

STRATEGY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ESTONIA 2021–2024

The National Archives of Estonia (NAE), operating within the area of government of the Ministry of Education and Research, ensures the preservation and use of information reflecting the Estonian society. The key strengths of the organisation are its devoted staff, good IT infrastructure and extensive relationships with partners in the public and private sector. NAE is a somewhat atypical government agency, having diverse functions in the fields of research, education and culture, alongside guaranteeing the protection of citizens' rights and duties as well as state archival administration.

One of the most challenging undertakings for NAE in the near term is participation in the development and implementation of the reconstruction of the National Library building. Once reconstruction is complete, NAE's Tallinn-based units will move into the National Library building. This will open up innovative opportunities for synergy and is likely to challenge conventional thinking on information management in Estonia but also provide conditions for improved efficiency of services and support functions.

The major challenges facing NAE relate to complex tasks in the digital society in general and within the organisation. Two areas of focus have been adopted for the near term: **(1) National Archives as part of e-governance and information society** and **(2) National Archives as an open organisation and partner for communities**.

NAE's approach is customer-driven and based on employees' commonly recognised and shared values: openness, reliability, competence and teamwork. We value employees who give importance to self-development and apply new knowledge, skills and experience, thus supporting the organisation's development.

I NATIONAL ARCHIVES AS PART OF E-GOVERNANCE AND INFORMATION SOCIETY

NAE has been part of e-governance and information society for a long time. NAE has developed information systems for decades with some of its solutions revolutionary on the global stage. Therefore, there is a need in the near future to update central archives management systems and integrate them for customers and employees. Our work becomes more effective and we support the development of our employees by designing and streamlining internal workflows. NAE aims to continue its successful professional relationship with partners and drive processes that give rise to mutually beneficial technical developments.

Key objectives

- Seamless archiving.
- Agencies' paper records have been transferred to the archives to the greatest extent possible.
- The conditions of storage of archival records of any type, category and medium meet the required standards as far as possible.

Period end

I.1 Transfer of archival records

- NAE is fully prepared to absorb the growth in acquisition volume arising from the Archives Act (also including the potential consolidation of government records management), including such records where the term for transfer has not been reached but transfer is reasonable.
- Records transfer schedules have been agreed with agencies (plan of acquisition), arrangement and description requirements have been updated.

- Content without gaps is available to researchers. At the end of the transfer workflow, born-digital records have been made accessible to users, incl. agencies (transfer bodies).

I.II Transfer systems

- Agencies as a rule carry out transfer procedures in one system ([ASTRA](#), [EFIS](#)).
- Analysis and updating of systems and workflows occurs on an ongoing basis. Artificial intelligence is used where possible to improve the controls, quality assurance and reduce manual labour related to transfers.
- The functionality of transfer process is divided between ASTRA (content-related and manually conducted activities, such as description, arrangement, visual inspection, documentation conversions) and [Preservica](#) (automated technical inspection).
- A collaborative effort with state ICT units and software developers has solved the interaction of ASTRA with electronic records management systems and Preservica, the latter being interfaced with other information systems of NAE ([FIS](#), [AIS](#), etc.).
- A convenient option has also been created for the transfer of a single record (film, video, image, audio).

I.III Marketing and partnership involving records transfer

- Marketing related to the transfer of records to support acquisition is part of NAE's acquisition policy.
- Consultation and training are part of marketing to encourage transfers – NAE offers its competence, systems (ASTRA, AIS, film archives systems) and solutions to achieve acquisition objectives.
- Guidelines are created in a coordinated manner inclusive of all parties, they are updated and are branding NAE's reputation.
- Agencies are persuaded to find resources for the preparation of records transfer.
- Supervision (incl. master elements of moving images) is a method securing the transfer and preservation of records, which is applied if needed.
- NAE has an overview of partners providing the services of high quality arrangement and description that are involved in the development of requirements and guidance.

I.IV E-Register of archives management operations within NAE

- Metadata about management of archives is an integral part of archives management, which enables to easily document and monitor activities about transferred and stored content carried out at the archives.
- Metadata about management of archives enables to perform statistical analysis (for example of holdings, activities and actors).

I.V Databases

- NAE continues to use the [Database Preservation Toolkit](#) for the archiving of databases.
- The internationally recognised format [SIARD](#) is used for the long-term preservation of databases.
- Requirements for the archival description of databases have been agreed. Specifying archival requirements for databases continues in close collaboration with database owners and administrators.

I.VI Preservation

- The general principles for the preservation of digital content (both digitized and born-digital) have been updated, these are based upon standards (data security rules, General Data Protection Regulation, ISO 16363, etc.) and are documented.
- Digital preservation processes are streamlined and implemented (incl. specific responsibilities and actions) and are continually updated.

- The storage conditions for digital and analogue collections are up-to-date and in accordance with the principles of NAE's preservation policy.

II NATIONAL ARCHIVES AS AN OPEN ORGANISATION AND PARTNER TO COMMUNITIES

In the previous period NAE has substantially increased the volume of services provided as part of archival education. In addition to the support activities to general education and higher education we aim to increase our involvement in adult education while also expanding our programmes targeted at people with special needs. As part of the [Education Strategy 2021–2035](#) NAE has the opportunity to contribute to the development of flexible and personalised learning pathways.

The contemporary archival world is increasingly community-oriented. Since 2014, NAE has involved volunteers in improving archival metadata, launched several crowdsourcing projects with hundreds of participants and organised initiatives targeted at the general public. All of this will continue but in an even more deliberate manner.

Key objectives

- Central user environments are updated and are more convenient to use.
- Digital content is described in enhanced detail, the data quality and accessibility of digitized archival content is improved using artificial intelligence.
- In a deliberate and targeted manner, communities are included in the activities of the archives, the scope of crowdsourcing is expanded.
- The archival education programme is more diverse than ever and aimed at more target groups, NAE is an important partner to teachers.

Period end

II.I User environments

- User experience design methods are applied to the development of a new, integrated and intuitive environment.
- The third version of [AIS](#) serves as central information system, [Saaga](#) is incorporated into AIS and the current administration interface is updated.
- [FIS](#), [Fotis](#) and the [maps database](#) are updated and have been interfaced with AIS.
- APIs have been developed for crowdsourcing and user environments.
- The [VAU](#) employee and customer interface has been updated and enhanced.
- Results of text (OCR/HTR) and object recognition and crowdsourcing are applied in user environments.
- Easy access has been created to born-digital content.

II.II Digitization of collections

- The first priority for digitization is given to genealogical and local history resources as well as audiovisual recordings on unstable carriers. Digitization projects financed by European Union Structural Funds encompass 3.9 million pages of documents, 167,000 photographs and 245 hours of films from the collections of NAE and other heritage institutions.
- Alongside projects and on-demand digitization the volume of day-to-day digitization is increasing.
- The workflows of film scanning (incl. wet-gate scanning), digital remastering and restoration are configured and the entire potential of acquired technology has been applied.
- Digitization services for legacy media (in addition to 8/16 mm films also video carriers, glass plate negatives, audio recordings on analogue carriers) have been designed and introduced.

- Applications enabling automated text and image recognition (HTR, OCR, face and object recognition) and tagging are used.

II.III Crowdsourcing and community engagement

- NAE has taken on board experience of Estonian and foreign heritage institutions to develop its community strategy, defining specific metrics, target groups and responsibilities.
- NAE's self-service portal VAU has a built-in technical capability to interact with communities (for example link sharing, where possible seeing the record without logging in, text-to-speech for the visually impaired).
- Crowdsourcing is implemented into user environments and descriptions are improved based on user feedback (interface with Facebook, feedback across different environments, etc.).
- New crowdsourcing projects are regularly developed. Volunteers and communities are involved in digitization and revision of text and image recognition results.
- Information related to archives and records management is regularly shared with the private sector. A blog and newsletter are aimed at them, with the target group being expanded from the business sector to not-for-profit organisations and NGOs. The acquisition of archival records is focused on sources documenting the period of restoration of independence.
- Spokespersons are used to achieve wider exposure and reach communities.

II.IV Archival education

- The range of target groups exposed to archival education is now wider:
 - new target groups, for example through youth centres and hobby schools, as well as day centres for the elderly, heritage societies and other organisations,
 - expansion of the area of target groups, including more teachers and students from the counties of Võru, Valga, Jõgeva, Ida-Viru and Lääne-Viru,
 - educational programmes aimed at adults,
 - development of solutions for visually and hearing impaired people and use in educational programmes.
- A broader spectrum of services provided and more digital solutions:
 - a streaming platform is used to promote the film collection,
 - educational programmes and learning materials focusing on teaching history,
 - lessons and learning materials integrating multiple disciplines (digital archives, conservation, art history, scientific background, introduction to optical character recognition and artificial intelligence, etc.).
- The diversity of analogue content is acknowledged and various storage media found in the collections are used.
- Collaboration with culture and heritage institutions and colleagues from Estonia and the rest of the world has become more frequent. Various joint projects are underway:
 - NAE hosts travelling exhibitions,
 - school holiday programmes are offered to students,
 - works from the collections of NAE are screened at domestic and foreign film festivals,
 - lectures, film screenings, exhibitions and other events are organised.