



ACCESSIONING MANAGEMENT PLAN

NATIONAL
FILM
& SOUND
ARCHIVE


A U S T R A L I A

AUSTRALIA'S LIVING ARCHIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION



The mission of National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) is, 'to excite people's curiosity and inspire their creativity through development, preservation and an informed understanding of Australian film, sound and emerging new media heritage, its cultural diversity and significance'¹. In accordance with the *NFSA Collection Policy 2011* and the *NFSA Collection Development Strategy 2011*, the Curatorial areas acquire material for the national audiovisual, document and artefact collection that support the goals of the NFSA's mission statement.

The Collection Stewardship Branch serves to ensure that the national audiovisual, document and artefact collection is professionally managed in a sustainable manner. The Branch consists of two teams: Collection Information and Collection Management who work together, so that the collection is appropriately described, packaged correctly and stored in the most suitable environment that the NFSA can provide. These activities are integral to the preservation of the collection, improving the knowledge of the collection and to ensuring its accessibility to future generations.

Each year, the collection grows by approximately 35,800² works across the audiovisual areas of film, television, music and radio. Material acquired within a given year would ideally be catalogued and packaged for archival storage within the same time frame. However, like most cultural collecting organisations, the NFSA has a backlog of un-catalogued material. While backlogs usually accrue due to any number of reasons, it does not necessarily mean that un-catalogued acquisitions are uncontrolled or inaccessible.

As part of their collection development activities, the NFSA curatorial staff are responsible for creating acquisition records for collection items in the NFSA's integrated collection management system: Mediaflex³.

The acquisition record represents the NFSA's formal receipt of material accepted for the collection. By creating an acquisition record, with a detailed content listing and assigning a unique identification number to each acquisition, a level of control and accessibility to the content is achieved.

Given the high volume and complexity of collection material intrinsic to audiovisual archiving, along with the increasing demand on limited resources, the NFSA recognises that an accessioning queue is a growing concern that requires active administration.

¹ NFSA Guiding Principles Statement 2009

² NFSA Performance Measures 2011-2012

³ In 2011, the NFSA introduced Mediaflex by Transmedia Dynamics (TMD) as its computer based collection management system. It consists of a suite of database modules used to provide archive specific business functions in an integrated manner and support both physical media and digital content. For further information see: <http://www.tmd.tv/>

⁴ AS/NZS ISO 31000, 2009 Risk Management, see: <http://www.iso.org/iso/home.html>

As such, accessioning management draws on curatorial and preservation practices to ensure that risks to the un-catalogued collection are kept to a minimum. Risk management⁴ is managing to achieve an appropriate balance between realising opportunities for gains while minimising losses. Within the context of the NFSA collection, key criteria including:

- cultural significance of the work
- condition of item
- longevity of format
- available storage conditions
- financial value and impact

are part of the intellectual assessment that informs decisions to successfully manage the accessioning queue, so that key acquisitions can move through the queue within a reasonable time frame and that the NFSA meets its budget requirements when valuing the collection.

This document pertains to managing accessioning of the main national audiovisual, documents and artefacts collection of 1.7 million items. In recent years, the NFSA has also taken responsibility for a range of additional collection-based programs. These include: the Non-Theatrical Lending Collection⁵ managed in Medianet; Australian Screen Online and the Film Australia Collection both managed in their own tailored suite MS Filemaker Pro databases.

Whilst these form part of the NFSA collection fold, each are managed in separate collection management systems and program managers administer their accessioning and backlogs within their own established standards.


Whilst the activities of these programs are currently outside the scope of this document, as the NFSA moves toward integration of collection programs, this document will be revised accordingly.

1.1 Review Schedule

This plan is current from the time of its endorsement by the NFSA Senior Executive Group and will be reviewed on a triennial basis, in alignment with the NFSA Collection Policy and the NFSA Collection Development Strategy. Revisions will be undertaken by the Branch Manager, Collection Stewardship.

⁵ The NTLC was previously known and operated as the National Film and Video Lending Collection

2. THE ROLE OF ACCESSIONING



The NFSA aspires to be the authoritative source of Australian audiovisual information. While it acknowledges the challenges of its existing accessioning queue, it continues to regard having all collection works catalogued in Mediaflex, as a core operational objective.

The Collection Information team are primarily responsible for accessioning all works by:

- establishing the NFSA's data entry standards for the description of collection works
- developing and updating accessioning procedures based on international cataloguing standards for audio-visual and documentation material
- creating new and maintaining the catalogue records in Mediaflex
- appropriately labelling and packaging collection items using format specific, archival grade packaging, in preparation for long term storage
- progressively creating electronic records for those works manually accessioned on index cards
- ensuring data quality is consistently achieved.

Accessioning is the process of creating catalogue records by entering descriptive and technical information about works, items and collections into the collection management database⁶. Each catalogue record is specific to a collection work and provides an intellectual description of the content and the technical details of the item format.

The catalogue of works represents the formal inventory and description of items in the national audiovisual, document and artefact collection. As such, catalogue records are central to all NFSA work flows for access and control of a collection item. In Mediaflex, catalogue records are also linked to acquisition records thereby maintaining the integral relationship between an item and its provenance.

The Collection Information section develops and updates accessioning procedures which are based on international cataloguing standards for audio-visual and documentation material. Accessioning is done in accordance with these policies and in consultation with Curatorial staff. These decisions are regularly revisited in terms of overall practices and especially when accessioning specific collections, while always considering that the level of data entry affects accessibility, preservation programs and collection profiling.

⁶ NFSA Glossary of Terms:
Collection Policy, 2011 and
Collection Development
Strategy 2011.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE ACCESSIONING QUEUE

From 1984, when the NFSA became a separate institution, it has always needed to manage cataloguing queues. It began with inheriting a queue of accessioning from the National Library of Australia as collections were transferred across institutions and continues today as collection development strategies increasingly need to include a comprehensive representation of Australia's culturally diverse screen and sound production.

The accessioning queue has generally been regarded as the accrual of newly acquired works waiting to be catalogued and packaged for storage. While many collection items have a catalogue record in Mediaflex, a significant portion of the collection is only accessible via its manual card index systems and other catalogue listings. Therefore, a complete representation of the accessioning queue, based on material that does not have a catalogue record in Mediaflex, includes:

- Newly acquired material
- Legacy material acquired awaiting sorting and selection
- Registered materials accessible via acquisition records and registration entries in the catalogue
- Manually accessioned Australian and International documentation works accessible via an index card system
- Recorded sound collections accessible by their label and manufacturer's catalogue listings.

Collectively, the existing estimate is over 500,000⁷ items which at the current rate of accessioning⁸, is projected to be completed by c.2040.

Understanding the nature of each acquisition is essential to how the Collection Information team determines the best approach to assigning accessioning tasks. Acquisitions may contain single or multiple items in single or multiple formats and as such the degree of complexity can differ greatly.

Monthly meetings between the Senior Curators, the Manager and Team Leader of Collection Information, ensures that priority acquisitions are addressed in a timely manner and that strategies are cooperatively agreed.

3.1. Manually Accessioned Material

The manually accessioned material is largely Australian and International documentation works relating to film and is controlled and accessible only by its original card catalogue.

While this material is already selected, packaged appropriately and stored in optimal conditions, there is no catalogue record in Mediaflex as such cannot be accessed via the online catalogue, Search the Collection, on the NFSA website⁹. Managing this collection remains an ongoing challenge that can only be finalised once the material is fully catalogued into Mediaflex.

In past years, projects utilising outsourced accessioners for distinct subsets of the collection have been successful and large amounts of the Australian material, in particular, publicity, posters, scripts and transparencies have been fully accessioned. Concerted projects over the next 3 to 5 years could result in all remaining Australian material catalogued in Mediaflex. This task is a priority for the NFSA as these works are unlikely to be held in other collections.

⁷ NFSA collection count 2010-2011

⁸ Collection Information accessions c. 30,000 items of film, video, audio, documentation and digital files each year.

⁹ <http://www.nfsa.gov.au/>

For the international documentation collection, a streamlined approach to cataloguing this material should suffice to increase its use and accessibility. A title entry catalogue record could be created in Mediaflex, the index cards scanned and a digital image of the card attached to the record. This is a viable approach when the ultimate aim is to have the manually accessioned material catalogued in Mediaflex thereby increasingly opening access to areas of the collection that remain under utilised.

3.2 The Registration Run

The registration record was first introduced by the NFSA as part of the *NFSA Collection Security Project (2001-2003)*¹⁰. This project addressed a backlog of c.350,000 audiovisual works by registering those items that were selected for the collection. Registration records are a basic level catalogue entry that includes core information for identification and the ability to generate a barcode for security and tracking purposes. The registration process also replaced a manual system of storing and locating material by using a map number and location for un catalogued material.

In 2003, the practice was extended to complement the acquisition record, with a view to improving the overall management and accessibility of newly acquired material. Registration of acquisitions continued up until March 2011 when a new acquisition workflow was introduced with the implementation of Mediaflex.

Registration records with fully fledged content listings may be made available via the *Search the Collection* (STC): the NFSA's online catalogue¹¹ as they contain a level of information that is useful to the public and renders the material accessible prior to it being fully catalogued.

Whilst the registration process has now been replaced by a new acquisition workflow in Mediaflex, there are over 34,000¹² registration records in the NFSA catalogue. Enriching the existing records, by creating content listings, is a valid approach to opening up the collection which otherwise will remain shadowed from public view.

¹⁰ For more information, see:
NFSA registry files: 01/0805/01
and 01/0805/02

¹¹ <http://nfsa.gov.au/collection/>

¹² NFSA Collection Count
2010-2011

4. STRATEGIES – THE WAY FORWARD

There are a number of factors that inform the NFSA's approach to accessioning management. These include:

- the current acquisition rate exceeds accessioning rate
- older acquisitions which have not been sorted and selected
- industry trends where content is increasingly copied to new digital formats and donations of their entire catalogue of original formats is accepted by the NFSA
- acquisitions programs have grown and broadened in scope whilst accessioning resources have decreased.

Acknowledging that these factors are likely to continue, the Collection Information section may draw on a single or range of proven strategies to manage accessioning appropriately.

4.1 Curatorial Preparation of Acquisitions

As staff acquire material and register the acquisition, creating the acquisition is integral to how the collection needs to be accessioned. By sorting, sequencing, writing statements of significance where required, and providing accessioners with as much detailed cataloguing information as possible to be included in the catalogue record, preparing the acquisition for cataloguing contributes significantly to speeding up the accessioning process. The ongoing relationship between the acquisition curator and the accessioning officer is also a key to ensuring that the items are clearly and correctly represented in the catalogue.

4.2 Prioritisation

As material is acquired, it is prioritised for accessioning by Senior Curators. Acquisitions are assigned a priority level ranging from 1 to 3 with 1 being the highest preference for accessioning. Prioritisation assessments are based on a range of criteria, including:

- its condition and level of fragility which may require urgent treatment and storage in optimum conditions
- a donation accepted through the Cultural Gifts Program¹³ which needs to be processed within the financial year
- a donation under specific contractual agreements
- a purchased item work deemed as iconic
- material specially required for access projects, client and research requests
- the financial value of collection formats and impact to achieving NFSA budget revenue requirements.

Prioritisation focuses Collection Information resources on collection items that require immediate attention, meet any contractual requirements entered into by the NFSA. It is the key to ensure that collection material that matters most is catalogued in the first instance and that the NFSA collection budget revenue targets are also achieved.

¹³ The Cultural Gifts Program is administered by a secretariat based at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office of the Arts. It offers tax incentives for culturally significant gifts to Australian public collections. For further information, see: http://www.arts.gov.au/tax_incentives/cgp

4.3 Registration Records for Acquisitions

The process of creating a registration record in the catalogue, for newly acquired material, has served the NFSA well in the past. While registration records capture a minimal level of description, they increase security over collection material and provide access to acquisitions waiting to be fully catalogued.

By creating registration records in the catalogue, they can be included in any search results along with the rest of the collection.

Whilst some duplication of data entry may result from creating registration records, further consideration needs to be given to introducing registration, or a form thereof, as a workflow enhancement in Mediaflex so that newly acquired material documented in acquisition records is rendered equally accessible as the catalogued collection.

4.4 Streamlining

Streamlining processes can be applied to both handling practices and catalogue records. It is an approach that can expedite whole or parts of the accessioning process without compromising professional standards or increasing risk to collection works.

One of the options often adopted is to streamline handling practices such as preparation for storage and packaging requirements. This approach is particularly useful in managing film acquisitions.

Film accessioning is resource intensive, partly due to archival standard procedure that all films need to be re-wound for long term storage. However, the NFSA has successfully accessioned some film collections, that are in good overall condition and do not require immediate preservation activity, without re-winding.

The films are placed in new cans; their physical conditions noted and assigned a condition code of 'not rewound' in the catalogue record. The items can then be stored in an appropriate environment, in clean packaging with minimal risk to their condition.

A similar strategy can be applied to 16mm film on the present accessioning queue. Whilst, 16mm preservation category material would continue to receive full treatment, copies of the same work could be then be managed expediently thereby allowing resources to focus on the 35mm original negatives and masters.

Streamlining packaging practices is an approach to be undertaken in consultation with curatorial and preservation staff to keep risk at a minimum. Should resources become available, these film collections can then be targeted as a preservation project.

Different levels of accessioning can be applied depending on the material, its significance and whether descriptive information can be easily found elsewhere. Streamlining data entry is highly suitable when accessioning large documentation collections in particular.

While documentation items constitute the largest amount of collection material on the accessioning queue, many include detailed content listings as part of the acquisition. By applying the principles of different levels of cataloguing, and that a basic record is better than no record, material may be properly described at a macro level and packaged at a box level.

There are many opportunities where streamlining the catalogue record can provide an acceptable level of identification. For collections of private papers consideration is given to the level of descriptive detail required and often more generic titles may suffice e.g. '...PERSONAL PAPERS FROM 1970-1980' accompanied by a summary that outlines the types of paperwork contained within.

In the case of a television or radio series, consideration can also be given to accessioning a complete series as one title with multiple episodes represented as one item rather than the current practice of individual entries for each episode. Whilst this approach is a theoretical possibility, it would require thorough testing in Mediaflex before being adopted as standard practice.

4.5 Templates

The use of accessioning templates brings a range of benefits. Templates can be applied to same format as well as collections that are formed by a series or similar sequence of information. They can be developed as part of the ongoing workflow or specifically designed for project based work.

Templates increase efficiency and data entry consistency as well as enable the work to proceed quickly with less error as many of the relevant or mandatory fields can be preset in a template. Staff can select the relevant accessioning template and amend data fields as necessary.

Templates are particularly useful when accessioning large collections, for outsourced projects and when working with temporary staff who can then undertake accessioning with minimal supervision.

4.6 Cloning

Cloning (or copy cataloguing) is the process of building upon original cataloguing. It is used when an item with exact or similar descriptive information is to be added to the collection. Sometimes records are improved and or corrected in the process of cloning, such as upgrading and enriching the existing data. Cloning is a proven method to accelerate cataloguing as it reduces the need to undertake original record creation each time a work is catalogued.

4.7 Ingest of Metadata

Mediaflex has the capability to ingest metadata from third party online sources. In terms of cataloguing, initial steps have been taken to adopt this practice. Accessing databases such as *Gracenote*¹⁴ for contemporary music information could significantly reduce the amount of time it takes to accession compact discs, as the track listing can be directly imported into the catalogue record.

Further consideration needs to be given to the practicalities and efficiency gains of ingesting catalogue records from authoritative information resources, production companies, television and radio stations, and other content creators.

4.8 Cross Branch Project Teams

For significantly large and complex collections of incoming material, cross branch project teams are often formed so that a concerted effort can be made to complete the tasks needed to finalise the collection. This approach engages individuals from across the organisation including the Curatorial areas, Collection Stewardship and Preservation and Technical Services thereby drawing on a set of expert skills for a holistic approach to managing the acquisition.

4.9 Increasing Accessioning Capacity

While the accessioning of new works is a primary responsibility of the Collection Information team, the NFSA Preservation and Technical Services team (PATS) are best placed to accession any copies of collection works made within their teams. This approach supports an effective workflow, where an item record is created in the catalogue by the experts who can capture the technical details, as the new copy is created. PATS staff often fully view material during the course of their work, as such they are also well placed to correct and/or add descriptive information in the catalogue record.

In cases where acquisitions are straightforward and accessioning is simple, Curatorial teams often undertake accessioning tasks. Regular training and refresher sessions are conducted by the Collection Information team and are generally geared to the relevant formats for the collecting areas.

The Collection Management team also contribute to accessioning through targeted projects of simple accessioning of larger acquisitions where repackaging is minimal and can be undertaken on-site at the Mitchell storage facilities. Accessioning video tapes is a prime example, as they are not time consuming nor involve too much handling because the tapes are accessioned in their original containers which tend to be quite robust. Partnering with Collection Management, reduces the amount of material transported, results in an increase in accessioning rate and overall provides staff with the opportunity to learn new skills.

Engaging teams in simple accessioning tasks results in a collective contribution and enrichment of overall collection skill set across the organisation. It also enables the Collection Information team to focus on the more complex acquisitions where experienced staff are most effective.

4.10 Outsourcing

In recent years, a number of outsourced accessioning projects have been conducted with great success. Complete runs of documentation material e.g. scripts, posters, publicity, stills and transparencies, have been accessioned with minimal impact on resources.

Outsourcing works best with well defined, targeted projects that require minimal supervision, accessioning is straightforward and the least amount of collection handling is needed. Whilst outsourcing is linked to budgetary allowance, opportunities to do so are duly considered in consultation to ensure the greatest benefit for the collection is achieved.

Other approaches to outsourcing have included the sorting and/or accessioning of discrete collections by interns, work experience students or volunteers. While this approach is a viable option in some instances, it often requires a high degree of training and supervision.

¹⁴ For further information see:
<http://www.gracenote.com/>

5. PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

5. Professional Practice

Most collecting institutions face the ongoing challenges of a queue of material that requires cataloguing and many adopt a range of strategies which reflect the practices within their professions.

Libraries generally adopt prioritisation and levels of cataloguing records to manage their material. The cataloguing level determines the amount of detail and description provided in the catalogue record. Government and document based archives, generally use a system of fonds to support the aggregation of documents that originate from the same source such as a department, organisation or individual.

Museums and galleries generally use a registration process to document their acquisitions and provide an object or collection-level description in their accessioning records.

Many institutions leverage the technical capabilities supported by their collection management systems. Copy cataloguing (cloning), templates, importing metadata and resource sharing are all standard features that are routinely used to expedite the cataloguing process across all professions.

There are numerous audiovisual archives working worldwide to preserve the cultural heritage of film, television, radio and music. Whilst many are medium specific, very few organisations are like the NFSA with carriage of an entire national audiovisual collection including documentation and artefacts, in all its formats.

Through its extensive local networks and worldwide interactive connections, the NFSA is well positioned to continuously draw on proven practices undertaken by its peers in order to develop and apply its own suite of strategies that best applies to archiving audiovisual, documents and artefacts works.

6. CONCLUSION

The NFSA's Collection Information program plays a key role in the stewardship of the national audiovisual, documentation and artefact collection. Their work is integral to creating an authoritative record of the national audiovisual, documents and artefacts collection thereby enhancing the knowledge of the collection.

Best practice accessioning standards, procedures and guidelines are in place and when partnered with well informed and proven strategies, combine successfully to manage accessioning in a sustainable manner.

APPENDIX A: PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE REFERENCES

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