

# Northern Territory Archives Service

## Access to archival records

The archives in the custody of the Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS) are preserved so that they may be used by the community. Most of the archives held at the NTAS ultimately become open to the public. However some series or collections of archives are restricted from public access for certain periods.

### Why access conditions are applied

Unlike published materials, archives are essentially primary records created as records of business, or in the conduct of personal affairs. Because of their significant enduring historical value, these records have been retained as archives.

Archives may contain sensitive, confidential and personal information and therefore to protect the privacy of individuals or to safeguard confidentiality, it is necessary to restrict access to some archives for certain periods.

### Access to Government Archives

Under the *Information Act 2002* section 141, a public sector organisation must transfer a record to the archives service for inclusion in the Territory Archives not later than 30 years after the record was created. It also states (under section 142) that records then fall into the open access period 30 years after the record was created. Therefore Government archives are not available for public access until they are 30 years old. This 30 year closed period is essentially applied to ensure the availability of the archives or records for continued administrative use and/or to protect their confidentiality.

A small quantity of government archives may be closed for public inspection for periods longer than 30 years because of the sensitive or personal nature of their content. The decision for extending access restrictions beyond 30 years is based on a compromise between providing public access to archives and any other public interests which may support longer closed access period.

The 30 year rule also applies to records of the Commonwealth Government which were transferred to the Territory after self-government in 1978. It is consistent with practices in most other Australian government jurisdictions.

During the closed access period, public access can only be provided by the Northern Territory Archives Service with the written authorisation of the responsible public sector organisation.

### Access to personal and organisation archives

The conditions of access to personal archives and archives of organisations are essentially governed by the persons or organisations who deposited them with the NTAS.

At the time of depositing the archives with the NTAS the depositing person or organisation's representative enters into an agreement with the NTAS. Any particular access conditions which the depositor wishes to impose are entered on the agreement.

While the majority of personal archives collections are immediately signed over to open access, a number of personal archives collections have some access restrictions imposed upon them. The most common restriction is the requirement to seek written permission from the depositor to gain access. A less common restriction is the denial of access until after the depositor is deceased.

While the majority of archives of organisations are also signed over to open access immediately, a minority of organisations set down a rule that written permission must be granted by them before researchers can gain access to their archives.

When written permission is required for access to certain archives collections, the staff at the NTAS will make these requests on behalf of researchers.

## Access to Oral History Archives

The conditions of access to oral history archives are determined by the persons who are the subjects of the oral histories, i.e., the interviewees or informants.

While the majority of oral history archives are immediately open for public access when they are lodged with the NTAS, as with personal archives and the archives of organisations, some oral history archives have restrictions imposed upon them. The most common restriction is a requirement to seek written permission from the interviewee to gain access. A less common restriction is the denial of access until after the expiration of a given period of years.

As in the case of the other categories of archives, when written permission is required for access to certain oral history archives, the staff at the NTAS will make these requests on behalf of researchers.

## Contacts

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