

Requisition of Archival Records from the Public Records Office of the Government Records Service

Introduction

1. Records transferred to the Public Records Office (PRO) of the Government Records Service (GRS) will become the documentary heritage of the community, and their primary use is to be accessed by members of the public in accordance with the Public Records Access Rules 1996 (PR(A)R). Occasionally, the records transferring bureau or department (hereafter referred to as B/D)¹ may need to refer to the archival records already transferred to PRO for specific operational purposes. To facilitate this, PRO provides a requisition service that allows B/D to request temporary retrieval of the transferred archival records. This paper provides B/Ds with the essential information regarding requisitioning of archival records from PRO.²

Guiding principles for PRO's requisition service

2. The guiding principles of PRO's requisition service are –
- (a) archival records must be protected and made available to meet the needs of current and future users;
 - (b) archival records may be requisitioned to B/D temporarily only if their physical condition is assessed by the Preservation Services Office (PSO) of GRS to be satisfactory for the said purpose. If the archival records in question are considered not suitable for temporary removal from PRO repository because of their physical condition, B/D is required to view the archival records in question in the Search Room of the Hong Kong Public Records Building (HKPRB) in Kwun Tong.
 - (c) if the physical condition of archival records permits their temporary removal from PRO repository, the requisition period should not normally exceed three months. Subject to the prior endorsement from

¹ "B/D" in this paper refers only to records transferring bureau / department exclusively.

² The requisition of electronic archival records is not covered by this paper and will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

a directorate officer of B/D and full justifications be provided to PRO for consideration, a requisition extension of up to two months from the original due date may be granted. This means that the short-term requisition period of archival records on each occasion will be restricted to a maximum of five months each year. B/D is required to return the requisitioned archival records to PRO by the end of the requisition period.

Procedures

4. To minimise damage and maximise public access to archival records, facilitate records retrieval and prevent unauthorised access, B/D should designate an officer or officer(s) not below the rank of Senior Executive Officer or equivalent as Requisitioning Officer(s). He or she should carefully consider ways to meet B/D's operational needs without compromising the physical condition of and public access to archival records. The Requisitioning Officer should first consider whether on-site inspection of the archival records is appropriate. If so, he / she should sign Request Form A "Onsite Access to Archival Records at the Hong Kong Public Records Building" available at CCGO (https://grs.host.ccgohksarg/service_requisition.html).

5. If, after due consideration, the Requisitioning Officer considers that there are compelling reasons to request temporary retrieval of archival records, he / she should complete Request Form B "Short-term Requisition of Archival Records" available at CCGO (https://grs.host.ccgohksarg/service_requisition.html) and state the detailed reason(s) for short-term requisition. Merely "Operational needs" or "for reference" without further elaboration is not an acceptable reason. For records required in respect of a court case, the Requisitioning Officer needs to provide details such as the expected hearing dates. He / she should exercise due care to minimise both the quantity and period of archival records requisitioned. In addition, the Requisitioning Officer has to undertake in writing that -

- (a) his / her office will return the archival records before the end of the requisition period;
- (b) his / her office will take steps to safeguard the requisitioned archival records from loss, damage or tampering by putting in place appropriate security measures and arranging their storage in air-conditioned

environment (preferably round the clock, and at least during office hours). Requisitioned archival record(s) should not be passed on to another B/D; and

- (c) if his / her office subsequently transpires that the requisition of the archival records needs to be extended, prior agreement has to be sought from PRO as early as possible. If the aggregate period of requisition will exceed three months, the Requisitioning Officer has to seek endorsement from a directorate officer and confirm this in writing before putting the request with full justification to PRO for consideration.

6. The Requisitioning Officer should complete and send the Request Form A or B in PDF format to PRO by email in making a requisition request. He / she should provide the Record ID (i.e. Hong Kong Records Series Number, Deposit Number and Serial Number), and the Original Reference (if any) of the archival records to be requisitioned as they appear in E-RTL in the form.³ The Requisitioning Officer should sign the request form with the departmental chop. Requisition request may not be processed if the request form is not completed in the prescribed manner.

7. In case of short-term requisition, the requested archival records will be despatched to B/D by post or collected by B/D directly from PRO. The corresponding Despatch Note and Receipt (PRO 3) will be sent to B/D through email. B/D is required to complete and return the signed PRO 3 to PRO upon receipt of the requisitioned archival record(s).

8. Generally, B/D may examine or collect the archival records within five working days after PRO receives the completed request form. However, retrieval may take longer in certain cases, such as archival records stored in the archival repository at the Tuen Mun Government Storage Centre, or in low-temperature facilities such as the Microfilm Repository or the Photographic Material Repository where a three-day stay in the Acclimatisation Room is required before they can be accessed.

³ After completion of physical accession of each deposit of archival records, PRO will provide B/D with a set of Electronic Records Transfer List (E-RTL) showing the newly assigned reference no. (i.e. PRO Record ID “HKRS”) and other basic information. The E-RTL serves as an essential tool for future requisitioning of records. B/D should keep the E-RTL properly.

Protection of archival records

9. To protect the integrity and authenticity of archival records, B/D must not alter, remove or add any information to the requisitioned archival records.

10. Transmission and carriage of security-graded archival records requisitioned from PRO are governed by the relevant procedures laid down in the Security Regulations.

11. For details on the requisition service, please refer to Annex “**Frequently Asked Questions on Requisition of Archival Records to Records Transferring B/D**”.

Enquiry

12. For enquiry, please contact Mr. Jack LAU, Senior Assistant Archivist of PRO, at 2195 7774.

Government Records Service
December 2024

Frequently Asked Questions on Requisition of Archival Records to Records Transferring B/D

General

Q1. What are archival records? What are the purposes for preserving archival records?

Archival records are government records that have been appraised with archival value and must be transferred from bureaux and departments to the Public Records Office (PRO) of the Government Records Service (GRS) for permanent retention and preservation. These records constitute the documentary heritage of Hong Kong, and the primary purpose of their preservation is to be accessed by members of the public in accordance with the Public Records (Access) Rules 1996 (PR(A)R).

Q2. What is records requisition?

Records requisition refers to the provision of archival record to the records transferring bureau / department (hereafter referred to as B/D)⁴ for short term inspection upon its request. There are two methods of records requisition: onsite inspection and short-term requisition.

Q3. What is onsite inspection?

Onsite inspection means the access to the archival records at the Search Room in the Hong Kong Public Records Building in Kwun Tong.

Q4. What is short-term requisition?

Short-term requisition means the temporary removal of the archival records from PRO's repository to B/D.

⁴ B/D in this FAQ refers only to records transferring bureau / department exclusively.

Requisition of archival records

Q5. Can my office requisition archival records for reference?

Requisition service is limited to the temporary retrieval of archival records by the records transferring B/D.

Requisition service is provided by PRO to B/D on a need basis. In the interest of protecting the archival records, B/D is strongly advised to access the archival records in PRO's Search Room. If after due consideration the Requisitioning Officer considers that there are compelling reasons for short-term requisition of archival records, he / she should exercise due care to minimise both the quantity and period of requisition.

Q6. How can my office requisition archival records?

For onsite inspection, you are required to complete **Request Form A: Onsite Access to Archival Records at the Hong Kong Public Records Building** and return to PRO. For short-term requisition, you are required to complete **Request Form B: Short-term Requisition of Archival Records** and return to PRO. The forms and information on the procedures are available on CCGO (https://grs.host.cngo.hksarg/service_requisition.html).

Q7. What is the short-term requisition period for archival records?

The short-term requisition period should not normally exceed three months. Subject to the prior endorsement from a directorate officer of B/D and full justifications being provided to PRO for consideration, a requisition period extension of up to two months from the original due date may be granted. This means that the short-term requisition period of archival records on each occasion will be restricted to a maximum of five months each year. B/D is required to return the requisitioned archival records to PRO by the end of the requisition period.

Q8. Is it necessary to have a directorate grade officer to endorse the request for extension of requisition period?

B/D is required to consider seriously whether extension of requisition period is absolutely necessary. If so, the Requisitioning Officer is required to seek endorsement from a directorate officer and confirm this in writing before putting the request with full justification to PRO for consideration.

Q9. Is it possible to have longer requisition period?

In exceptional circumstances, archival records may be requisitioned for longer period if necessary, such as for use in court cases. Special arrangements for longer requisition period must be discussed and agreed with PRO.

Q10. Is there any requirement for long-term requisition of archival records?

Archival records to be requisitioned for more than five months must be returned to PRO for inspection of their physical condition by the Preservation Service Office (PSO) of GRS before further extension is granted. If the archival records concerned cannot be returned for inspection, PSO staff will conduct on-site inspection, including the inspection of the records storage environment.

Q11. When should B/D return the requisitioned archival records for public access?

Where the requisitioned archival records are requested for inspection by members of public, they must be returned to PRO within five working days, unless alternative arrangements have been agreed.

Q12. If the returned archival record is required again soon, can B/D requisition it repeatedly?

If the returned archival record is required for justified operational purposes repeatedly, it may be prioritised for providing a digitised or microfilmed copy by PSO.

Protection of archival records

Q13. How to safeguard requisitioned archival records from loss or damage?

Archival records are documentary heritage of the community. They are unique and irreplaceable. B/D should protect the archival records while the records are temporarily kept in its office. Specifically, B/D should adopt the following measures:

- ◆ Designate a responsible officer to keep track of the movement of the requisitioned archival records for branch office using the records (e.g. file reference, requisition date, return date, requesting officer, etc.);
- ◆ Prepare a register to keep track of and conduct regular check on the whereabouts of the requisitioned archival records;

- ◆ Restrict the use of the requisitioned archival records to the action officer(s) who should not leave the archival records unattended;
- ◆ Remind the relevant staff to return the requisitioned archival records in due course;
- ◆ Store the requisitioned archival records in air-conditioned environment (preferably round the clock with temperature and relative humidity not exceeding 24 C and 65 % respectively);
- ◆ Put the requisitioned archival records in proper, dedicated storage equipment and environment, such as clean shelves, with suitable security measures as required in the Security Regulations, especially for classified records. They should not be put in basement or corridor;
- ◆ Return the requisitioned archival records to dedicated storage after use;
- ◆ Remind action officer(s) to handle the requisitioned archival record(s) with great care; and
- ◆ Refrain from passing on the requisitioned archival records to another B/D.

Integrity and authenticity of archival records

Q14. Can B/D remove or add information to the requisitioned archival record(s)?

No. To protect the integrity and authenticity of archival records, B/D must not alter, remove or add any information to the requisitioned archival record(s).

Q15. Can B/D retain the requisitioned archival record(s)?

No. In accordance with paragraph 31 of General Circular No. 3/2024 “Management of Government Records” (hereafter GC No. 3/2024), B/D should transfer its records having archival value to PRO for permanent retention according to the respective disposal schedules within two years after they have become time-expired. Upon PRO’s confirmation of accepting the transfer, the records will be accepted as archival records and, subject to exemptions, made available for public access when they reach 30 years old. In no circumstances B/D should retain the requisitioned archival records.

Q16. Can B/D propose to dispose of the requisitioned archival record(s)?

No. Records transferred to PRO for permanent retention have been appraised with archival value and have become the documentary heritage of the community. The primary use of archival records is to be accessed by members of the public in accordance with (PR(A)R).

Loss of archival records

Q17. What should B/D do if the requisitioned archival record(s) are missing?

Loss of records is a serious matter, more so if archival records are involved. B/D should ensure safe custody of the requisitioned archival records at all times as they are the documentary heritage of the community. If any of the archival records requisitioned to B/D are found missing, in accordance with paragraph 38 of GC No. 3/2024, the case should be immediately reported to B/D's Departmental Records Manager (DRM) and GRS simultaneously, i.e. within two weeks upon the discovery of the cases (including suspected cases which B/Ds may continue with the search of the missing records after reporting). Among other things, DRM is required to consider whether any disciplinary action or other administrative action is necessary arising from the loss and include his / her relevant findings and actions in the report to GRS within three months.

Government Records Service

December 2024