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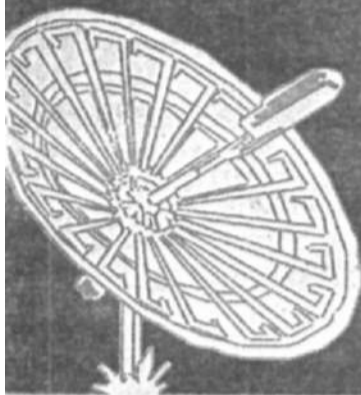
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# Towards an Integrated Records Management in Professional Associations and Societies in Nigeria

## Professional Practice

Umar, Ibrahim Ph.D.

### The author

Umar, Ibrahim, Ph.D. Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Umarahim2003@yahoo.com

### Keywords

Records management, Professional Associations, Records creation, Control

### Abstract

*The paper discusses the need for records management in professional associations and societies in Nigeria. The problems of records creation, control and management were highlighted and solutions advanced. As a way forward, the paper discusses the basic elements of records management that members of Professional Associations and Societies need to know and implement.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Different scholars have variously defined records. However, the National Archives Decree (1992) has provided a more encompassing definition of records as "all papers, registers, printed matters, books, plans, maps, photographs, microfilms, cinematographic films sound recordings, or other documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristic made or received by public or state office or by business houses or companies, private bodies and individuals in pursuance of their legal obligations or in connection with the transaction of their legal obligations or in connection with the transaction of their proper business".

From the above definition, three basic characteristics of records could be identified as follows:

- ❖ Documentary materials created or received by an individual or organization.
- ❖ The created or received documentary materials have to be about the individual or organization, or some relationship having to be established.

- ❖ The Documentary materials created or received should be of help to the individual or organization in pursuing his or its legal obligation or objectives.

Records are therefore very important administrative, historical and legal tools. Apart from serving as sources for information, direction and instruction, records are used to justify official activities and to explain and record policy decisions. They are also used as useful sources for good decision-making, strategic planning and successful implementation, as well as good policy formulation and implementation. In addition, records are primary sources of information for research. Above all, records are fortune; serve as accountant, as well as evidence.

The need to ensure proper records creation, control, organization, evaluation and dispositions in both public and private organization has received the attention of both libraries and archivist. For instance, Ibrahim (1991) investigated record maintenance and organization in Bayero University Kano, and its implication for decision making, while Popoola (2000) investigated the records management systems in the civil service of Oyo State. They observed that records management increases efficiency by providing speedy access to the right information at the right time. It also provides legal protection by reducing legal exposure.

Additionally, record management increases effectiveness in conducting organized activities because the value and unique organization by resources is being fully exploited. Lastly and more importantly good leadership begins with the adoption of functional record management system. Therefore, both concluded that records information is indispensable tool for good decision making, articulate policy formulation and successful implementation, and hence called for a well-defined record management programme in all organizations.

While much have been written on the need for record management in private and public organizations, from the literature reviewed, it seems nothing is written on the need for records management in professional associations and societies, at least in the Nigerian context. Professional associations/ societies are organizations made up of people joined together by common custom, law, etc. for a particular

purpose. The objectives for which the associations and societies are set up to achieve are usually well defined and stated, and the associations/societies work assiduously for the realization of the objectives. Professional associations/societies are many in Nigeria. Examples are Nigerian Library Association (NLA), National Medical Association (NMA), Council of Registered Engineers in Nigeria (COREN), etc.

Apart from contributing in the development of individuals in the association/societies, professional association/societies no doubt contribute meaningfully to the national development. It is therefore significant to find out the problems of records creation, control and management in these organizations with the view to proffering solutions. It is a fact that if professional associations/societies would imbibe the culture of record management, a lot of accusations, allegations, mistrust and other problems would be avoided.

## 2.0 RECORDS CREATION, CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS/SOCIETIES

In order for professional associations and societies to efficiently and effectively realize their set objectives, these organizations are run through various offices. Prominent among them are President/Chairman/, Vice-president/Vice-chairmen, Secretary/Assistant Secretary, Treasurer or Financial Secretary/Assistant Treasurer or Assistant Financial Secretary, P.R.O./Assistant PRO, Editor-in-Chief, Librarian, etc.

There is no doubt that professional associations/societies engage in various activities and events, which invariably constitute the major sources of information records they formally and informally create and keep in documented and non-documented formats. The various officials mentioned above are involved in the writing of correspondences, memoranda and reports, etc. Occasionally the organizations organize lectures, seminars, conferences, workshops, and other ceremonies such as anniversaries, launching, commissioning, etc. All these activities are information intensive. Therefore, the greater quantity of information required for the effective and efficient running of associations/societies is in the internally generated records.

Although a lot of records are daily being created and received by the various offices of professional associations/societies, it is obvious that their control and management seems to be invariably absence. Bower and Albadi (1989), Alegbeleye (1990), and Dawna and Biu (1993) averred that there is no formal way of controlling and managing records not only in professional associations /societies but also public and private organizations. It is in the light of the above that many scholars, such as Unugbe (1990), Evborokhai (1990) and Esse (1992) lament the poor situation of record management in Nigeria.

Ukwu (1995) posits that the issue of records management is more apparent in this era when there is tremendous increase in paper work. The increase in records of incredible proportions as a result of the introduction and use of modern information and communication Technology (ICT) also call for radical changes in documentation, control and management of records.

## 3.0 PROBLEMS OF RECORDS CREATION, CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS/SOCIETIES IN NIGERIA

Although a lot of records are daily being created/generated and received from the various offices in the associations/societies and outside, it is apparent that not all the offices care to properly create and generate records. Even those that do, there appear to be no proper control organization and management. Problems associated with non-proper creation, control and management of records in professional associations/societies have been identified as follows:

- Lack of adequate knowledge and consciousness on the part of officials on the need, importance and functions of records in their organizations. Also, sometime, officials are negligent and reluctant in creating and controlling records.
- *Lack of adequate funds*: Most professional associations/societies are sustained through membership registration fees, personal contribution and donations from individuals and organizations. Very often, the little fund generated through these means is not always

adequate to run the affairs of the associations. So because of lack of adequate knowledge and consciousness as well as lack of adequate funds, professional associations and societies cannot employ professionals that could effectively and efficiently handle and manage their records.

- Offices created to run the affairs of professional associations/societies are elective and transitional; the tenure of officers usually lasts between 1-2 years. Although there is handing over whenever there is change of leadership, very often, many records are discovered to be missing, improperly organized and sometimes not even created.
- A lack of permanent secretariat: Most professional associations/societies do not have a permanent place that serve as their secretariat. In most cases, the secretariat moves with the new officials, especially the president or chairman. This constitutes serious problems not only in forms of records control and management but also other administrative problems.
- Since there is no permanent secretariat for professional associations/societies, there is absence of equipment for the storage and preservation of record materials.

#### 4.0 ELEMENTS OF RECORD MANAGEMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS/ SOCIETIES IN NIGERIA

Records Management Society of Great Britain (1997) has summed up the various definitions of record management proffered by many scholars as: systematic control, organization, access to and protection of an organisation's information in whatever format, from its creation, through its use, to its permanent retentions or legal destructions. The goal of records management is to ensure that only the right type of records are created, organized and made available. Thus records management consists of the following basic elements:

##### 4.1 ORGANISATION OF RECORDS

One of the most basic elements of records management is organization. Systematic

organization of records not only arranges records in a particular order that will ensure quick and easy retrieval but also give a complete overview of the records of an organization. Record organization in record management is achieved through description rather than cataloguing. Record description is the essential element of record management that lead the record resources to proper exploitation by the users. The description produces the records finding list that confirm all the holdings of a record center. The description should give at least original title, subject, volumes, and dates. Other information could include nature and form, series, scope, etc.

##### 4.2 FILING OF RECORDS

One way of achieving effective organization of records is through filing. Filing is a process of arranging and sorting records so that they may be found quickly when needed. It may also be defined as the classified and arrangement of collected records for reference and preservation. Many scholars such as Thomas, et al (1983) have identified three basic filing techniques as Alphabetical, Numeric and Alphanumeric. Olayemi (1998) added the fourth technique, which is called Chronological.

While Alphabetical suggests arrangement in alphabetical order by the name or topic of a document, segregating records do Chronological by time sequence. In Numerical filing, each item filed has a number and allocation of the material is by numerical sequence. Alphanumeric is a filing system that combines both alphabets and numbers. How are Alphabets, Numbers and Alphanumbers assigned to records? First of all the mode of arrangement and organizing should be determined. Three mode of organization have been suggested as follow:

- ✓ The action to which the records relates within the associations. In this case the various classes of activities performed by the association will provide the basis for establishing subject headings under which file Unit must be grouped, e.g. lectures, correspondences, training programme, etc.
- ✓ Organisational structure. In this case, the various offices of the Association would file records.

- ✓ The third mode is by subject. This is mostly adopted for records that do not arise from the organizational activities.

#### 4.3 STORAGE OF RECORDS

Records created should be properly stored in order to preserve and secure them. Most record created and received is kept in files which in turn are kept in iron cabinets. Although there is other filing equipment such as Mobile and Circular filing bays, Skand veyer, automated card file, etc, for professional associations/societies the iron cabined could be sufficient.

#### 4.4 PRESERVATION AND SECURITY OF RECORDS

Records should properly be guarded against any agent of destruction such as insects, rodents, fire and theft. Files and file cabinet should always be kept clean by constant dusting and fumigation. Records can be preserved and secured by making photocopies, binding and rebinding, jacketing and rejacketing, retagging and digitalizing.

#### 4.5 RETRIEVAL OF RECORDS

The volumes of records created, generated and stored are immense that without the existence of *finding aids*, one could waste a whole day searching without being able to trace a single required record. Such state of affairs would not only be time consuming but would be extremely unsatisfactory to both keeper and searchers. Therefore, apart from using the *filing systems*, which could be in class list, simple list, and special list to retrieval record information, others such as inventors, calendar, indexes and guides could as well be used.

#### 4.6 EVALUATION AND DISPOSITION OF RECORDS

It is very important that the records of an organization should periodically be evaluated in order to reassess their historical present and future value. The whole essence of evaluation is to determine those records to be retained by the organization and those to be disposed or destroyed. UNESCO (1993) suggested that the type of records to be disposed vary from organization to organization, but they generally

include non policy making records; low level administrative records; low frequency of reference records; and records that do not have any historical and legal value.

Many scholars pointed out that there is no need for organization to continue to keep records that are no longer useful and would not serve any purpose. Apart from occupying unnecessary space, these records contribute in increasing search time because of the volume of records to go through before the required record is retrieved. They also increase the cost of record management in terms of storage preservation and conservation. In a nutshell, the ultimate results of evaluation and disposition as observed by Ibrahim (1991) are fewer records, better records; more effective records, and more economical records.

#### 5.0 OVERCOMING PROBLEMS OF RECORDS CREATION, CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS/ SOCIETIES IN NIGERIA

In order to ensure transparency, accountability and continuity and success in professional associations/ societies, records must be readily and appropriately created, well processed, systematically organized, used, evaluated and timely disposed. For this to be achieved the following programmes should be embarked by all associations/societies:

1. All members of professional associations/ societies should strive hard to acquire adequate knowledge; conscious and diligent on the need, role, importance and functions of records creation, control and management in their associations/societies.
2. Official of the associations should, out of the *little funds generated*, always make funds available for the creation and sustaining records creation and management. Adequate stationeries, such as papers and files should be provided to all the officials.
3. To ensure that records created/generated and received are properly documented and not missed during transitions, the following measures should be taken:

- (a) Any record created by any officer should be accessioned, documented and filed. A photocopy of such records should be sent to a central pool to be created in the associations/societies.
  - (b) An official among the executive officer, like the PRO, Editor-in-Chief or the library officer should be designated as the custodian of these photocopies documents.
4. For associations/societies that have permanent secretariat a place should be designated for the purpose of storing the associations/societies records, for those that do not have permanent secretariat, effort should be made to have one where they could be sending their records and other essentials for safekeeping. An interim alternative should be provided immediately
  5. Professional Associations/Societies should make effort to provide essential storage equipments such as iron cabinets, files, e.t.c, for record keeping and preservation.

#### CONCLUSION

The paper discussed the role, characteristics, function and importance of records in professional associations and societies. The problems of record creation, control, and organization management in professional associations/societies were highlighted and solutions proffered. The paper concluded that now more than ever, professional associations/societies need record management. As a way forward, the paper introduced and practically demonstrated the elements of records managing associations and societies members need to know.

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