

Role Delineation Statement for Professional Archivists

Introduction

The Role Delineation Statement for Professional Archivists encompasses the commonly accepted duties and responsibilities that professional archivists perform in the course of their work. As the framework for the certified archivist examination, it defines the seven major domains of archival practice. Within each domain a series of tasks and related knowledge statements are defined. Together with the General Knowledge Statements, these elements encompass what it means to be a professional archivist.

This document assumes that individuals seeking certification recognize that (a) their professional practice is performed within the context of an institutional mission and is directed to the achievement of goals consistent with that mission, and (b) their professional practice has an ongoing effect on the emergence and evolution of that overall mission and its associated goals, as well as the development of the archival profession.

In addition, although those seeking certification do not necessarily control how archival policies are set with regard to activities such as acquisition, access, preservation, and security, it is assumed that archivists understand that the elements contained in such policies are important in carrying out in a professional manner the tasks specified below. ACA is aware that rapidly changing information technologies challenge archival principles, practices, and communication protocols, demanding effective leadership from the archives community to access, capture, and preserve records in all formats.

The ACA Role Delineation Statement uses the definitions and distinctions found in A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology which has been incorporated into the [Dictionary of Archives Terminology](#), available on the Society of American Archivists website.

General Knowledge Statements

Archivists know and apply knowledge about:

K-1: the impact of social, cultural, economic, and political factors on the evolution and characteristics of archival materials and their management.

K-2: the origins, development, and definitions of archival concepts, terms, principles, practices, methods, and institutions.

K-3: the similarities and differences in the administration of institutional archives, personal papers, and manuscript collections.

K-4: the physical and technological characteristics of archival materials and how these characteristics influence their appraisal, acquisition, preservation, and use.

K-5: theory, methodology, and practice appropriate for archival materials on all media including working with media specialists to ensure the preservation of materials.

K-6: the standards and accepted professional best practices that apply to archival work, including their rationale and implications.

K-7: the concepts of the life cycle of records and the records continuum.

K-8: how the core archival functions (selection, appraisal, and acquisition; arrangement and description; reference services and access; preservation and protection; and outreach, advocacy, and promotion) relate to each other and influence the administration of archival materials.

K-9: the types of organizational settings where archival programs exist and the implications of placement within a particular institution.

K-10: how the administration of archival programs is related to, different from, and draws upon the theory, methodology, and practice of allied professions and disciplines.

K-11: how archival theory, methodology, and practice has developed to meet the expectations and evolving needs of digital information and records.

Domain 1: Selection, Appraisal, and Acquisition

Tasks

Task 1: Identify sources of archival materials by applying knowledge about record creators to determine records appropriate for acquisition.

Task 2: Establish, maintain, and keep a record of communication(s) with creators and/or potential donors of archival materials.

Task 3: In determining the acquisition of archival materials, identify and evaluate record characteristics.

Task 4: Appraise archival materials for their enduring value and long-term retention.

Task 5: Implement disposition recommendations or decisions through legal instruments retention schedules, deeds of gift, purchase contracts, deposit agreements, and other instruments.

Task 6: Promote cooperative acquisition and disposition strategies.

Knowledge Statements

K-101: how the mission and holdings of archival repositories relate to selection, appraisal, and acquisition.

K-102: techniques for locating and surveying potential acquisitions.

K-103: the evolution, nature, and variety of recordkeeping systems and practice.

K-104: factors in determining official records or record copy through appraisal techniques and retention scheduling.

K-105: factors that should be considered when defining collecting or accessioning areas and developing an acquisition or collection policy.

K-106: solicitation and negotiation techniques, including ways of educating record creators about the importance of preserving archival materials.

K-107: laws, policies, regulations, procedures, legal instruments, and ethical standards relating to acquisitions and disposition.

K-108: the evidential, informational, administrative, legal, fiscal, and intrinsic values; and the past, current, and potential uses of archival materials.

K-109: appraising, inventorying, retention scheduling, deaccessioning, and disposition techniques.

K-110: selection, sampling, re-appraisal, weeding, and other volume reduction techniques.

K-111: selection and appraisal methodologies, including documentation strategy and functional analysis.

K-112: the characteristics of archival materials such as trustworthiness, authenticity, reliability, usability, and comprehensiveness, as well as form, uniqueness, and quantity.

Domain 2: Arrangement and Description

Tasks

Task 1: Analyze the existing arrangement and description of archival materials and make decisions about any further arrangement and description that may be necessary.

Task 2: Design and implement an arrangement plan to either perfect the existing arrangement or impose a new one.

Task 3: Design and implement a descriptive plan to identify and explain the structure, context, and content of archival materials to promote their accessibility.

Knowledge Statements

Archivists know and apply knowledge about:

K-201: the complementary principles of provenance and original order.

K-202: the history and variety of recordkeeping systems and practices.

K-203: the role of access and retrieval in making arrangement and description decisions.

K-204: the concept of hierarchical levels of arrangement.

K-205: the distinctions and relationships between physical and intellectual control of archival materials.

K-206: the influence of societal shifts, cultural awareness, and technological changes on policies, practices, and methods for archival arrangement and description.

K-207: the levels, types, and components of finding aids within an overall description program.

K-208: the availability and applicability of descriptive standards.

K-209: how the descriptive process may begin at or before records creation and continue throughout the life of the archival materials.

Domain 3: Reference Services and Access

Tasks

Task 1: Define the information needs of users and keep abreast of current research trends and strategies.

Task 2: Develop policies and procedures designed to serve the information needs of various user groups, based on evaluation of institutional mandates and constituencies, the nature of the collections, relevant laws and ethical considerations, and appropriate technologies.

Task 3: Respond appropriately to user requests by providing information about and from archival materials and providing access to archival materials, making copies, referring to other sources, or providing an explanation for denying the request.

Task 4: Develop policies and procedures for assessing reference and access services for evaluation and planning purposes

Knowledge Statements

Archivists know and apply knowledge about:

K-301: issues and components of user services, including policies and procedures governing access, reference services, and reproduction.

K-302: laws, regulations, and ethical principles governing copyright, digital rights, freedom of information, privacy, confidentiality, security, and equitable access.

K-303: understanding research needs, strategies, and interests of a diverse user constituency.

K-304: understanding user information and research needs to frame reference strategies for a variety of formats and media.

K-305: knowledge of resources not only of an institution's holdings, but similar collections elsewhere and how to research / locate holdings at other institutions.

K-306: developing policies and procedures for safeguarding physical and digital archival materials while in use.

K-307: techniques for effectively handling repeat requests on the same or similar topics

K-308: techniques for evaluating the effectiveness of reference services.

Domain 4: Preservation and Protection

Tasks

Task 1: Analyze the current condition of archival materials including the devices and media on which they are preserved to determine appropriate preservation priorities and actions.

Task 2: Develop and adopt strategies and proper technologies for preservation regardless of format; make and implement appropriate preservation and conservation decisions.

Task 3: Apply best practices for long-term storage of archival materials including proper containers, encasements, shelving, storage facilities, environmental controls, and digital preservation requirements.

Task 4: Ensure the security of archival materials regardless of format from damage, destruction, theft, unauthorized access, and other forms of loss.

Task 5: Prepare and implement procedures for disaster prevention, response, and recovery.

Knowledge Statements

Archivists know and apply knowledge about:

K-401: the nature of materials' treatment and current physical and digital preservation techniques.

K-402: the causes and consequences of the deterioration of various media and formats, including the factors that influence the stability and durability of digital records.

K-403: the elements of preservation management and preservation planning for both digital and physical materials, including environmental monitoring, disaster preparedness, in-house conservation, reformatting, data migration and conversion, and services available through third parties.

K-404: the elements of security management and risk assessment, including threats and vulnerabilities of digital records.

K-405: when to preserve archival materials in their original format or structure, and when to replace originals with reproductions in the same and/or different media or format.

K-406: the range of preservation options and the application of each to archival materials on different physical and digital media.

Domain 5: Outreach, Advocacy, and Marketing

Tasks

Task 1: Promote the use of archival materials and awareness of the collections to diverse communities through public outreach and educational programming.

Task 2: Develop relationships with key constituents, stakeholders, and communities to broaden and diversify support for the archival program.

Task 3: Develop and participate in diverse programming utilizing archival materials for traditional and nontraditional users.

Task 4: Develop and participate in efforts to market archival collections and repositories to multiple constituencies.

Knowledge Statements

Archivists know and apply knowledge about:

K-501: the approaches to educating users, both current and potential, about the variety of uses of archival materials and the benefits of such uses.

K-502: the range of approaches to advancing the understanding of archival work and programs, both within parent organizations and to the broader public.

K-503: the best practices of using archival materials for educational and outreach purposes and the various modes of delivery.

K-504: methods of articulating to resource allocators the benefits of the establishment and continued support of an archival program in an organization.

K-505: methods of collaborating with other units within the archives' parent organization or with other institutions to enhance and promote archival work.

Domain 6: Managing Archival Programs

Tasks

Task 1: Develop a strategic vision for an archival program, establish priorities, continually assess progress toward that vision, and make adjustments as environments and resources change.

Task 2: Assess staffing needs, recruit appropriate personnel, and train staff; support professional development; and ensure that the staff works together to fulfill the archives' mission.

Task 3: Assess financial performance and participate fully in budget processes and effective resource management.

Task 4: Identify facility, equipment, and technological needs and prepare and implement plans to meet those needs.

Task 5: Create policies, standards, and procedures that define and facilitate the range of activities in archival programs.

Task 6: Use appropriate technologies to manage archival programs and collaborate with other allied professions, inside and outside parent institutions, to ensure that the archival record is preserved.

Knowledge Statements

Archivists know and apply knowledge about:

K-601: the role of planning approaches and assessment tools in archival programs.

K-602: institutional structures, cultures, values and ethics, and the role of archival programs within institutions.

K-603: management principles and procedures.

K-604: current archival education standards for graduate and continuing education as well as other professional development opportunities and certification programs.

K-605: budgeting and financial planning techniques; internal and external funding sources

K-606: implications of legal requirements that affect the management of archival programs

K-607: facilities, space, personnel, and resource management.

K-608: the application and impact of evolving technologies and information systems on archival programs.

K-609: methodologies for assessment of archival functions within one's own program and programs of other institutions.

K-610: sources of professional and technical advice and assistance.

Domain 7: Professional, Ethical, and Legal Responsibilities

Tasks

Task 1: Maintain professional awareness of current issues in the field of archival history, theory, and practice by reading professional literature, attending conferences, and participating in continuing education and professional exchanges.

Task 2: Contribute to the development of the archival profession through research, publishing, presentations, and advocacy.

Task 3: Knowledge about statutory or other legal authorities and professional standards and act appropriately with respect to archival materials.

Task 4: Conform to professional and ethical standards and promote best practices.

Knowledge Statements

Archivists know and apply knowledge about:

K-701: international, national, regional, and sub-regional organizations whose activities include archival concerns.

K-702: current research and resources relating to archival history, theory, methodology, and best practices.

K-703: social, economic, cultural, and legal systems that inform and affect archival work across the records continuum.

K-704: laws, regulations, and ethical considerations governing loans, deposits, exchanges, and gifts to institutions, including tax consequences.

K-705: ethical responsibilities of archivists to ensure archival materials and collections are preserved, collected and respectfully described with community input.

K-706: laws, regulations, and policies defining archival materials and governing their retention, access, accessibility, use, integrity, formats, and disposition.

K-707: archival and information professional codes and standards

History

The Role Delineation Statement for Professional Archivists is one of the Academy of Certified Archivists' greatest contributions to the profession. Developed by archivists and archival educators, it defines the knowledge and skills necessary for archival work. The statement is a unique and valuable contribution to the field because it was created according to rigorous standards under the direction of test-development professionals. The systematic formulation of a statement describing the general responsibilities of professional archivists, and the skills and knowledge that they need to perform those responsibilities, is the foundation upon which to build a viable and sustainable certification examination.

Panels of archivists and archival educators wrote the original Role Delineation Statement under the guidance of test development professionals. These outside experts ensured the objective, impartial, and non-political nature of the drafting process. A random sample of professional archivists then validated the document for fairness, accuracy, and thoroughness. The result was a series of test specifications known as the Role Delineation Statement for Professional Archivists. It encompasses more than one hundred commonly accepted duties and responsibilities that professional archivists perform in the course of their work.

The Academy regularly reviews the Role Delineation Statement to ensure it remains a valid basis for the certification examination. Accordingly, in June 2002 President Leon Miller appointed a Role Delineation Review Task Force consisting of Edie Hedlin (chair), Thomas Brown, Gregory Hunter, Gerrienne Schaad, and Deborah Skaggs. After recommending editing and wording changes to reflect recent changes in the field, the task force concluded that the Role Delineation Statement remained a relevant and valid definition of professional archival practice.

At its meeting in March 2003, the ACA Board accepted the revised Role Delineation Statement, which became the basis for the archival certification examination beginning with the test administered in August 2004. In March 2008, the ACA Board decided that the Role Delineation Statement should be reviewed at least every five years to ensure that it remains a current, relevant, and effective document.

Role Delineation Review Task Forces

- 2008 – Cindy C. Smolovik (chair)
- 2014 – Mary Elizabeth Ruwell (chair)
- 2019–2020 – Joshua Kitchens (chair); Approved by the ACA Board in 2021