

SESSION IV: ARCHIVES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Once the National Bahá'í Archives is on a firm footing, the archivist will be in a position to begin promoting the archives, actively seeking collections, and at the right time and with permission of the National Spiritual Assembly, open the archives for use by researchers. We'll talk about that in more depth in this session.

Another important responsibility of the archivist is to advise the National Spiritual Assembly on appropriate steps to take with regard to helping Local Spiritual Assemblies preserve and maintain their records. The same guidance should also be provided to Bahá'í schools and institutes.

Ways to Develop and Promote Bahá'í Archives

As you begin working in the archives, the word is bound to spread. Make announcements at conventions, conferences, schools and institutes. Place notices in Bahá'í publications about the types of materials and assistance you are seeking.

Biographical questionnaires can be useful in determining if personal papers would be valuable or worth collecting. **(Handout IV-1)**

Be aware of noteworthy people in the community and approach them ahead of time.

Encourage scholars and historians to do oral history interviews with prominent Bahá'ís and talk with them from a professional standpoint about the importance of preserving their personal records. It is a good idea to issue guidelines for Bahá'í book collectors and researchers so that they will know the proper steps to follow when they come across significant collections of personal papers in the course of their work. **(Handout IV-2)**

Solicit the assistance of Auxiliary Board Members and Counsellors, who have the opportunity to come in contact with many different people and communities. **(Handout IV-3)**

Make good use of volunteers in the archives. Train them well and let them assist with the work. They can also make good emissaries for the archives in the larger community.

When the archives is in a condition to be opened for use by researchers, you will need to have a firm access policy in place **(Handout II-13)**, approved by the National Spiritual Assembly, as well as an application for research form **(Handout IV-4)** and a good set of reading room rules **(Handout IV-5)**. You may want to develop a brochure about the archives and its holdings, or at least develop an information sheet **(Handout IV-6)**.

All of this is way down the road, but it's helpful to keep in mind your ultimate goals as an archivist. Knowing where you're headed can give you useful perspective as you labor along that path. Always remember to cultivate and use your contacts with other Bahá'í archivists and professional archives repositories in your community. Join a local archives association, if possible.

Archives in the Local Community

The development of local archives is another measuring stick for gauging the maturation of our Local Spiritual Assemblies. **Handout IV-7** is a tool you can use to survey local communities in your country, gauge their level of understanding, and get a feel for what kinds of records they have.

Archives begin with good record-keeping practices. The key to a good local archives is training Assembly members, and secretaries in particular, about the importance of properly organizing and preserving records as they are generated. If they give thought to the context in which they are operating, it will help give them perspective on the role they have to play in creating and protecting their local archives.

They need to follow the same rules and guidelines the National Archives uses for protecting and safeguarding their archives. (**Handouts IV-8 and 9**) They can use the inventory in Handout 9 to do their initial inventory. **Handout IV-10** talks about what to do if they have collections of personal papers in their archives.

The minutes of the Local spiritual Assembly, of course, are their most important records. They record the development of the Faith and individual Bahá'ís in a given locality.

Make sure the minutes contain complete information: date, names, complete enough details that an outsider could read them and understand what happened.

Should preferably be typed, on high-quality bond paper

Assembly stationery should also be high-quality bond paper

Maintain personal case files separate from minutes

Organize records at the end of each year.

Annual reports become very important and should be done with the same perspective of a researcher (i.e., stranger from outside) as applies to taking minutes.

Keep track of all publicity

Collect photos that document events

Keep records of special teaching programs or events—appoint a chronicler

Mention children's classes and other activities—all aspects of Bahá'í life

Maintain a birth, death, marriage, and enrollment register—reconstruct past years by talking to those who were there. (**Handout IV-11**)

When current records are caught up, go back and organize past years in the same fashion.

Make a record/inventory of everything that is available and what is missing.

Set up records disposition schedule with the Assembly

Also work on:

Reference library for the community

Educating believers about importance of their personal papers (**Handout IV-12**)

Oral interviews (**Handout IV-13**)

Collecting old photographs

Let the National Bahá'í Archives know that you exist and what you have. Stay in touch.

Most of this same information is relevant to Bahá'í schools and institutes, especially the permanent schools like Landegg. **(Handout IV-14)**

Writing Local History

Visualize a group of people sitting around with boxes of miscellaneous materials, trying to reconstruct the history of a community. How hard would that be? Think of how much you can do to make their job easier.

Think of all the things you would like to know about the early believers and the early Bahá'í communities in your country. **(Handout IV-15)**

What do you wish they had written down?

What were their Feasts like, what kinds of things did they consult about at their Assembly meetings?

What was it like for those early believers who were the first in their families to declare and adopt this unheard-of religion? How did they feel about that?

What will answer those questions? Letters, taped interviews, personal papers, early local records.

Remember the intangible things about communities that are not written down.

The special character of the community

The names and experiences of early pioneers

Travel teachers and visitors to the community

How individuals' understanding of the Faith developed as the community grew

The archivist must also think like a historian and collect materials not only on the Bahá'í community but also on the community of which they were a part and what was going on in the outside world at the time.

Importance of identifying photographs

Use acid-free labels or place photo face down on glass and write on back with soft #1 lead pencil. Never use an ink pen or hard pencil to write on photos. Write on edges, not in the middle.

Rectifying past information gaps:

BDME records – verbal sources

Keep looking for missing minutes

Piece together annual summaries of activities (from personal calendars, photo albums, diaries, correspondence, oral histories)

Conduct oral histories with early believers

Put together stories and thoughts on the early years—weave a fabric of memories

Remember to think about growing young archivists and encouraging Bahá'í youth to investigate Archives as a Career (handout)

Take a break and come back for 45 minutes of questions and general discussion.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Thank you for taking the time to come and for taking an interest in Bahá'í archives work.

I know you all have very busy schedules and other very important Bahá'í work to accomplish in your countries. But even any small amount of time that you can dedicate to the work of the archives will be a big step forward and will be abundantly rewarded. You can become the mothers and fathers of the Bahá'í archives in your countries.

If you need assistance with your return travel arrangements, please see Günter.

Closing prayer