

**Faster access to archival collections in NSLA libraries:  
Guidelines for arrangement and description beyond the  
collection/record group level**

National Library of Australia  
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## 1. Purpose

These guidelines are designed as a set of practical ideas to assist managers of NSLA archival collections more efficiently administer the later stage of archival collection control, beyond the collection/record group level. The suggestions which follow are intended to be non-prescriptive, a starting kit of ideas which managers can use, adapt or elect not to apply as best fits their library.

Each NSLA library and its processes are unique, and your library may have already implemented or started to think about some of the suggestions at a local level. The information presented should act as a catalyst for continued creative discussion on how to improve our processes for the further arrangement and description of collections within the NSLA archival community.

## 2. Background and scope

The guide was commissioned as one of the recommendations of the *Faster access to archival collections in NSLA libraries*<sup>1</sup> report. The suggestions contained in the text draw heavily on the report's survey results and analysis, together with ideas derived from recent international research (listed in the Bibliography in Section 11 below).

The guide focuses on the later stage of control beyond the collection or record group level. The suggestions are intended to apply to collections of personal papers, though some points are relevant to the management of government records. As an introductory document, no attempt has been made to provide comprehensive advice and many questions are posed to stimulate thought and further discussion. Guidelines for providing rapid access to recent receipts are the subject of a separate companion booklet.

The contribution of each of the national and state libraries to the NSLA surveys, and of Jackie Dooley (OCLC), Joanna Meakins (TROVE analyst), Jennifer Lloyd (Manager, NLA Preservation Services) and Marie-Louise Ayres (NSLA Project 8/Action 5, Project Manager) for their expert advice, are gratefully acknowledged.

## 3. Three things that your library can do to make further processing of archival collections more effective

1. Acknowledge that only a minority of collections or parts thereof should require further arrangement and description – most collections will be fully arranged and described on the creation of a good collection-level catalogue record supported by a box list
2. Set aside a day to reflect upon existing practice and brainstorm alternative approaches
3. Focus on throughput – set targets and use project plans and timelines to manage projects and available resources

## What is arrangement and description beyond the collection/record group level?

One definition of 'processed' is when a collection 'can be used productively for research'. Made up of arranging, describing and cataloguing. 'to an ideal standard level' To this statement we might add that it can also be uniquely identified, located and accessed. As indicated in the NSLA surveys, our definitions of what is processed vary widely as a community. The suggestions put forward in these guidelines

Greene Meissner 'we need to articulate a new set of arrangement, preservation and description guidelines that (1) expedites getting collection materials into the hands of users, (2) that assures arrangement of material *adequate* to user needs, (3) that takes the *minimal* steps necessary to physically preserve collection materials, and (4) that describes materials sufficient to promote use'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ayres, Marie-Louise *Faster access to archival collections in NSLA libraries* : project report. Canberra : National Library of Australia, November 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Greene, Mark & Meissner, Dennis 'More product, less process : revamping traditional archival processing', *The American archivist*, v. 68, no. 2, 2005, p. 2.

Many of us take considerable pride in our work and the 'craft' of archiving

Greene and Meissner –'our tradition of slow, careful. Scholarly research and writing about every collection or record group have come to haunt us', p. 7

#### **4. Return to first principles and question basic assumptions**

*'Whether they are in good order, or in bad, or in none, we shall still require to arrange them...to marshal them in such a way that the archive significance of every document – its own nature and its relation to its neighbours – is brought out as clearly as possible'*<sup>3</sup> – Hilary Jenkinson (1922)

*'The most common fault is haste in dealing with archives, due to anxiety to make them available for use'*<sup>4</sup> – Hilary Jenkinson (1922)

*'Unfortunately, for the sake of consistency, archivists have often produced certain kinds of finding aids...regardless of whether or not they are needed or usable'*<sup>5</sup> – T.R. Schellenberg (1963)

For many years arrangement and description has been performed in particular ways which gave great satisfaction to the processor. A beautifully arranged and described end product.

The past joys of opening a letter, refolding, releasing knowledge

Need to be balanced against the need to provide access to more collections means that we need to look radically at what we are doing and why in order to increase throughput. The reality for staff undertaking these tasks is quite challenging as we all derive enormous satisfaction from the task.

Processing has been at the very core of archival activity and by questioning what we do we are touching on the central nerve of what we do. In the last decade, scholars have highlighted the need to uncover 'hidden' (undescribed) collections, to make processing more efficient, to address legacy backlogs in order to make collections more discoverable and accessible to researchers.

##### **4.1 Return to first principles**

Revisit fundamental archival texts and critically analyse what you presently do. Read the works of influential thinkers such as Hilary Jenkinson and T.R. Schellenberg with 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes and an online perspective.

Question basic archival assumptions, such as:

- What are the essential steps needed to achieve further intellectual and physical control?
- How can we adapt archival theory to make it relevant to a digital environment without forsaking basic principles?
- Are those concepts traditionally at the heart of arrangement and description work (such as restoring a perceived 'original order') essential or nice to do? Archival texts emphasise the role of the archivist in providing context and restoring original order (where this can be identified). If there is no discernable original order, do we really need to arrange the collection or is the order received at transfer sufficient to provide access, and is this sustainable in the digital age?
- What level and form of description are appropriate to federated online environments? Are finding aids really necessary or will less labour-intensive box lists or inventories suffice? What are the unquestionable essential elements of finding aids or box lists? Scholars refer to the 'new special collections environment' with a broader clientele in

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<sup>3</sup> Jenkinson, Hilary. *A manual of archive administration*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London : Percy Lund, Humphries and Co, 1965, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Schellenberg, T.R. *The management of archives*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1966, p. 114.

which straightforward access to collections is primary to their needs<sup>6</sup>. Consider the place of finding aids in this environment and what shape and form will best serve user needs? Think about social media and how creators, donors and users of archives be more actively involved in providing or enhancing basic descriptions.

## 4.2 Reflect on basic assumptions

Set aside a day for you and your staff to pause and reflect on all post collection-level processing which your library currently performs, and to brainstorm alternative approaches. Ask yourself:

- Why you are doing what you do and how relevant the activity is in the electronic age? Encourage new ways of thinking about collections – transfer your focus from what you want to do to what researchers actually need. This will help reduce delays inflicted on users who want to access collections quickly. Do not remain ‘mired in traditional conceptions of how access is provided’<sup>7</sup>
- What can you stop doing and still meet researcher needs? Increase your flexibility and move away from a ‘one size fits all approach’.
- How useful are existing processes and the resources required to sustain present activity? Recognise the forward creep in standards which arise from aiming forever higher, and incrementally raise our benchmarks - ‘save perfection in descriptive practices for the most significant material or for that which cannot be described usefully at all without explicit detail’<sup>8</sup>
- Which aspects of archival context, practice and performance are impeding processing workflows?
- What are our user needs, available resources and *achievable* end-products?

## 5. Analyse current practices

You might consider analysing you current practices to separate what is essential from that which is nice to do. In doing so need to balance the competing needs of providing adequate description, enhancing discoverability and meeting the real needs of users.

To assist in this process you might:

- Undertake a stock take of all processes that you currently perform and assess which are ‘essential’, ‘nice to have’ or ‘not really necessary’. Focus resources on tasks at the higher end of the scale and reduce or eliminate time spent on tasks at the lowest end.
- Implement a simplified workflow for arrangement and description - redevelop and streamline processes to increase throughput
- Rein in your inner quest for perfection. For example ‘the urge to rewrite finding aids (or reprocess collections and then rewrite finding aids) is a huge barrier to providing interim access to the collection descriptions as they are now’<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 8

<sup>7</sup> Jones, Barbara. *Hidden collections, scholarly barriers : creating access to unprocessed special collections materials in North America’s research libraries : a white paper for the Association of Research Libraries Task Force on Special Collections*. Washington : Association of Research Libraries, 2003, p. 7. Accessed 10 March 2011: <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/hiddencollswitepaperjun6.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Association of Research Libraries. *Special collections in ARL libraries : a discussion report from the ARL Working Group on Special Collections*, March 2009, p. 18. Accessed 10 March 2011: <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/scwg-report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Combs, Michele et al. *Over, under, around and through : getting around barriers to EAD implementation*. Dublin, Ohio : OCLC Research, February 2010. Accessed 16 March 2010: [www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-04.pdf](http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-04.pdf)

- Revise your benchmark for the minimum collection size requiring a box list. It is not unreasonable to expect researchers to consult up to 7-8 boxes themselves without a box list being essential or to use basic inventories where these are available.
- Attune your workflows and systems infrastructure and invest in new or existing archival collection management systems – and in the integration of these systems with other corporate systems – as this has a significant benefit on processing productivity

## **6. Measure what you do**

- Understand the metrics of what you currently do – archival collection management is severely under measured, making it difficult for senior managers to decide whether the programs in their library are efficient, inefficient, or vary between these points. The benefits of keeping reliable and useful statistics for identifying potential efficiencies in archival workflows cannot be overstated.
- Gather and analyse data on processing performance in your library to provide accurate estimates of how long core and repeatable activities should take. If this challenge seems formidable, start with one task in the workflow and work from there.

## **7. Shift your benchmarks – only further arrange and describe that which is necessary and your resources allow**

### **7.1 Set achievable benchmarks**

- Focus on the level of arrangement and description which is sufficient to provide access
- Process more fully only those parts of collections which require more attention, not entire collections at the same level
- Set a performance benchmark for full arrangement and description of at least 80 metres per year per full-time processing archivist. For libraries which cannot assign staff to full-time A&D activity, set a performance benchmark of no more than an average of two hours per archive box, or 12 hours per linear metre processed.
- Recognise that some detailed processing tasks are now an activity of the past, eg. the creation of correspondence indexes, etc. The resources required are unsustainable and will prevent you from describing more collections at a lower level.
- Be concise and focus on what the researcher needs to know, not what you know about the collection or would like to describe

### **7.2 Profit from processing priorities**

- Assign processing and description priorities on receipt and record in electronic form so that results can be manipulated and reports obtained
- Ask yourself key prioritisation questions – which collections will receive fuller processing, what level of detail is required, how much time is available? Move to varying levels of processing, rather than a ‘one size fits all approach’
- Recognise that the value of the collection, prominence of the person or anticipated usage should not usually determine the level of processing; instead, the need for further processing should drive prioritisation so collections can be made accessible to researchers.

## 7.3 Purposeful processing levels

*'The ideal level of processing is not the same for all collections. As the intermediary between creators and users of records, the archivist should aim to do only the amount of processing that makes a collection useful to researchers. To do more for the sake of uniform finding aids is wasteful'<sup>10</sup>*

- Adopt a clear policy on which collections are in scope for full processing, and which should be considered fully processed on production of a good collection level record. Gain acceptance of this policy from your institution.
- Develop a more nuanced vocabulary to describe the stages of description and control – unprocessed, minimally processed, fully processed
- Acknowledge that not all series and all files in a collection need to be arranged at the same level – a collection may be flagged for further processing but this level of attention may only be justified for a single series
- Curtail item-level work, change the focus to collection and series-level. Users are better served by some information about many collections rather than detailed information about fewer collections.

## 8. Optimise time and resources

### 8.1 Stay on track

- Focus on throughput and only put in as much effort as can be justified
- Schedule regular meetings with the project supervisor (for example, once a week) to review progress and issues and to keep the project focused so that doesn't deviate into extra finessing, etc.
- Keep up the momentum - view processing as a finite phase in which material is further arranged and described within a stipulated timeframe. Projects should not pause at any one point for too long – flag any complications in your archival management system or on a spreadsheet for follow-up or as discrete projects for when time and resources allow.
- Set end-dates and stick to them – gone are the times when finding aids could be endlessly perfected without a specific end-date. Limit what you do to a defined time period.

### 8.2 Project planning

- Mandate the use of detailed project plans and reports for all arrangement and description projects. This will progressively support accurate predictions on the time and resources required to arrange and describe large collections, and will hold processing staff accountable to reasonable performance benchmarks. Insist that time spend on processing is both planned and recorded
- Customise plans to fit the job – use a simple format for straightforward projects and an appropriate level of detail for more complex ones
- Use your project plan and timeline to manage and set firm boundaries around processing projects. Set targets for the processing of higher level collections within a designated processing time, eg. 5-6 metres per month.
- Focus your attention and resources where they will have maximum effect for the end-user – note the modesty of resources devoted to archival collection management, the rapidly escalating workload in most libraries and prioritise any additional description of unique and rare collections
- **Make the task fit available resources not the resources fit the job, ie. do not commit to detailed processing if the resources are not available**

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<sup>10</sup> Slotkin, Helen & Lynch, Karen. 'An analysis of processing procedures : the adaptable approach', *The American archivist*, vol. 45, no. 2, Spring 1982, p. 156.

## 9. Tackle legacy backlogs and prevent new backlogs from accruing

- Recognise that the real cost of producing a few exquisitely described collections comes at the expense of growing backlogs
- Distinguish between legacy backlogs (which will require special projects to tackle) and current accrual backlogs and develop a plan for progressively tackling these issues. For example prioritise an audit of completely uncontrolled material, followed by expansion of collection level records from available brief accession records, followed by expansion of collection level records; delay deeper levels of description until all collections are 'unhidden' at least a basic level.
- Obtain an accurate measure of backlogs – only when the size and scope are understood will you be able to plan effectively
- Redefine existing backlogs by retrospectively assigning processing priorities and considering lower priority collections as fully processed on production of a good collection level record
- Implement a 'blitz' morning or day each week to progressively tackle backlogs or complete unwieldy tasks. Take several staff offline and use this resource to work quickly through outstanding tasks – remember the maxim 'many hands make light work'. The instant and observable progress made is usually a positive tonic for all!

## 10. Tips for productive processing

Included in Section 10 are some practical suggestions for making your processing more productive with the aim of increasing throughput.

### 10.1 Planning

- Before you start, analyse and plan for what you need to do. Assess each new project on its own terms and resist a 'one size fits all approach'.
- Prepare a project timeline and stick to it. Liaise with senior staff and have any projects and timelines approved before commencement to ensure that resources are justified and available.
- Meet with project stakeholders at critical points in the project plan: at the project commencement (to outline project scope and processing level); following an initial survey and analysis of the collection (to refine agreed approach); following approval of the project plan (to define agreed approach) and at critical milestones in the processing workflow.
- In addition, schedule regularly weekly catch ups with the project supervisor to discuss any issues that arise and to ensure that the work being done does not stray outside agreed boundaries. These do not necessarily need to be long (15-20 minutes) but will ensure that both parties keep in communication and the project stays on the approved path.
- Regularly review progress - set weekly or fortnightly targets and keep on track
- Take advantage of pre-existing information and do not attempt to do or describe that which has been done before
- Establish which tasks require more input and which can be omitted. For example, a discrete sequence of important correspondence may warrant listing at folder level but the remainder of the collection might be described at box level.
- If you haven't already, consider implementing the use of a processing check or worksheet – this lists tasks to be completed, their order in the workflow and indicates when each stage has been signed off. A checklist will assist in tracking and reporting on where a collection is up to in the workflow chain.
- Flag which tasks are in scope and those which are out of scope, eg. no preservation work, no detailed photographic descriptions, no correspondence indexes, etc.



- Identify any risks to the proposed timeline and how to best manage contingencies. These might include unexpected leave, competing duties (eg. reading room responsibilities), equipment failure.
- Prepare an end of project report in dot point form. Think of each project as a learning experience and note any lessons learnt to inform future activity.

## **10.2 Maximise available physical space**

- Before you start processing, make sure you clear enough space to work on as it is impossible to work efficiently at your desk surrounded by other tasks
- If possible, ensure that a separate processing space is provided for staff, even if limited to a single sorting table and set of shelves. It has been demonstrated that investing in physical infrastructure for processing large and/or unwieldy collections has a significant benefit on processing productivity.
- Where possible, position your processing area in a space separate to the main work space so that staff can concentrate on tasks undisturbed
- Store archival supplies close by to minimise travel back and forth to obtain materials

## **10.3 Assign the right staff level to the job**

- Shift staffing resources and skills to where they can provide value, eg. arrangement and description of material of intrinsic historic or research value, not 'everything'
- Minimise the inefficiencies inherent in the fragmentation of staff across a wide range of duties and responsibilities by concentrating effort on one, or blocks, of activity. Consider rotating staff through various tasks to build up skills and increase awareness of processes undertaken across the full span of the processing continuum. Where resources permit, consider appointing (or rotating staff through) a processing officer position to concentrate effort and minimise distractions.
- If you have the flexibility in your team structure, better match staffing levels to tasks and concentrate higher level staff on more involved level processes. For example, make a list of tasks which can be undertaken by lower level staff – examples include routine processes and activities such as data entry, labelling, shelving and rehousing.
- Implement a 'master and apprentice' system for training staff in higher end processing tasks so that the theoretical and practical knowledge of more experienced processors can be distilled to those new processor, and to ensure that a thorough grounding in archival theory is not overlooked
- Where possible use group sorting (two or three staff working together) for processing projects – for instance, one person typing into a spreadsheet whilst another examines the records. This technique is particularly effective for large or urgent processing tasks. Staff working together are less inclined to get stuck in detail, resolve problems more efficiently, keep up project momentum and are less subject to outside diversions than processors working alone.
- Understand the skill sets needed to undertake core tasks and address areas requiring further training and experience. Project planning, dealing with audiovisual and born-digital materials and change 'readiness' are all areas identified by NSLA libraries in which staff could benefit from further training.

## **10.4 Arrange collections more efficiently**

- Challenging the concept of the need for a series approach is not new. In 2001 the St Johnsbury Athenaeum Archives processing manual noted;
- 'When arranging a collection, the ultimate goal is to make the materials available expediently and efficiently. Respect the organisation imposed by the person who created the records. Not only is this sound archival practice, but it will save you from having to devise an elaborate and time consuming alternate arrangement scheme. Strive for simplicity. There is no need to create complicated hierarchies of series and

subseries if you don't need to. Many collections will be arranged and described as a single collection without series'

- Set aside blocks of time to concentrate on important tasks, eg. one morning per week to concentrate on processing, etc. Concentrated, undisturbed effort will be more productive than a piecemeal approach. If necessary, find a bolt hole and lock yourself away for a few hours!
- In libraries where the accessioning workflow is broken up between multiple teams (eg. accessioning done in one team, A&D in another), reduce delays caused by the need for frequent cross-team liaison by developing an effective communication tool (such as a checksheet) to minimise liaison and staff repeating tasks unnecessarily.
- Minimise significant travel of collection items through the library – each stopping point adds a further delay in the processing continuum
- Apportion a dedicated time in your calendar to concentrate on processing, eg. one morning a week
- Stay focused on the objective of minimally processing the collection and avoid being sidetracked into providing more detail than is necessary
- Consider the processor's role as adding value where it is most needed; recognise a shift in the role of the processor from comprehensive sorting and listing to one of 'touching up' and providing context where it is needed.
- Limit item-level work, change focus to collection and series-level – users are better served by some information about many collections rather than detailed information about fewer collections
- **Ask yourself is physical arrangement really needed beyond the box level. If so, could the same objective be achieved intellectually, ie. through the finding aid or box list, rather than by moving material?**
- Recognise that maintaining an arrangement at box level is much more efficient for libraries than reorganising at series level
- Eliminate item level processing, eg. never internally reorganise folders, do not unfold papers – if such tasks are deemed essential flag as separate preservation projects for volunteers or interns
- Think of shortcuts at every step of the process, eg. instead of trying to restore a perceived 'original order', record any evidence you find but leave material in the order received at transfer
- Prioritise the resolution of any outstanding rights issues – eliminate as many blocks as possible to access and copying for research purposes

## 10.5 Minimise preservation actions

- Greene and Meissner 'our users, tellingly, seem much less concerned about these housekeeping issues than we do' – dirt and untidiness, p. 4
- 'techniques and expectations that made great sense when acquisitions consisted of a relatively small volume of carefully created document types, that were each truly unique, and that were often visually and artifactually impressive, make no sense in an era where acquisitions comprise a huge amount of frequently redundant material, in myriad forms, with no inherent appeal apart from their informational content', p. 5
- Perform any preservation actions very selectively
- Greene and Meissner found that x% of processing time is spent on unnecessary item-level preservation actions<sup>11</sup>. As outlined in their findings you can probably stop doing most of the following without risking collection material:

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<sup>11</sup> Greene, Mark & Meissner, Dennis 'More product, less process : revamping traditional archival processing', *The American archivist*, v. 68, no. 2, 2005, pp. 208-263.

- Curtail physical handling and rehousing
  - Removing paperclips
  - Isolating photographs
  - Photocopying clippings
  - Re-folding
  - Weeding,
  - Photocopying of carbons or thermal faxes
  - Mending torn documents
- If complex problems are present, record these in your system or refer the material to your preservation section for attention as appropriate. Keep materials in original containers as far as possible – in most cases comprehensive re-folding is unnecessary; replace folders only where they pose a threat to the longevity of the material.
  - Record preservation projects on a spreadsheet or your archival management system to facilitate analysis, monitor trends, and identify collections for special project work. Straightforward tasks can be used as volunteer projects or reading room/fill in jobs for staff.

## 10.6 Describe collections more efficiently

- Focus on user perspectives and only include information which will assist actual needs. Even when providing fuller description, limit staff input to the minimal steps necessary to bring collections under intellectual control.
- Discoverability - reflect on international research which indicates that finding aids are predominantly (90%) discovered by researchers via search engines – researchers typically begin their search using services such as Google or Wikipedia<sup>12</sup>. This suggests that the structure and content of traditional finding aids needs to be modified to enhance their visibility and usability in an online environment, ie. these factors will necessarily influence shape and form
- The results of several user behaviour studies demonstrate that researchers predominantly use general keyword searching, not usually limited by specific fields. When limits are used, name keyword and subject keyword searches predominate.<sup>13</sup>
- Relevance ranking – users are used to and like results lists that are relevance ranked (as in Google) rather than listed by title, date, etc.<sup>14</sup>
- Put the most important information at the top of the finding aid as readers
- Archivists role to support users in their searching by providing strategic description, ie. 'Efficient description in the online environment must communicate the main content of collection and surface some significant content lower down'<sup>15</sup>
- Content – research shows that researchers are more interested in the subjects contained in collections, rather than in than provenance and how the collections are arranged. 'Librarians and archivists need to manage archival collections by provenance, but also must describe what is in the collections for their

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<sup>12</sup> Light, Michelle. 'The endangerment of trees', EAD @ 1, 31 August 2008, p. 1. Accessed 31 March 2011: <http://www.archivists.org/publications/proceedings/EAD@10/Light-EAD@10.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Shaffner, Jennifer. *The metadata is the interface : better description for better discovery of archives and special collections, synthesised from user studies*. Dublin, Ohio : OCLC Research, 2009, p. 6. Accessed 24 March 2011: <http://www.oclc.org/programs/publications/reports/2009-06.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Light, Michelle. Op cit, p. 3.

users'<sup>16</sup>. Strategic use of keywords and concepts in the description, and less focus on material type and folder lists<sup>17</sup>

- Consider which elements of existing finding aids can be eliminated or reduced – only include what is essential and dispense with the rest! Box lists are more efficient to compile and (it could be argued) better capture the original order of material (as it was at the point of transfer). The production of detailed finding aids in series form is unsustainable for many institutions and may be unnecessary in meeting the real needs of researchers.
- Innovate and do not be afraid of exploring new ways of presenting information. The traditional finding aid may not be the most efficient form of description in an online environment. For example, more use of keywords and dot points can save time and present information in a simpler, easy to read and discoverable form.
- Create pathways for researchers to augment collection description – explore the use of social media such as tagging, interactive finding aids and other networking options that will encourage researchers to contribute to the documented knowledge about a collection<sup>18</sup>. Some NSLA library catalogues already include functions for adding tags and comments to entries, though these functions have not yet been extended to finding aids.
- Minimise extra work for cataloguing staff by aligning your descriptive fields with cataloguing requirements. Doing so will enhance the quick transfer or upgrade of data.
- Check donor lists but resist the temptation to overhaul unless essential to do so; limit amendments to essential corrections or the removal of inappropriate data, ie. those elements which might lead researchers astray.
- Do not further research biographical notes if information is already available online; resist any temptation to improve upon unless there is a critical need to do so.
- Build on descriptive metadata created in earlier stages in a single online system – transferring and re-keying core data into multiple systems wastes time and is very inefficient.
- Keep good notes to avoid having to return to previous boxes to retrace steps and check points again.
- Focus on the quality of information, not quantity – what are the essential facts that the researcher needs to know? For example, do not prepare biographical notes if these already exist in Who's Who, existing catalogue records, ADB online, other websites, etc. – instead provide a hyperlink or citation to existing documentation.
- Use keywords rather than labouring over beautifully constructed sentences – keywords are more precise for retrieval in an online environment.

## 10.7 Publishing

- Convert legacy finding aids for internet accessibility – resist any temptation to update or improve. Until they are available online they remain 'hidden' to users. 'Access deferred is access denied'<sup>19</sup>
- Make hard copy finding aids available online – many libraries have backlogs of these which make contents of collections less discoverable, and tying staff to a mediator role for researchers wanting further information

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Light, Michelle. Op cit, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Special collections in ARL libraries*, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Combs, Michele et al. Combs, Michele et al. *Over, under, around and through : getting around barriers to EAD implementation*. Dublin, Ohio : OCLC Research, February 2010, p. 9. Accessed 16 March 2010: [www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-04.pdf](http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-04.pdf)

- Invest in access to the rich intellectual content of lists and finding aids by using the models outlined in the Project 8 Lists project undertaken by Linda Newbown in 2010<sup>20</sup>

## 10.8 Make your finding aids discoverable

### 10.8.1 Maximising discoverability

- Recognise that we now operate in a federated environment and prioritise effort on enhancing discoverability. Research confirms that online finding aids are more likely to be found by inexperienced users than those only held locally in an institution<sup>21</sup>.
- Streamline description to minimal essential elements; use keywords rather than full sentences to save time and facilitate discovery
- Include the creator name in more than one form in more than one field in the box list or finding aid. Trove logs indicate that researchers find collections predominantly by name of creator or by keyword, often searching by phrase<sup>22</sup>. This suggests that including creator name in multiple places in the finding aid will maximise discoverability, as will including the name in a variety of forms, eg. James Cook and Cook, James
- Where resources allow, also insert names of places, features, events, occupations and format (eg. diary, journal) associated with the collection in the catalogue entry, box list or finding aid as these are also search terms frequently used by researchers<sup>23</sup>
- Adhere or work towards common standards which promote cross-searching in a federated environment
- Standardise and streamline the representation of additions to archival collections in MARC records

### 10.8.2 Making sure that your finding aid is discoverable in Trove

- Contribute all records for archival collections to Libraries Australia/Trove (and thence to OCLC)
- Be mindful of discovery in federated environments – contribute to Libraries Australia/Trove (and thence to OCLC). Ensure that your collection level records have the correct trigger for indexing in the ‘archives island’ of Trove.

### 10.8.3 Understanding relevance ranking

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## 10.9 Flag resource-intensive tasks for follow-up projects

- Don't try to do everything - flag intensive non-urgent projects for attention for if and when extra funding becomes available, or to justify more resources, for example the photocopying of fading faxes. Record these in your archival management system or on a spreadsheet with a priority rating and estimate of resources required so that the data can be extracted quickly as needed.
- Identify and record in a spreadsheet or archival management systems any projects suitable for volunteers as you go, eg. list of major correspondents, biographical notes

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<sup>20</sup> Newbown, Linda. The lists project : making collection lists searchable through Trove. Melbourne : NSLA, November 2010. Accessed on 9 March 2011: <http://www.nsla.org.au/publications/papers/2010/pdf/NSLA.Discussion-Paper-20101208-The.Lists.Project.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Combs, Michele et al. *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Email from Joanna Meakins, TROVE analyst. 3 March 2011.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*

- Include volunteer hours in each area of your statistics where volunteers provide input – this will provide a more exact picture of overall resource deployment and requirements

### **10.11 Review and refine**

- Complete a summary report at the end of each project
- Consider each project as a learning process in which outcomes are reviewed and workflows refined. Any efficiencies gained should be channelled into the future projects as part of a continuous cycle of improvement.
- Encourage the input of new staff or of those at different levels who can bring fresh eyes and insights to bear on existing processes

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

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**Papers, 1955-2006 [manuscript].**

**Author/Creator:** [Joseph Brown 1918-2009](#) ;

**Contributor(s):** [Joseph Brown Gallery](#) ;

**Date(s):** 1955-2006

**Access conditions:** Available for reference. Access to certain files is conditional upon the user signing a confidentiality agreement - the descriptive list will indicate which files will require this.

**Description:** 36 Boxes (6.3 m.)

**Identifier(s):** Accession no(s) MS 13591

**Subjects:** [Brown, Joseph, 1918-- Correspondence](#) ; [Brown, Joseph, 1918-- Archives](#) ; [Finley, Donald J -- Correspondence](#) ; [Boyd, Arthur \(Arthur Merric Bloomfield\), 1920-1999 -- Correspondence](#) ; [Nolan, Sidney, Sir, 1917-1992 -- Correspondence](#) ; [Thomas, Daniel, 1931-- Correspondence](#) ; [Art -- Australian](#) ; [Artists, Australian](#) ; [Art, Australian -- Exhibitions](#) ; [Correspondence](#) ; [Drafts \(documents\)](#) ; [Photographs](#) ; [Clippings \(information artifacts\)](#) ; [Catalogues](#) ;

**Contents/Summary:** Comprises correspondence with public institutions, private companies and individuals regarding the purchase, loan and valuation of works of art; also letters of congratulation to Brown on his awards; correspondence with Donald Finley over the life and work of John Peter Russell; correspondence and press cuttings relating to cultural heritage matters; files on exhibitions held at the Joseph Brown Gallery; files on Brown's book 'Outlines of Australian Art: the Joseph Brown collection' and transcripts of interviews with Brown including one he gave to the National Library of Australia in 2000.

**Notes:** Original ms., typescript, printed, photographs.  
Descriptive list available for reference.

**Biographical/Historical note:** Joseph Brown arrived in Australia in 1933 at the age of fifteen. After training as an artist, he served in the army until 1945. After a number of years in the fashion industry he turned to a career as an art collector and dealer. His collection of paintings is now on permanent display at the National Gallery of Victoria.

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# Appendix 2

The screenshot shows the OneSearch library website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the SLQ logo, 'one search', and user options: Guest, Store, My Account, and Login. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for 'Find Databases', 'New Search', 'Delivery times', 'Tags', 'e-journal A-Z', 'Databases A-Z', and 'Previous catalogue'. A 'Help' button is highlighted in green.

The main search area features a search box containing the text 'tindale'. To the right of the search box are dropdown menus for 'Heritage Collections' and a red 'Search' button. Further right is an 'Advanced search' button. Below the search box, there are three dropdown menus for refining the search: 'All items', 'that contain my query words', and 'in user tags'. A 'Refine your search:' label is positioned to the left of these dropdowns.

The search results are displayed in a two-column layout. The left column contains filters for 'Show only' (Online resources (1), On shelf (30)), 'Refine my results' (Subject: Aboriginal Australians (28), Torres Strait Islanders (4), Names, Aboriginal Australian (2), Arrente / Aranda language (NT SG53-02) (2), Hymns, Kala Lagaw Ya (2), Show 15 more), Author/Creator: Unidentified (4), Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (4), Meston, A (3), Douglas, K (2), Kepa, W (2), Show 15 more), Collection: John Oxley Library (11), Australian Library of Art (3), Open access, Lvl 4 (2), Date: Before 1950 (18), 1950 To 1975 (8)).

The right column shows '58 Results for Heritage Collections' sorted by 'Relevance'. It includes navigation links for 'Previous' and 'Next'. The results are filtered to 'Online resources (1)' and 'On shelf (30)'. The refined search criteria are 'resource type: Other'. Two results are visible: 'Cracks in the mask' (Talking Pictures c1997) and 'Tindale Genealogical Collection 1928-1960' (Norman B Tindale, 1900-1993). The 'Tindale Genealogical Collection' result has a 'Reviews & Tags' tab selected, showing a 'Send to' dropdown and 'Login to post your review' and 'Login to add new tags' buttons. A list of 'All tags' is shown, including 'slq indigenous languages project (1003)' and 'aboriginal family history (142)'.

http://onesearch.slq.qld.gov.au/primo\_library/libweb/action/search.do?ct=Next+Page&pag=nxt&dscnt=0&fctN=facet\_rtype&frbg=&fctV=other&scp.scps=scope%3A(HC)&tab=default\_tab&dstmp=1301630803543&srt=rank&ct=Next+Page&mode=Basic&dum=true&tb=t&indx=11&vl(1UIStartWith0)=contains&vl(freeText0)=indigenous&vl(D45500790UI0)=usertag&fn=search&vid=SLQ&vl(91047781UI1)=all\_items

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## Contributors



## Papers

**Creator** [Pryce, Charles](#)

**Subjects** [Pryce, Charles; Arable Station; Ranchers - New South Wales - Monaro - Archives.](#)

**Summary** Correspondence, accounts, receipts etc. of Charles Pryce and Alexander Hamilton. Diaries; including correspondence, mainly between relatives & Alex Hamilton & some other Monaro residents; accounts; notices of local events, etc. Mainly concerning Arable and Woolway Stations. Bills of sale, assignments, letters accounts, relating to Alex Hamilton, Charles Pryce, Adam Brierly concerning Arable and Woolway Stations.

**Bookmark** <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/34446181>

**Work ID** 34446181

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