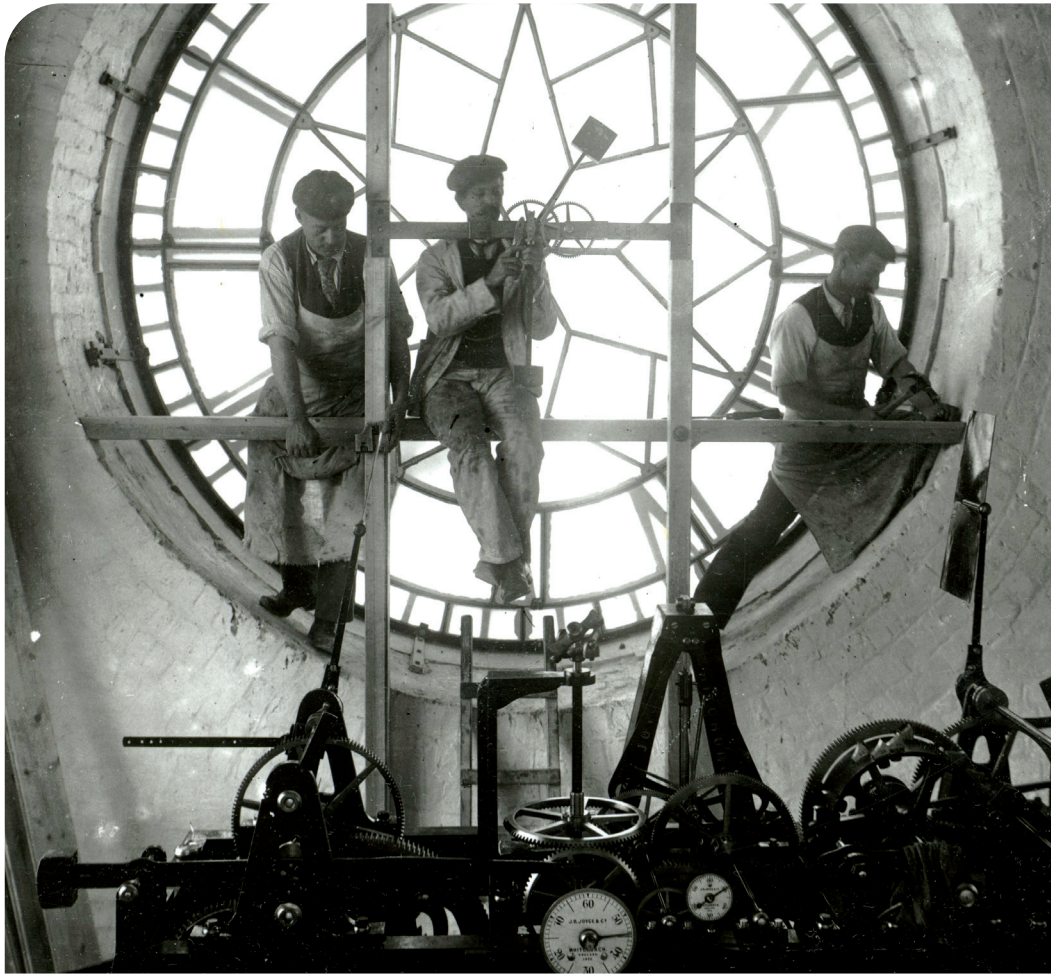




Western Cape
Government
FOR YOU




Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport

What is an archivist? And what do they do?

Western Cape Archives and Records Service

WHAT IS AN ARCHIVIST? AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

An archivist is responsible for the safe-keeping, organization, and management of historical documents (called “records” in archival terminology). The aim of an archivist’s work is to ensure the continued survival and accessibility of historical records that have been identified as being of enduring value or significance for future generations.



Archivists use specialized techniques to evaluate, organize, index, describe, and to preserve records – ensuring that they remain in good condition and are accessible to researchers and other users.

Archivists play an important role in preserving cultural heritage and ensuring that future generations have access to important historical documents and artifacts. Archivists also play an important role in providing information and guidance to professional researchers, scholars and the public who seek to access historical records.

Archivists work in a wide variety of settings, including libraries, museums, historical societies, government departments, municipalities and universities. Archivists can also work in the private sector, working in companies that range from legal firms to engineering and construction enterprises. They also work in academic institutions, archives, and research centers that specialize in specific subject areas, such as science or medicine.



An archivist is responsible for the **safe-keeping**, organization, and management of **historical documents** (called “records” in archival terminology).

Archivists may also rehouse materials in more appropriate **protective enclosures** and perform basic conservation tasks...

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ARCHIVIST: **MANAGING AND GROWING COLLECTIONS**

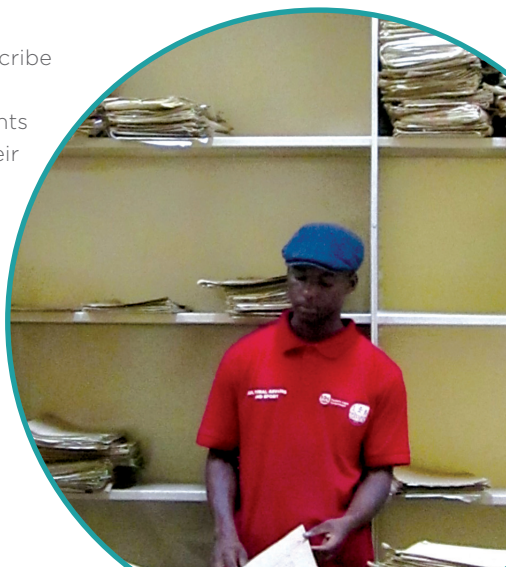
To grow and develop collections, archivists must be knowledgeable about the history and context of the records in their collection and how they relate to the larger collection.

➤ Potential acquisitions are evaluated based on the collection's mission and goals. Factors such as historical significance, uniqueness, and condition of materials. They use their knowledge of the archive's subject areas and research interests to identify materials that will be of long-term value. Archivists may receive records as part of scheduled transfers of records from government departments. They may also negotiate with potential donors to acquire records for the collection.

Processing archivists physically sort, arrange and describe archival materials to facilitate their access and use by researchers. Archivists organize records and documents in the collection into logical groupings that reflect their content and context. Records are boxed and labelled during this process, to prepare them for storage in the archive.

Archivists also create finding aids and other descriptive tools that help users navigate collections and find relevant materials.

Archivists may also rehouse materials in more appropriate protective enclosures and perform basic conservation tasks to ensure that the collections are preserved for future generations.




DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ARCHIVIST: ACCESSING RECORDS, **RESEARCH** AND **SCHOLARSHIP**

Archivists make the records and documents in their collection available to researchers, scholars, and the public.

To help users and researchers navigate the records, archivists develop finding aids, as well as creating indexes and catalogs that describe the contents of the collection. These aids assist users in locating materials.

Archivists also provide reference services, helping researchers find and use the materials they need.

 Archivists conduct research and scholarship in their areas of expertise. They may publish articles, books, or other materials based on their research. They may also collaborate with other researchers to develop new approaches to managing and preserving historical materials.

Reference archivists assist researchers in using archival collections, providing reference services and helping researchers locate materials. They may also provide instruction on how to use archival materials and offer guidance on research strategies and methodologies.



Archivists also provide reference services, **helping researchers** find and use the materials they need.

Preservation archivists focus on the **preservation** of archival materials. They develop and implement preservation strategies to **protect** collections from **deterioration**.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ARCHIVIST: PRESERVING RECORDS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Archivists are responsible for preserving the physical integrity of the records and documents in their collection. They assess the physical condition of records and documents, identify preservation issues, and develop strategies to prevent damage or deterioration. These strategies may include environmental controls, proper storage and handling, and conservation treatments.

Archivists may digitize records to make them more accessible to users. Digitised versions of records are considered to be surrogates – copies of records that can be consulted in place of using the original, thus sparing the original wear-and-tear damage from repeated usage. Archivists working with digital records also develop strategies for the long-term preservation of digital materials, which includes creating backups, migrating data, monitoring file formats and storage media.

Preservation archivists focus on the preservation of archival materials. They develop and implement preservation strategies to protect collections from deterioration. They may work to mitigate risks such as environmental hazards or pests, or they may focus on preventive measures such as proper storage and handling techniques.



DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ARCHIVIST: COMMUNITY OUTREACH, PUBLIC PROGRAMMING AND EDUCATION

Outreach archivists promote the collection and its resources to the public through a variety of activities. They may create exhibits, offer tours of the collection, arrange talks by researchers, or develop educational programs for specific audiences.



These activities raise awareness of archives and the collection and encourage people to use its resources.

They also sometimes interpret collections to make them more accessible. Activities that outreach archivists include developing exhibitions, give presentations, or create educational materials to engage diverse audiences.

Activities that outreach archivists include developing **exhibitions**, give presentations, or create **educational materials** to engage diverse audiences.

Records managers typically manage a record's **life cycle** while they are still considered to have an **everyday usefulness** in an office or organisation.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ARCHIVIST: RECORDS MANAGEMENT

In some cases, archivists are responsible for the management of records before they reach the archives. The idea behind records management is that records have a lifespan: they are created, have a period of usage, after which they are either discarded and destroyed – or they are transferred to the archive.

Records managers typically manage a record's life cycle while they are still considered to have an everyday usefulness in an office or organisation. After a specific period, records generally become less useful for an office's day to day business, after which they can be transferred.

Records managers develop policies and procedures for the management of records and ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements while the records are still in the office. Records managers are also responsible for managing the transfer of records that have outlived their everyday usefulness by identifying the records to be transferred or discarded and processing their transfer to the archive.



WORKING IN OTHER ENVIRONMENT AS AN ARCHIVIST: INSTITUTIONS, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND COMMUNITIES

Institutional archivists manage the archival collections of a particular organization or institution, such as a university, government agency, or museum. They will perform the work associated with the organizing and managing of archival materials and may also work to acquire new collections that are relevant to the institution's mission and goals.



Community archivists work with communities and organizations to document their history and culture, and to preserve and make accessible their archival materials. They may work with underrepresented groups or communities to ensure that their stories and experiences are documented and preserved for future generations. Community archivists can also serve as important liaisons between institutions and under-served and under-represented communities.

Community archivists work with communities and organizations to document their **history and culture**, and to preserve and make accessible their archival materials.

THINKING ABOUT A CAREER AS AN ARCHIVIST?

To be able to work as an archivist, you require a university degree from a recognised university. Archival Science – the specialised study program for archivists – is part of the broader field of Information Science, which also includes librarianship studies.

You can study for a dedicated Information Science degree, specialising in archival studies at university. You can also study for a more general BA degree in subjects like History, Political Science, Library and Information Science, or Public Administration – before taking a Postgraduate Diploma in Archival Studies. Alternatively, you can study for post-graduate degree (for example an Honours or Masters) specialising in Archival Science.



WHERE TO STUDY

The Universities of Fort Hare, South Africa (Unisa) and Cape Town (UCT) offer a Postgraduate Diploma in Archives and Records Management.

Unisa also offers an undergraduate degree Bachelor of Arts in Archives and Records Management.

FUNDING YOUR STUDIES

In addition to NFSAS funding, the National Department of Sports, Arts and Culture offers an annual bursary for heritage-related study, including for archives: www.dsac.gov.za/DSAC-Bursaries-for-2025-Heritage-Related-Studies

THE EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAM (EPWP) AND WORKING FOR THE ARCHIVES

The Western Cape Archives and Records Service participates in the EPWP program. The program is a nation-wide program aimed at giving recent matriculants and graduates experience in the workplace.

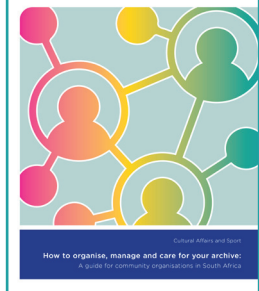
It is a 12-month internship, starting on 1 April and ending on 31 March the following year. Applications are advertised on the Western Cape Government website. About 20 positions are available at the Archives per year.

EPWP beneficiaries receive a monthly stipend, calculated based on your existing qualifications.

INTERNSHIPS AND WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

University students studying dedicated Archival Science degrees or heritage preservation programs that require a period of workplace experience can apply through their respective universities for an internship or workplace placement. These placements will need to be self-funded, as the Archives is not able to contribute financially to travel, or accommodation costs associated with such a placement.

LEARN MORE ABOUT ARCHIVING PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS



The Western Cape Archives and Records Service has created a guide to archiving for community organisations. The guide will introduce you to the concepts and ideas behind archiving work, as well as how to begin to organise, manage and care for the different kinds of materials in a collection. It is intended to provide a broad overview of how to get started in organising, managing and caring for an archive.

Download a copy of the manual from: www.western_cape.gov.za/cas/service/western-cape-archives

Contact us for visits or more information

Helen Joannides
Western Cape Archives and Records Service
72 Roeland Street, Cape Town, 8001
tel: 021 483 0456
Email: helen.joannides@westerncape.gov.za

Western Cape Archives and Records Service
Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport
72 Roeland Street, Cape Town, 8000
tel: +27 21 483 0400
www.westerncape.gov.za/cas



[@culturalaffairsandsport](https://www.facebook.com/culturalaffairsandsport)



[@WCGovCas](https://twitter.com/WCGovCas)



[@WCGovCas](https://www.instagram.com/WCGovCas)



**Western Cape
Government**