

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

1. Purpose

The Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR), part of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC), is committed to preserving the digital assets, content, and materials of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, especially those within its holdings. This policy articulates the framework for digital preservation at the Seventh-day Adventist Church's world headquarters.

Digital preservation is “the management and protection of digital information to ensure authenticity, integrity, reliability, and long-term accessibility”.¹ While tasks such as scanning materials and ensuring routine backups are included in the concept, a digital preservation policy takes a high-level, long-term view of the principles, procedures, and processes involved in preserving digital information. Since all digital material is at risk, it is imperative to articulate the deliberate principles, commitments, and actions that ASTR strives to adhere to when it comes to preservation of those materials.

Authentic, organized, reliable, transferrable, and accessible records are integral to the functioning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It aligns with Adventist Church policy; improves efficiency and increases effectiveness in operational tasks; and facilitates transparency to church administrators, church members, and to the general public. Good records management—which includes digital preservation—helps to preserve the unique history and heritage that any institution's records comprise.²

2. Mandate

ASTR's mandate to preserve materials and collections is core to its existence. The office's vision and mission statements support preserving materials and collections, which allows ASTR to fulfill its vision of “bring[ing] together the Seventh-day Adventist Church's past and present in order to inspire for the future”. This is in line with ASTR's broader mission, which reads:

The mission of the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research is to:

- Organize, analyze and appropriately publicize historical documents and images, current statistics, and other vital organizational data of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

¹ “Digital preservation”, Society of American Archivists, *Dictionary of Archives Terminology*, <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/digital-preservation.html>. Accessed 1 August 2024. Other archival and preservation terms in this document may also be drawn from this dictionary.

² Language is drawn from “Why Manage Records?” on the Adventist Archives website, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/why-manage-records>. Accessed 1 August 2024.

- Preserve the integrity of the records of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
- Heighten awareness and understanding of Adventist heritage and identity among church members worldwide, telling our denominational story innovatively and truthfully
- Conduct evaluations, undertake and administer research, and present findings with integrity and transparency
- Utilize historical records and current data to inform decision-making by the Seventh-day Adventist Church³

The vision and mission statement are in turn supported by the policies of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In its *Working Policy*, BA 70 “Retention and Safeguarding of Records”, the GC creates a mandate for records to be appropriately managed, retained, and preserved. BA 70 15 specifies that “[a]ll organizations and institutions shall give special attention to the permanent preservation and security of their own vital records”.⁴ This includes the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, which holds special responsibility for developing, maintaining, and providing records management and preservation resources to other Adventist Church entities.

The work that ASTR does to preserve materials and collections is also in line with Objective 10 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s *I Will Go: Strategic Focus, 2020-2025* strategic plan, “To enhance the transparency, accountability, and credibility of denominational organization, operations, and mission initiatives”.⁵

3. Scope

The scope of this policy covers the born-digital and digitized materials as well as the digital data managed and held by ASTR.

3.1 Records Center

As the Records Center for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, ASTR strives to preserve digital materials, such as (but not limited to) publications, correspondence, digital images, audiovisual materials, and websites, created by the departments, offices, services, and agencies of the General Conference. These materials can be digital versions of physical materials, materials which are born digital, or digital data recorded in the course of regular business practices.

³ “Vision and Mission Statements”, *AdventistArchives.org*, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/vision-and-mission-statement>. Accessed 1 August 2024.

⁴ “Retention and Safeguarding of Records Policy”, *AdventistArchives.org*, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/gc-policy-for-records-retention-and-safeguarding>. Accessed 1 August 2024.

⁵ See *I Will Go: Strategic Focus, 2020-2025* (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2019/2022), 9. Accessed 1 August 2024 at <https://executivecommittee.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/IWillGo-booklet-final-digital.pdf> and at https://www.iwillgo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/IWG-Booklet_English.pdf.

If the disposition of these digital materials has been determined to be permanent according to the Records Retention Schedule (which is regularly updated with the input of the departments, offices, services, and agencies), then they will be preserved in accordance with the Records Retention Schedule. A model Records Retention Schedule is made available by ASTR for reference by other Adventist Church entities.⁶

Unless the digital materials were originally publicly published, it is accessible only to the content's creator(s), originating department, and to ASTR staff for a time period determined in accordance with the Access Policies.⁷ Materials to be retained permanently are transferred to the General Conference Archives and made accessible as per the Access Policies.

3.2 General Conference Archives

In addition to digital materials transferred to the Archives from the Records Center, the General Conference Archives holds digital materials that exist due to having been digitized from permanently retained physical materials. These materials include paper documents, photographs, slides, negatives, and audiovisual material.

Digital materials held by the Archives are not automatically made available on public-facing websites for a variety of reasons. However, whenever feasible and sustainable, digital materials are made available in ASTR's online archives, which features digitized historical books, periodicals, and minutes, among other records. The online archives also features digital versions of current Seventh-day Adventist periodicals as supplied to ASTR by the publishers.

3.3 Rebek Memorial Library

The Rebek Memorial Library holds materials which came to ASTR outside of the Records Center to Archives path. These archival materials, which may be physical or digital, include manuscripts, photographs, and other records. The digital materials resulting from these holdings may also be uploaded to ASTR's online archives. (Books from non-Adventist-Church publishers which are added to the Library's holdings are outside the scope of this digital preservation plan.)

4. Principles

ASTR is committed to facilitating efficient and effective access to Seventh-day Adventist Church records to both internal and external users as appropriate. Digital and digitized records that are to be permanently preserved will be managed in ways that maintain the records' organization, authenticity, reliability, and accessibility.

⁶ "General Conference Model Retention Schedule" (July 2015), <https://www.adventistarchives.org/retention-schedule.pdf>

⁷ "Access Policies" (2019), *AdventistArchives.org*, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/gc-access-policy.pdf>. Accessed 1 August 2024.

4.1 Organization

Disorganized or unorganized digital records are tantamount to missing or non-existent digital records, so the organization of digital records lays the groundwork for their long-term preservation.

4.1.1 *Organizational viability*: ASTR is committed to the protection of vital records⁸ as well as the protection of other historically relevant records in both physical and digital formats. These records are crucial to the operation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including its strategic planning, and to the understanding and application of its history. To that end, ASTR will seek to ensure that world headquarters personnel are aware of and able to interact with the Records Retention Schedule for their department, as well as advocate for Seventh-day Adventist Church entities to go through its records center and archives accreditation process.

4.1.2 *Policy and strategy*: ASTR will be diligent in following the digitization guidelines as laid out in “ASTR’s Primary Source Collections: Structure and Definitions” document. Furthermore, ASTR will permanently retain the minutes of any standing, ad hoc, or special committee whose decisions are related to digitization and digital preservation. ASTR will also regularly review its digitized materials to assess when updates and additions to the materials are needed.

4.1.3 *Legal and ethical*: ASTR will comply and will ensure compliance with all relevant legislation and work closely with other GC departments and offices tasked with information and data integrity. ASTR commits to aligning with best practices within the professional industry standards of digital preservation as well as working with relevant stakeholders to identify needs and address any issues that arise.

4.1.4 *Metadata management*: ASTR is committed to creating and maintaining sufficient and appropriate metadata that allows the discovery and use of preserved digital content. The consistent use of standard subject headings (typically those from the Library of Congress) and keywords, along with the use of unique controlled vocabularies, in alignment with Dublin Core standards, will allow for ASTR’s continued stewardship of digital content and materials. ASTR will strive to make its metadata findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (FAIR).⁹

4.2 Authenticity

Organized records must retain their authenticity, whether they were originally physical or digital.

4.2.1 *Acquisition, transfer, and ingest*: ASTR will ingest digital and digitized material through the Records Center to Archives process and through the application of the Rebok Memorial Library’s Collection Policy. ASTR will regularly communicate with records creators and donors

⁸ As defined by General Conference *Working Policy* BA 70.

⁹ “FAIR Principles”, *Go FAIR*. Accessed 8 August 2024 at <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>.

during the transfer and donation processes. While digital records are typically donated rather than deposited in the Library, any deposits of digital material will be the subject of a signed Memorandum of Understanding between ASTR and the depositor.

4.2.2 *Content preservation*: ASTR will plan to maintain access to the content of digital and digitized material by performing data, format, and platform migration as necessary.

4.3 Reliability

Organized and authentic records must remain reliable. This means that such records generally remain unaltered, and any changes are thoroughly documented.

4.3.1 *Bitstream preservation*: In collaboration with GC Information Technology Services (ITS), ASTR will work to ensure the proper storage and integrity of its digital content over time. They will actively monitor its digital content to guard against digital decay; identify, document, and repair any corruption through the use of routine backups; and follow industry best practices for the long-term preservation of its digital repositories.

4.3.2 *Continuous improvement*: ASTR will routinely assess and evaluate its digital preservation capabilities, goals, procedures, and policies. Digital preservation is a long-term, ongoing commitment which requires regularly tracking progress, evaluating priorities and plans, and revising or updating procedures and policies as necessary to remain aligned with this policy.

4.4 Accessibility

Organized, authentic, and reliable digital materials are meaningless without those materials remaining accessible in readable and understandable formats.

4.4.1 *Discovery and access*: ASTR makes digital and digitized content available in alignment with its Access Policies.

4.4.2 *Community*: ASTR will routinely, regularly, and frequently collaborate with others seeking to preserve digital and digitized materials relevant to the work and history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It will maintain a close and positive working relationship with ITS, the Office of Data Governance, the Office of General Counsel, and others within the world church headquarters in their mutual pursuit of the preservation and accessibility of digital and digitized material.

Furthermore, ASTR will work with the Adventist Digital Library (or its successors) to provide ongoing, easy access to digital and digitized materials from throughout the Adventist Church's network of recordkeeping and holding entities, from administrative records centers and archives to higher educational facilities such as university libraries.

ASTR staff will also seek to create and maintain relationships with other professional records managers, librarians, and archivists through membership and participation in related professional organizations, especially those which seek to bolster and maintain access to digital and digitized materials.

4.4.3 *Technological capabilities*: ASTR will collaborate with Information Technology Services and the Office of Data Governance to maintain sufficient support for digital preservation activities, including storage and access infrastructure and an appropriate level of security.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

In the Adventist Church’s world headquarters, more than one department is responsible for the long-term preservation of digital and digitized material. While all personnel have a responsibility to safeguard their records while in use, both the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research and Information Technology Services are responsible for adhering to policies related to the long-term preservation digital and digitized material and for the practical implementation of any said policies in day-to-day work. They also support headquarters personnel in understanding and applying their individual responsibility to steward records well.

Both the Office of General Counsel and the Data Governance Office are consulted for input on issues related to digital preservation as well as on new processes that may improve or affect the status and state of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s digital and digitized materials.

All four of these offices are held accountable for the success of digital preservation policies and plans. Their directors provide high-level oversight to the ongoing work of their teams, and, in turn, report on long-term digital preservation work to their respective oversight committees, the three General Conference Officers, and the General Conference Executive Committee.

6. Standards and Models

ASTR strives to use best practices when it comes to digital preservation. Its physical collections are described using a DACS-compliant¹⁰ schema; this description transfers to digitized collections and is collected for original digital records. Its metadata falls in line with Dublin Core¹¹ and PREMIS¹² and utilizes Library of Congress subject headings and name authorities¹³.

¹⁰ Society of American Archivists, *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, Version 2022.0.1.1, <https://saa-ts-dacs.github.io/>, accessed 12 August 2024.

¹¹ Dublin Core, “DCMI Metadata Terms,” <https://www.dublincore.org/specifications/dublin-core/dcmi-terms/>, accessed 12 August 2024.

¹² Library of Congress, “PREMIS Data Dictionary for Preservation Metadata, Version 3.0,” <https://www.loc.gov/standards/premis/v3/index.html>, accessed 12 August 2024.

¹³ Library of Congress, “Library of Congress Subject Headings PDF Files,” <https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCSH/freelcsh.html>, and “Library of Congress Authorities,” <https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCSH/freelcsh.html>, accessed 12 August 2024.

Its scanning processes incorporates concepts from OAIS¹⁴ and is FADGI-compliant¹⁵. The template for this policy was drawn from the Digital Preservation Coalition.¹⁶

7. Sustainability

Digital preservation is a long-term commitment that requires dedicated and ongoing financial and institutional support. Not all physical records—even those of enduring value—should, can, or will be digitized, as digitization is not a solution for physical space concerns or other administrative issues. However, both digitized and born-digital records are treated in a similar manner to physical records and are subject to the Records Retention schedule.

Materials that are not selected for ongoing digital preservation may receive typical IT backups but will not receive any additional support. Materials that are selected for ongoing digital preservation will, at minimum, have best efforts made to maintain the integrity of the original digital objects. Some materials may require higher levels of preservation in order to sustain them. Such activities will be in line with the National Digital Stewardship Alliance’s “Levels of Digital Preservation”¹⁷ and will be considered in light of the digitization guidelines in “ASTR’s Primary Source Collections: Structure and Definitions”.

In addition to the sustainability of the digital preservation activities it engages in, the Seventh-day Adventist Church feels that it is called “to care for their environment”¹⁸ and commits to considering during its decision-making processes what the potential impacts on the environment that the long-term stewardship of digital and digitized materials might be.

8. Related Documents

The policy and plan documents that this policy refers to and relies on include (but are not limited to):

- ASTR’s Primary Source Collections: Structure and Definitions
- ASTR Strategic Plan
- [General Conference Archives Access Policies](#)
- General Conference Records Retention Schedule
- General Conference Strategic Plan

¹⁴ Digital Preservation Coalition and Brian Lavoie, “The Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Guide (2nd Edition),” (2014), <https://www.dpconline.org/docs/technology-watch-reports/1359-dpctw14-02/file>, accessed 12 August 2024.

¹⁵ Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative, <https://www.digitizationguidelines.gov/>, accessed 12 August 2024.

¹⁶ “Template for building a preservation policy,” <https://www.dpconline.org/digipres/implement-digipres/policy-toolkit/policy-template>.

¹⁷ NDSA, “Levels of Digital Preservation,” <https://nds.org/publications/levels-of-digital-preservation/>, accessed 12 August 2024. See also https://www.digitalpreservation.gov/documents/NDSA_Levels_Archiving_2013.pdf.

¹⁸ “The Nature of Humanity,” 28 *Fundamental Beliefs* (2020 Edition), 4, <https://www.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ADV-28Beliefs2020.pdf>, accessed 12 August 2024.

- General Conference *Working Policy*
- Rebok Memorial Library Collection Development Policy

9. Contact

Questions and/or comments about this digital preservation policy can be directed to ASTR's external email, archives@gc.adventist.org. External requests for materials to be digitized may result in a fee being levied in accordance with ASTR policies.

10. Document Control

Original draft prepared in August 2024 by Ashlee Chism
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