Guidelines for Using the Universal Declaration on Archives Evaluation Tool

Introduction

The Universal Declaration on Archives Evaluation Tool was developed as part of the ICA Online Learning course "Understanding and Using the Universal Declaration on Archives"[1]. The Universal Declaration on Archives has the status of a UNESCO instrument, as well as being one of the reference documents of the International Council on Archives. There is no other document in the archives and records management field that carries this distinction and authority. Institutions and individuals who need to evaluate the performance, quality and impact of their archives and records management programmes should take the UDA into consideration in their assessment or audit because of its status. But beyond its authoritative status, the UDA provides content that can be used as criteria for measuring archives and records management work.

Note that at present there is no universal scheme in place for assessing compliance with the UDA, so comparative data for benchmarking is not available. Quantitative evaluation, whereby evaluation is based on a measurable outcome, is not relevant since the UDA itself is not specific about how its principles should be enacted. But it can be used to set standardised targets. For example, compliance with the public access principle can be assessed by checking for the existence of an access policy that commits the repository to being open to the public, or even by documenting specific numbers of researchers per month or year. In using the UDA as an evaluation tool we are effectively using it as a standard. The UDA offers a set of principles, rather than instructions or targets. Compliance can therefore be measured by assessing whether or not an archives and/or records management programme follows some or all of the UDA principles in its work. Further steps in the evaluation process might be necessary to measure how well or how completely the principles have been implemented, to analyse why the principles have not been adopted and to identify ways in which the principles could be adopted to meet standards implicit in the UDA.

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[1] Launched in September 2019, see: https://www.ica.org/en/register-for-the-online-course-understanding-and-using-the-uda for more details

Developing the UDA Assessment Tool

In developing the tool, the authors took a global and comprehensive approach to ensure all aspects of the UDA are covered. The tool was developed according to the following methodology:

- Analysis of each of the UDA statements and principles to articulate a set of closed questions to establish whether or not the programme/organisation has adopted the principle

- Articulation of further questions in the case of positive responses to prompt information and evidence on how the principle is being implemented

- Articulation of further questions in the case of negative responses to prompt information on impediments to adopting the principle and identify strategies to achieve adoption.

It should be stressed that this is just one way of interpreting the UDA and there may be other ways to extract assessment criteria.

Using the tool

Who will be assessing the programme is one of the first things to consider when using the tool. It can be used as a self-assessment instrument, with the archivist and/or records manager conducting the exercise. Assessment can also be audit-style, carried out by the organisation's internal audit team or an external auditor or consultant.

Another important consideration for assessment is the goals and scope of the evaluation exercise. The UDA evaluation tool could be used in many ways, as follows:

- Assessing an archives management programme for a public or private body

- Assessing a records management programme for a public or private body

- Assessing a joint archives and records management programme for a public or private body

- Assessing a national archives' own internal archives and records management systems Assessing a particular area of archives or records management

- Analysing areas where a programme is known to be performing poorly and/or where there are gaps in coverage, in order to identify ways to improve.

The UDA consists of 21 principles or statements. The evaluation tool has 31 questions, most of which have potential to generate supporting data. An assessment based on the full evaluation tool would provide a very comprehensive benchmark of the status of a joint records and archives programme. But the UDA principles, and the evaluation tool, can be cut down to suit

the needs of the organisation or assessing body. Once the scope of the assessment has been established, the UDA evaluation tool can be tailored to reflect those requirements.

For an assessment to become a useful analysis of the status of an archives and/or records management programme, the reasons for positive or negative responses should be examined in more detail. Take statement 7, "Open access to records and archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life." This prompts two questions "Are the archives accessible to the public?" and "Are the records subject to access to information legislation or otherwise made available to the public?". In the case of a business with an archives programme but no records management in place, or with records management but no archives provision, only one of the questions can be answered positively and it is only the follow-up question, "Why not?" that allows understanding - and analysis - with a view to strategies for improvement.

On the other hand, where an organisation claims compliance with a statement, it may be that the way in which it complies is not in keeping with the overall spirit of the UDA. For example, UDA statement 16 reads "Appropriate national archival policies and laws should be adopted and enforced". The UK National Archives is bound by the Public Record Acts of 1958 and 1967 as amended by subsequent privacy, access to information and other legislation. On closer examination the law may not be considered to be appropriate since it is old legislation and does not cover all areas of archives and records management across UK Government or the private sector. Thus, the follow-up questions on the reasons behind non-compliance are useful in prompting analysis of the data and starting to develop ways to improve archives and records management practice which would to achieve compliance with the UDA. The strategies could be suggested by staff responsible for delivering the programme as well as by the assessor, either whilst gathering data or afterwards.

Since the basic premise of the tool is to assess compliance with the UDA, and the questions are closed questions, another way to use the tool would be to 'score' the archives and/or records programme based on answers to the questions. Remember that some questions would need a positive response (eg "have all records been identified?"), whilst others a negative one (eg "Is anything missing?") in order to count in the programme's favour. This would give a quick, if summary, indication of overall compliance with the UDA.

Using the results of evaluation

How the results of the evaluation exercise are used will depend on its initial goals and scope, but the full set of data realised by using the unedited tool has a wide range of applications.

An initial outcome could be a compliance score based on the results of the yes/no responses, allowing for when 'no' reflects well on the programme under evaluation. This assessment and

resulting scores over time will show where improvements have been made, or where compliance is slipping.

The most effective use of the evaluation results would be to deploy them in supporting changes that need to be made to improve the quality of the archives and/or records management programme. Assessment data which identifies reasons for non-compliance can be used to suggest ways to increase compliance and provide evidence for recommendations and improvement strategies. Depending on the organisational culture, it may be possible for the archivist or records manager to take immediate action, or it may be necessary to argue for the necessary change and also for a plan to implement the change.

In all cases described here, the assessment results, be they simple scores or more detailed analyses and conclusions, can be compared over time in the same organisation or across a number of organisations or programmes. For example, a national archives service may be responsible for monitoring records management in government departments. A cut-down version of the tool which focuses on current records management could be used to assess comparative compliance with the UDA.

As stated earlier, the UDA and therefore the UDA Evaluation Tool do not say how the principles should be implemented. There are a number of archives and records management self-assessment tools that have been published on the internet. They provide more detailed evaluation questions for specific aspects of archives and records management. These can be used to support follow-up work to amend existing practices or implement new strategies to improve recordkeeping in the organisation. Details are given in the Resources listed below.

Resources

NARA Records and Information Management Self-Evaluation Guide
https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/publications/records-and-information-management-self-evaluation-guide.pdf (Accessed August 2021)

Guidelines for Evaluation of Archival Institutions
Society of American Archivists
https://www2.archivists.org/groups/standards-committee/guidelines-for-evaluation-of-archival-institutions (Accessed August 2021)

"Using ISO 15489 as an Audit Tool" *The Information Management Journal* July/August 2004
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https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwj9m5bGgdXgAhWCr3EKHch5BnwQFjAAegQIHRAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fimages10.newegg.com%2FUploadFilesForNewegg%2Fitemintelligence%2FAdvil%2FCrockettFoster1445517104568.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0B4PzC6pLuiEsh83MWAhot (Accessed August 2021)

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