

The Tip of the Iceberg: Archives/Records Management situation in the British Virgin Islands (BVI)

Background

The older BVI records had been stacked in two small rooms in the Old Administration Building, unattended and without air-conditioning for well over forty years. Heat, dry rot and insects played havoc and many of the records were destroyed. There are no consistent records management systems in the BVI Civil Service for active records. Intermediate records are inappropriately stored and retrieval of information from them is difficult. There is no Records Centre or Archives Repository.

Progress since 2004

Since the appointment in April 2004 of Verna Penn Moll as Chief Records Management Officer in the British Virgin Islands some important work is being done in the area of Archives and Records Management. Some achievements of a 2004 Action Plan are as follows:

- Conducted a records survey across the Government Service
- Renovated the Archives room to an acceptable standard.
- Cleared and incinerated termite-eaten and infected papers and non-records
- Appointed an ad hoc Archives Committee and five Sub-committees to advise on:
 - Policy and legislation
 - Appraisal, disposal and retention schedules
 - Site and building
 - Automation requirements and fundraising
- Formulated an Archives and Records Management policy for submission to Executive Council
- Established a network of Record Officers
- Circulated directions on relieving offices and records store of superfluous materials
- Assisted individual offices with implementing hints

- Acquired a stock of archival boxes and other materials
- Issued disaster management hints for records and archives
- Draft disposal and retention schedules for every type of record was sent to all departments for their input
- Presented the case for the post of Government Archivist to be established
- Lobbied for up-grading the salary scale of Records Officers
- Lobbied British Executive Services Overseas (BESO) for an Archives consultant to advise on conserving both old and new archives
- Formulated a paper to show how archives could benefit the Government's legislative agenda
- Negotiated with the University of the West Indies to conduct workshops in records management for active records during 2005.



*Members of the archiving team:
Ms Martin, Ms Toote, Consultant, Ms Penn
Moll Co-ordinator, Ms Lettsome and Ms
Callwood (Not pictured, Dr Gail Saunders)*

Basic Training for Executive, Administrative Staff and Records Officers

Elizabeth Williams and Sonia Black, two Records Management and Archives Consultants from the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, conducted a Records Management Workshop for senior managers, supervisory and departmental records officers in February and March, 2005.

This training programme was designed to provide participants with an overview of the functional areas of Records and Information Management (RIM). The training sessions also aimed to deliver strategic records management skills in some critical areas of Records and Information Management. Participants were sensitized to the importance of records, and the development of skills used in the processes for creating, using, managing and preserving official records, throughout their life, while enhancing fast retrieval of documents in response to the demands of both internal and external customers.



Dr Gail Saunders

The Archives Project

A BESO Consultant – Mr John Cantwell - spent three weeks in November, 2004 assisting with the initial sorting and boxing of what is left of the older records dating back to the 1700s; and for five months from January to June 2006, Dr Gail Saunders, Director of Heritage, and Mrs Elaine Toote, Director of National Archives, of the Bahamas assisted with preparatory work for setting up the BVI Archives as a functioning facility.

The terms of reference were to bring the older Archives dating back to the 1700s into a proper functioning facility - that is, to prepare them for easy retrieval of information for reference and research. The work involved sorting, arranging, indexing and cataloguing materials according to international standards with a view to computerization and the creation of a database at a later stage.

Only about one-third of the work envisaged was actually completed due to lack of space, electricity blackouts and other challenging situations. There is still much short term and long term work to be done including the continuation of listing and boxing the older records; bringing the large backlog of intermediate records under control, drafting and enacting Archives/RM legislation, recruiting and training staff, acquiring appropriate accommodation (building) for storage, use and preservation of the records, and much more!

Verna Penn Moll
Chief Records Management Officer, BVI

