**Reference Services Source Sheet No. 7**

**What Are Reference Services?**

Reference Services is a term that refers to the provision of facilities and services designed to facilitate access to archives. The primary function of an archival reference service is to aid researchers in identifying and using records relevant to their interests. It covers a range of activities aimed at assisting the users of archives.

The provision of reference services involves responding to all forms of enquiries about archives, providing advice on holdings, preparing and explaining the use of finding aids, researching and documenting the context in which records were originally created and used, clearing records for use in accordance with stated access policies, servicing and supervising activities in the public areas of an archives, dealing with issues of copying and copyright, applying measures aimed at minimising deterioration in the physical condition of records made available to users - all these activities are part of the reference service role.

In addition, reference assistance comprises a referral service whereby users are directed to other more appropriate collections or institutions in situations where an archives does not hold the information they are seeking.

**Reference Services at the City Archives**

The City Archives provides a reference service to the Lord Mayor and Councillors, and ACC staff needing to consult records for administrative purposes. This service is also made available free to the public wanting to research the Council’s archives.

It is the role of the Archives’ to assist users gain access to information by helping them identify and select those records considered most likely to contain that information. As part of this service, Archives staff prepare finding aids such as guides, inventories and indexes, which facilitate access to archives.

Because archives are original documents, and therefore irreplaceable, access to this material needs to be closely controlled and monitored, and its use closely supervised.

An archives, unlike a library, is not self-service. Researchers are not able to browse among the shelves or borrow items from an archives. Rather they must use the finding aids provided and request records to be retrieved by the archives staff. This process can take time, although generally records can be made available within 24 hours of a request being received.

An archives is also dissimilar to a library in that there is no comprehensive catalogue of holdings. Instead researchers need to rely on the help of the archivist and the available finding aids, including any searchable electronic databases, in order to locate relevant records. Assistance is also generally offered with the preparation of source analyses and subject guides that list records held, and which provide information about the administrative context in which the records were created and used within the organisation.

Most archives do not undertake research for the public, although they can direct enquirers to independent research services who will carry out this task usually on a fee for service basis. The City Archives will undertake research for the Lord Mayor and Councillors and ACC executive management. Other researchers are expected to do their own research or, if this is not convenient, engage the services of a research assistant or specialist (see City Archives Source Sheet No. 39 *Research Services*).

**Using the City Archives**

To help define their subject and clarify their needs, researchers are advised to first consult any relevant secondary sources before visiting the City Archives, as this can often save time in identifying the appropriate records.

For major projects, the first visit to the Archives generally involves a ‘reference interview’ at which the Reference Services Archivist assesses the scope of the researcher’s request for information about a particular subject and suggests which records would be most likely to be of greatest assistance. Advice about how to use the Archives’ finding aids, and any published guides or information about relevant record holdings will also be provided to the researcher.

While some high use and particularly fragile records have been microfilmed and can be made available immediately to researchers, the bulk of records requests will need to be retrieved from the City Archives’ repositories and cleared for access. Researchers are strongly advised to make appointments, whenever practicable, to examine records which they have requested.

Requests for access to records less than 30 years old are generally referred to the relevant Council Program to determine what may be made available. Records containing information of an exceptionally sensitive or personal nature are withheld. Access may also be refused to records in such poor physical condition that their use would be detrimental to their preservation.

Special care must be taken when handling archival materials in the reading room to ensure their preservation. A list of rules to be followed when using archival material is available and researchers are required to comply with these procedures.

Copying records for research purposes is done at the discretion of the Archivist. Copies cannot be made of records that are in poor physical condition until they have received proper conservation treatment. Where copies are provided, the Archivist can assist researchers prepare citations showing the source of the reference.

**Further Information**

**City Archives:** Topham Mall, off Currie and Waymouth Streets, Adelaide

**Counter / telephone enquiries:** 9**.**00 am to 5.00 pm Mondays to Fridays

**Search Room open for public research:**10.00 am to 4.00 pm Tuesdays to Thursdays

**Telephone:** +618 8203 7439

**Email:** [cityarchives@cityofadelaide.com.au](mailto:cityarchives@cityofadelaide.com.au)

**Web:** <https://cityofadelaide.com.au/cityarchives>