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Getting In On the Ground Floor: Explaining the Importance of Records to Their Creators

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Finding Records As They Are Created

Records targeted for collection as they are created are more likely to be properly cared for throughout their lifetime. Reach out to record keepers in your town (including businesses, associations, and private individuals) to learn about the types of materials they create and aim to raise their awareness about which of their records may be important to people outside of their institution or families and thus appropriate for an archival facility once their active lives have ended. Targeting those records that are important to keep for posterity as they are created, rather than trying to track them down years later makes it easier to actively collect records, garner community support, show the vitality of your organization, and collect materials most meaningful to your collections. With the proliferation of records in the modern world, it is getting more and more difficult to track down records after they are created. It makes much more sense to have a good understanding of what records are being created and to target them as future archives, rather than trying to locate and appraise them after their active life has ended.

Create brochures to hand out to the public about different types of collections that are valuable for posterity and seek public speaking engagements to discuss the importance of properly maintaining records. Our involvement as records are created will not eliminate the need for us to seek out materials that were not targeted when they were created. It is just another component of collaboration that allows record keepers to work together to support community documentation.

Record Creators as Donors

Involving record creators in the collection development process in the early stages of a record's lifecycle also helps the creator to actively prepare their records for possible donation to your institution. Once you prove the value of their documents to posterity, you have created a mindset that will allow creators to consider the records beyond their active lives, making them more important as documents of social activity and not just papers to be used and disposed.

By raising awareness of the importance of records, we can also help record creators better track their materials to assist them during their active lives. Archivists and others familiar with cataloging, indexing, and organizational techniques can teach others how to employ them so that record keeping is more efficient and access to information is easier. Teaching record creators

how to properly organize and describe information will also allow them to send records to our archives in a more useful way, so that they are fully documented and ready for accession. This cuts down on the time we need to take to arrange, interpret, and otherwise process materials.

To summarize, collecting archives in the next millennium will need to collaborate more closely with record creators, they will need to actively promote the value of good recordkeeping practices to those who operate in unregulated or semi-regulated recordkeeping environments... I believe that we need to acquire a better understanding of recordkeeping in unregulated environments... We need to acquire a better understanding of the dynamics of personal recordkeeping behaviour...

Adrian Cunningham. *Collecting Archives in the Next Millenium*. Paper presented to the Australian Society of Archives, July 1997. available online at www.nla.gov.au/nla/staffpaper/acunning7.html