DONATING YOUR ORGANIZATION’S COLLECTIONS

Organization Histories Preserved for Community Memory

The heart of your organization’s memory is in its records. The original letters, minutes, reports, photographs, publications, and other documents that officers, members, directors, employees, or volunteers have produced and compiled over the years are records of historical value. These documents—in both physical and digital forms—provide unique testimony to the achievements of your organization and are important to your community, too. They may also be extremely valuable for administrative, legal, fiscal, and public relations purposes. By donating such records to Georgia State University’s Special Collections and Archives, you will ensure that your organization’s history and heritage will be part of your community’s collective memory.
What Can GSU’s Special Collections Offer You?
Special Collections and Archives is run by professional archivists, whose priorities are the selection, preservation, and accessibility of historical materials. If your organization donates its records to our repository, our archivists will care for your records and will continue to work with your organization to ensure access and future contributions. Feel free to contact one of our archivists for details about our archival operations.

What Documents Should Be Placed at GSU?
• Organization records that have long-term value.
• Records that best illustrate the purpose, activities, and policies of your organization.
• Documents representing an “end product”—a final report, for example, instead of a draft.
• Related groups of materials, which are typically more valuable to researchers than individual items.
• Inactive records—that is, materials no longer regularly used for routine business.
• Records from both defunct and active organizations.
What Is Historically Valuable Material?

Many types of material can be valuable to a researcher. We have expertise in identifying materials that should be transferred to an archival repository or manuscript library.

Before records are transferred to GSU, an archivist will survey your organization’s papers and digital files to determine which materials have enduring historical value. The research value of records may be diminished if items are removed or if the records are rearranged, so you should contact our archivists before weeding, discarding, or reorganizing papers and records, regardless of their location or format.

Listed below are some types of records that archival repositories preserve for historical and administrative research.
Your Organization’s Records Could Have Historic Value

To ensure the preservation of materials for potential transfer to GSU’s Special Collection and Archives, physical items should be kept in a cool, dry, temperature-stable environment. Digital materials should be backed up regularly and have descriptive file names and consistent naming conventions.

If your organization’s records are not appropriate for our collections, there may be another repository to which we can refer you. The Society of American Archivists can also provide you with information and suggestions.

Donations

GSU’s Special Collections and Archives operates much like a business; in general, we can only invest materials and labor in the preservation of items that we own. Not owning the material severely restricts a repository’s ability to care for records properly. Therefore, we will not accept material on deposit or on loan. Representatives of your organization and the repository will sign a deed of gift that documents the legal transfer of ownership and outlines the conditions of the donation to the mutual agreement of all involved.

GSU reserves the right to exhibit or use for research any collection of materials, but we cannot promise or guarantee that donated material will be used in any specific manner as a condition of accepting the gift.
If your organization is an ongoing enterprise, it is best to make periodic donations of records at appropriate intervals determined through discussion with the collecting archivist. To assure regular contact, your organization can add the periodic transfer of inactive records to the duties of one of its officers.

The archivist you work with may prefer to capture digital material directly from your organization’s computers or servers. If any of the digital material that you wish to donate is stored elsewhere, the archivist will need access to these locations.

**Access to Collections**

The repository’s policies regarding availability, duplication, and publication governs access to the materials in the repository. The archivist should discuss with a representative of your organization the repository’s access policies and any special needs or concerns of your organization before completing the deed of gift.

**Restrictions on Access**

If you are concerned about confidential materials, be prepared to identify items of concern and then discuss the possibility of restricting part of the collection to protect your privacy or the privacy of others. While we desire to make all materials freely accessible to researchers, we will agree to reasonable and equitable restrictions for limited periods of time.
Copyright
Assignment of copyright is a complex matter. Your organization should discuss issues of copyright ownership with the archivist and with GSU’s legal counsel before completing a deed of gift.

Tax Deductions
Your organization should discuss with its tax accountant or attorney the possibility of a tax deduction for the donation of material to GSU. Archivists cannot give tax advice, nor are they permitted to appraise the monetary value of a collection being considered for their own repository. They may provide your organization with a list of appraisers who can (for a fee) make monetary appraisals of the materials for the organization. The donor organization arranges and pays for any such appraisal. It is preferred that the appraisal take place before transfer to us.

Monetary Donations
We are a not-for-profit institution. Arrangement and description of a collection is the most expensive component of our operation. Although monetary donations are not a prerequisite for the acceptance of a collection, organizations are encouraged to assist repositories by providing funds toward the arrangement, cataloging, and preservation of their organizations records.

This pamphlet was adapted from content prepared by the Manuscript Repositories Section of the Society of American Archivists (CC-BY 4.0).