶

2.1.1. Appraisal methods

2.1.1.1 The National Archives is always guided by **consistent appraisal criteria**. This:

- ensures the uniform quality of the collections of the National Archives;
- explains to target groups how the given appraisal result was reached; and
- facilitates each individual appraisal.

2.1.1.2 The appraisal criteria help one performing appraisal **to analyse the information being appraised and its context** and judge the archival value of information. Analysis should **employ all the appraisal criteria, where possible**, which complement one another in this manner.

2.1.1.3 Analysis of information appraised and its context should keep in mind that information has archival value if it **is linked to what is set out in item 1.6**.

2.1.1.4 **Public information (that is, information generated in the performance of a public function) is generally appraised** by the National Archives **in two stages and at two levels**.

- In the first stage, **the areas of activity, functions and structure** of institutions or persons performing public functions are analysed, and their **legal status** is considered. Analysis results in the identification of the institutions and persons performing public functions with the most impact on society, or **the creators of archival records**. As a result of the activity of creators of archival records, **information with archival value may be created**.

If the functions of a creator of archival records change over time and its impact in society decreases, acquiring the information created by it stops. Retention of the status of a creator of archival records may be considered if the National Archives has acquired their records with archival value **over an extensive period**. In this case, **acquiring tradition is relied on**.

- In the second stage, the creators of archival records **record series in a classification scheme**, their links **to activities and/or work processes and functions** are analysed. If necessary, the content of the record series is analysed.

As a result of analysis, **information with archival value** is identified **at the level of the record series** of the classification scheme.

If the results of analysis reveal that no information with archival value is created in the record series of a creator of archival records, **the organisation is stripped of its status as a creator of archival records**.

NOTE: The National Archives is aware that appraisal at the record series level may become difficult due to the technologically rapidly changing facilities for the creation and accumulation of information.

2.1.1.5 The National Archives collaborates with those who own or possess information and, in cases where it is warranted, involves experts from outside the National Archives in appraisal.

⁶ How appraisal proceeds is outlined in a diagram at <http://www.ra.ee/arhiivihaldus/juhised/#4>.

2.1.1.6 Appraisal is **the function of those departments** of the National Archives **engaged in acquisition**. In the case of appraisals with a greater range of impact, the archival value of information is decided by **the Appraisal Committee** of the National Archives.

2.1.2 Appraisal criteria

2.1.2.1 Impact of a person, social movement or organisation

The more central the position of a person, social movement or organisation is in society or the hierarchy of public administration and the greater their impact on the developments in society, the more important any information created during the performance of their activities and tasks and functions is. The closer a function is to the highest level of decision, the bigger its impact on society.

In the case of a private individual, it is considered to what extent their activities or accomplishments have achieved prominence in society and impacted on it.

In the case of audiovisual information, consideration is given to the professionalism of the producer, the artistic quality of its creative output, the professional recognition it has received and whether its work has been funded by the state.

2.1.2.2 Research value

For the researcher, it is important to perceive the society, area, phenomenon or event researched as much as possible the way it would have been perceived at the time of the creation of the information. Therefore, the researcher has to be able to define the importance and forms of manifestation of the phenomenon using the information. Information with research value proves, explains and provides reasons for event occurrences and for decisions or interpretations made as a result of research.

Data in databases that are easier to process compared to other information (e.g. text) may have greater research value for the user.

When archival value is identified, preference is given to information linked to exceptional or pivotal periods in society (e.g. the transitional period of 1986–1992, the phosphate rock wars, restoration of independence and the like), international events, precedent-setting decisions but also any changes in the activities of the archive generator.

In the case of private and audiovisual information, among other things consideration is given to the degree to which it represents turning points, trends or key figures in the Estonian culture, society and history and the factors and assumptions that have shaped them.

Appraisal of audiovisual information also considers to what extent it has resonated significantly in society or gained the recognition of experts.

Generally, any information created before 1920 (inclusive) has archival value.

2.1.2.3 Uniqueness

One performing appraisal has to establish whether the information or data carrier is unique and/or complete. For this, the broader context of the area, related organisations and functions have to be considered. Information not available from elsewhere (e.g. archival material, printed media, social media or other sources) is more valuable in terms of permanent preservation than that which is duplicated elsewhere.

If there are two or more sets of information with the same information effectively, preference is given to the more usable form or format. Generally, in this case digital is preferred to analogue.

In the case of audiovisual information, film elements of various generations (e.g., camera negative, duplicate positive and negative, print(s)) are regarded as forming an integrated whole.

2.1.2.4 Usability

The issue of the usability of information arises in particular in the case of digital information. Usability depends on the retrieval of the information and on whether the information can be read, viewed or perceived in any other manner. Also the physical condition of the data carrier should be considered.

Information with a sufficient quantity of metadata is more valuable. Generating of metadata (e.g. context of creation) is often not possible retroactively or requires disproportionately great expense on the part of the party owning or holding the information or the National Archives.

If the format of digital information does not conform to archival formats, it has to be decided whether the substantive value of the information warrants the labour-intensity of changing its format. The value of information decreases if it is difficult to use for technical reasons.

In the case of audiovisual records on analogue media, appraisal has to consider the availability of playback devices.

The National Archives prefers to acquire information in the form of its creation; however, for the sake of expediency, also versions of the information converted into other formats (e.g. digitised) may be collected.

If collecting both versions (analogue as created and converted digital) proves excessively costly (see item 2.1.2.6), preference is given to digital information. This principle is not applied to moving images on film.

2.1.2.5 Timeframe

Importance is carried by (boundary) years which information covers or during which it has been accumulated. For the user, information is useful if it has been accumulated over a longer period or created over a short period, containing facts about a longer period.

2.1.2.6 Preservation costs

Appraisal has to strike a balance between the value of information and the costs of its preservation. Any information worth permanent preservation is appraised as having archival value irrespective of its volume. In the case of very extensive but less valuable information, the sampling (see item 2.1.2.7) is implemented where the nature of the information allows it.

If the other conditions are the same, the information whose physical volume is smaller merits collecting.

If information has been created in an analogous form and there is also a readily usable digital version of it available, first consideration is given to the option of collecting both versions (see item 2.1.2.4). If it proves excessively costly, digital information will be preferred.

If the arrangement and preservation of private records is too costly, only the transfer of ownership to the state warrants the conferral of archival value on them.

2.1.2.7 Intrinsic value

Intrinsic value is the artistic, aesthetical, technological or historical value for reasons resulting from the object itself⁷. This criterion is used by the National Archives mostly to appraise audiovisual information; however, if necessary, it may be used in other instances (e.g. if the file, individual record, data carrier, seal, volume or item is extraordinary).

In the case of institutions or persons performing public functions, this criterion is used when sampling is implemented (e.g. a criminal file with broad social resonance). Information retained as a sample does not aspire to prove an action; instead, it has an illustrative function, conveying what the information, data carrier, record, database or procedure looked like at a given moment in time.

Moving images on film typically have archival value.

2.1.3. Documenting an appraisal

2.1.3.1 The National Archives documents the results of appraisal in an **appraisal decision**. The appraisal decision has to reflect sufficiently the process of appraisal to help the person, the organisation, the National Archives and the public to understand the decision now and going forward.

2.1.3.2 **Reasons are stated** for the result of the appraisal. A statement of grounds is provided by analysis, which employs the appraisal criteria and provisions set out in item 1.6.

2.1.3.3 Given that technologies, data carriers, information and legislative requirements change over time, the acquisition policy alters as well, as a result of which the National Archives **reviews appraisal decisions if necessary and revises them in instances where this is warranted**.

- Before the transfer of **records dating from the Soviet period**, the National Archives reviews the decisions made concerning their preservation value and, if necessary, appraises anew the archival value of these records.
- Given that the preparation of the transfer of information involves expense, those in possession of information are notified about upcoming changes as early as possible.

⁷ Estonian: *objektist endast tuleneval põhjusel*.

2.2 TRANSFER OF INFORMATION WITH ARCHIVAL VALUE⁸

2.2.1 Transfer deadline

2.2.1.1 Institutions and persons performing public functions **have to transfer any information with archival value created after 2012 (inclusive) to the National Archives not later than within ten years of its creation** if it is no longer needed for the performance of their functions. This is **an obligation under the Archives Act**.

2.2.1.2 **The National Archives is interested in transferring information with archival value created before 2012** in a manner whereby it reaches the National Archives **before or at the same time as information created later**. By proceeding in this way, institutions use resources spent on the arrangement and description of archives in the most efficient manner and are relieved of the burden of managing the information.

2.2.1.3 In certain instances, the National Archives may propose to an institution or person performing public functions to **transfer information with archival value before the expiry of the deadline**, encompassing the institution's information with archival value in its entirety – information traditionally on paper, digital records and digital data in databases.

NOTE: The staff of the institution that has accepted the proposal are provided by the National Archives with **consultation and/or training, allowing for the details and specific features of the information (formats, nature of databases and the like)**, on how to use the tools for transfer, description and arrangement.

2.2.1.4 Information to which access is restricted under **a current restriction imposed by the head of the institution under the Public Information Act** (except in relation to personal data) **is generally not accepted by the National Archives**. The National Archives considers this to be information that has not passed out of the records management of the institution and is therefore not eligible for transfer.

NOTE 1: Item 2.2.1.4 **is not applied to databases transferred**.

NOTE 2: The reasonableness of transfer has to be considered carefully in instances where **access restrictions in their entirety** (without a date of the expiry of the restriction or the option of the consideration of access) **will continue to constrain the use of information**. This prevents the National Archives from making information available for use and from performing its primary functions. The same happens when the processing of access permissions requires from the National Archives a disproportionate quantity of resources (including the involvement of other organisations) or competences that the National Archives does not have to have.

2.2.2 Planning for transfer

2.2.2.1 For transfer, the National Archives agrees a **reasonable transfer interval** (regularity) with the institution.

2.2.2.2 **The National Archives produces extracts and images from databases** with archival value based on **an interval agreed** for every database.

⁸ Seen from the point of view of the National Archives, a transfer is a receiving. The course of transfer is outlined in a diagram at <http://www.ra.ee/arhiivihaldus/juhised/#6>.

NOTE: The transfer interval (also for databases) depends on the **quantity of information and the use needs of the institution**. When it is agreed, it is considered that the arrangement, description and quality control performed during every transfer can be reasonably managed by both the institution and the National Archives. At the same time, information with archival value has to be transferred with sufficient frequency in order for the institution to preserve the know-how needed for checking (and, if necessary, augmenting) the descriptions of records and in order for digital information to be convertible into archival formats if this is necessary during transfer.

The transfer interval **may vary from series to series**. It may prove reasonable to:

- transfer series of greater volumes more often;
- transfer extracts or images drawn from databases with archival value in separate projects and with varying regularity.

2.2.3 Arrangement and description

2.2.3.1 The arrangement and descriptions of information with archival value have to ensure that any information transferred to the National Archives is usable by researchers.

2.2.3.2 The minimum extent of the description of information with archival value transferred is⁹ **the portion marked as mandatory** on the list of the elements of archival description of the National Archives.

2.2.3.3 The objective of the National Archives is to ensure a situation where **descriptions used by the National Archives support the transfer process and are re-usable with simple and convenient tools**.

NOTE: Concerning the institution and its information with archival value, **descriptions are not required** once these have been created and are in the use of the National Archives in the case of an appraisal, the approval of a classification schemes or a prior transfer.

2.2.3.4 Before arrangement, **the National Archives** prepares **an archival scheme** in collaboration with the institution or the organisation service provider and, if needed, augment it during the next transfer (based on the transfer interval).¹⁰

2.2.3.5 If possible, the National Archives is prepared to cover the costs of arrangement and describing information with archival value accepted from private organisations or persons.

2.2.3.6 The National Archives provides **consultation and, if necessary, training for organisations and persons transferring information with archival value** on how to **arrange and describe** information and support them **in the use of technical equipment**.

2.2.4. Documentation of transfer

2.2.4.1 Transfer of any information with archival value created during the performance of public functions is documented **in delivery and receipt form**.

2.2.4.2 Transfer of private information with archival value is documented in an agreement, in addition to delivery and receipt form, **which stipulates the transfer of its ownership to the National Archives** (that is, the Estonian state).

⁹ http://www.ra.ee/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Arhkirj_elementide_loend_-_RA_juhis2.0.pdf.

¹⁰ Compared to section 21 of the Regulation of the Government of the Republic, "Archival rules", this is a new position.

2.2.4.3 Transfer documents set out the terms of access under legislation.

2.2.5 Information exchange among memory institutions

In the case of loose records and records with low research value but with potential exhibition value, the National Archives strives to find a memory institution into whose collections that which is being offered might fit.