

ACCESS POLICY

A good access policy will cover several important points. It must balance the desire to use the rich resources of the archives for administrative and scholarly research against the need to protect confidential materials.

Items to address in developing an access policy include:

Records of the National Spiritual Assembly and its agencies should be restricted for a predetermined number of years (in the U.S. 50 years) and require permission of the NSA Secretary for access.

Managers of Bahá'í National Centre offices should have access to their own records.

Make note of other records that are restricted (for example, Local Spiritual Assembly records, official files [as opposed to personal papers] of Counsellors, Auxiliary Board Members, Huququ'llah Trustees, etc.)

Access to Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and letters of Shoghi Effendi should be restricted to copies only, with the originals permanently and safely stored.

Manuscript collections (personal papers) of individuals may be open for research once they have been processed by a professional archivist, unless the donor or the archivist have placed restrictions on them to protect confidential or sensitive information or fragile material. Usually restrictions will have a definite time limit.

Access to historical photographs. The collection should generally be open for use. Develop a clear policy for allowing copies to be made. The archives should make arrangements for copying. Do not loan original photographs, if possible. Once negatives have been made, you can loan the negatives.

Access to relics, artifacts, and works of art and provision for their occasional use as part of displays, under careful environmental conditions. The guiding principle here must be protection and preservation of the items.

Access to audiovisual collections and architectural drawings collections.

Statement about how and when the archives will be open (generally by appointment) and the fact that all researchers must fill out an application for research and sign and abide by the reading room rules. All research should be conducted in the reading room, under supervision of an archivist. Make provisions for National Centre offices may check out archival materials for a limited period, if needed.

Statement that outside researchers and National Centre staff have access to the reading room only. The archives stacks and storage and working areas are closed to everyone except the archives staff.