

ACCESS POLICIES

GENERAL CONFERENCE ARCHIVES

Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

2019

A. Archives and Records Center

The General Conference Archives and Records Center, which is part of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) is the official depository of materials—documents, letters, memoranda, minutes, publications, images, media, etc.—produced or collected by the General Conference as an institution (by its boards and committees, departments, agencies, services, corporations, the boards of its institutions, and chief committees of its divisions), and the North American Division as an institution; as well as materials of historical and cultural value to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is vital that the procedures and policies governing their access be both transparent and uniformly applied.

B. Grounds for restricting access (see below: D.III–V)

1. **Administrative Problems:** By longstanding practice, materials containing references to and descriptions of administrative problems and theological differences are not restricted. However, files should be temporarily restricted in cases where the administrators concerned are still in active service, or where the problem is deemed by the ASTR Director or designee to remain especially sensitive. Such restrictions are to be kept to an absolute minimum.
2. **Moral Faults of Individuals:** References to marital infidelity, indecency, etc., are to be restricted. Where possible, restriction is to be accomplished by allowing access to redacted copies, in which names and other identifying phrases are deleted, rather than by restriction of a whole document or file.
3. **Political Comments:** Materials with references to national or international matters that criticize governments or suggest disloyalty are to be restricted.
4. **Privileged Records:** Documents subject to attorney-client privilege/work-product doctrine, and minutes and associated documentation from executive sessions of institutional boards, are to be stored but are not normally accessible, either to internal or to external researchers (see below: D. VI).

C. Archive versus Records Center

In general, materials in the Records Center are only available internally, to staff within the GC (or the NAD, in the case of its records), whereas materials in the Archive are available to external researchers. Exceptions are highlighted below.

D. Policies on materials

- I) **Unrestricted:** General Conference Session minutes, General Conference Executive Committee minutes, and Division Committee minutes are open to researchers immediately.
- II) **Zero–Ten Years:** All other materials that are scheduled for preservation in the Records Center by the GC Retention Schedule (revision pending) will be stored there initially for up to ten years from the date of creation (or, for files, for ten years after files are closed, i.e. after the most recent document in the file). Access, disposition, and further preservation will all be governed by the

GC Retention Schedule, and by the policies for internal researchers (E, below). In this time period, these materials need undergo no analysis or vetting by ASTR staff, other than being accessioned.

- III) **Ten–Thirty Years:** Materials and files of between ten and thirty years in age will be located in the Records Center. They will not be available to external researchers, with three exceptions.
- 1) Published reports, DVDs and CDs, clippings, open letters, and other material in the public domain. Files that consist only of public materials of this kind may be transferred to the Archive immediately.
 - 2) On a case-by-case basis, external researchers (see below: E and F) may request access to files or materials from: (a) Departments (listed in the *Yearbook*) except PARL; (b) Secretariat except for Interdivisional Employee/International Service Employee (IDE/ISE) files; (c) GC services and other organizations, except for Human Resources and the Office of General Counsel (OGC); **as long as** these are not materials or files marked as *confidential* (see 4, below). Other files or materials may be made available after review and upon determination by Records Center/Archives staff that the researcher's project is significant and that there are no grounds for restriction (as listed above, under B). Having been made available, they ought not automatically to be made available again to another external researcher—further review and determination should take place.
 - 3) Files of deceased IDE/ISEs may be shared with direct family members, after review for sensitive or confidential information by the ASTR director or his designee, and after consultation with OGC, International Personnel Resources and Services (IPRS), and GC Secretariat.
 - 4) **Note:** GC officers or departmental directors may stipulate that some materials or files be marked **confidential** and, in this case, they will not be made available until the thirty-year period has expired.
- IV) **Thirty–Fifty Years:** Thirty years after the creation of materials (or closure of files), most may be *transferred to the Archive* (defined under 1, below) and **thereafter** may be made available to an external researcher (ER) who has followed the process provided for in Section F. However, some materials may be **Restricted** (see 2–3, below) and only available to ERs after fifty years.
- 1) **Transfer to the Archive** entails brief review for references to *moral faults* or *political comments*. If possible, documents should be redacted to remove the references.
 - 2) If, following review, references are too extensive to be redacted, the relevant materials should be removed from the respective files and marked **restricted**, in which case they will not be made available for another twenty years.
 - 3) Four classes of documents will normally remain in the Records Center for fifty years: (i) Secretariat or IPRS files relating to IDEs/ISEs; materials from (ii) PARL; (iii) OGC; and (iv) Human Resources. However, in the period between thirty and fifty years, advance access may be granted on a case-by-case basis following the procedure described above (see III: 2): external researchers may request access to materials from these classes and, if review by ASTR raises no objection, and if prior approval is given by the originating department, they may be made available, but then they ought not automatically to be made available again to another ER—further review, determination, and approval would be necessary.
Note: An exception is made for authors contracted to write for the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, who will be permitted early access to IDE/ISE files relating to articles they have been commissioned to write and solely for that purpose.
- V) **Fifty Years and Over:** As indicated above (IV), certain sensitive classes of documents will be *transferred to the Archive* only after a period of fifty years. After that point in time, however, **all** materials and files will be available to ERs, with the exceptions in VI and VII below.
- VI) **Semi-permanent Closure:** privileged records (as outlined in B.4, above) are to be stored in the Archives, but should not be made available, whether to internal or external researchers, except with prior permission in writing from the individuals or institutions concerned.

- VII) **Permanent Closure:** On warrant of one of the Executive Officers of the General Conference, files may be marked **closed**; they will remain closed until agreed by two of the GC Executive Officers. Closed files are unavailable to external researchers and are available to internal researchers only if engaged in projects at the request of the ASTR Committee, Future Plans Working Group, or an Executive Officer of the General Conference.

E. Access Policies for Internal Researchers (GC/NAD Employees)

Any internal researcher (IR) who wishes to utilize the ASTR Research Center and/or to research in the Archives/Records Center holdings must send a request via email to the Director of ASTR, the Assistant Director for Archives and Records Management, or Assistant Archivist; this should be sent a minimum of 2 hours prior to the visit, in the case of using materials shelved in the Research Center, or a minimum of 24 hours in the case of using materials in the vault or other records storage area. Archives staff will in turn evaluate the request, and reply with an email of receipt and confirmation/denial of said request.

If the request is granted, the IR must receive and view the requested Archival documents in the Research Center. It is prohibited for documents to be taken from the ASTR premises for any reason barring an exigency determined by the Archives staff.

Unless specified in the Records Center Retention Schedule, the IR shall be permitted to view and to scan or copy only materials older than ten years, with the exception of items that are confidential, restricted or closed. For materials within ten years, the IR may have immediate access to materials from their own respective departments or offices; for access to materials of a department or office in which the IR is not employed, the IR must obtain express written permission from the respective departmental director or a General Conference officer before being allowed access.

General Conference officers have access to all Archives/Records Center materials regardless of year or retention status (and NAD Officers have similar access to all NAD materials). Office of General Counsel staff shall have privileged access to materials pursuant to discovery or subpoenas, or other legal needs with the approval of the ASTR director or an officer.

F. Access Policies for External Researchers

1. An external researcher (ER) wishing to gain access to the Archives must first **apply** for access. The applicant should submit a completed Archives application form to the Director of ASTR, the Assistant Director for Archives and Records Management, the Digital Records Manager, or the Assistant Archivist, including a letter or email briefly stating his/her background, purpose of visit and research interest, and an official letter of reference: this should be (i) from a current head of department or dissertation committee member, for faculty members or graduate students (who should also enclose a CV/resume); or (ii) from a conference/mission, union, division or GC officer, departmental director or associate director, for all other applicants.

2. The request will be reviewed and evaluated using the following criteria: recommendation; current position; education; and publications/ media. If the applicant is an established scholar (e.g., full-time or retired faculty member at an accredited university or college), he/she should usually be permitted access; if there are any questions over his/her bona fides as a scholar, then their relationship to the Church may be an additional criterion. Other applications should be evaluated based on (i) scholarly significance of the project, (ii) whether research could be conducted only at the GC Archives or elsewhere, and (iii) the applicant's relationship to the Church. Applications from undergraduate students should include a letter of reference from their academic adviser.

3. If the applicant is approved, one of the four Archives staff specified in 1, above, will email the potential ER, attaching the Research Center Guidelines and Policies Form, Researcher Code of Conduct Form, and a copy of the "Agreement for Researchers" that the ER is to complete and return. Once received, the ER will be considered approved and the Assistant Director for Archives and Records Management or Assistant Archivist will contact him/her to set up an initial visit.

4. *All* visits by ERs are to be scheduled in advance; walk-ins are typically not permitted, but they may be at the discretion of the staff. An exception would be made for church leaders attending meetings at the world headquarters, but even then they should, where possible, be asked to schedule a visit for the future.

5. The ER is permitted access to any material in the *Archive*, except for **restricted** or **closed** files (described above, D. IV(2), VI–VII). He/she may also apply for access to certain materials in the *Records Center*, as set out above (see above, D. III).

6. ER status is a privilege, not a right. It may be revoked for failure to follow the Researcher Code of Conduct or for breaking the terms of the Agreement for Researchers. However, except in egregious cases, a warning should be given first; and, as much as possible, ERs should be encouraged and facilitated.



NOTE: This statement of policies for access to the GC Archives/Records Center and for availability of documents was approved by the Archives, Statistics, and Research Committee, Oct. 1, 2012; revision was approved May 9, 2016; May 15, 2017; and 18 June 2019