

Local Spiritual Assemblies have permission to use the word “Bahá’í” in the names and titles of publications, such as “Anyplace Bahá’í Newsletter,” or “Anyplace Bahá’í Community” website.

Since “Bahá’í” is a derivative of the sacred word “Bahá,” the Universal House of Justice has pointed out that it should not be used for commercial purposes. Individual Bahá’ís, therefore, should not use the word “Bahá’í” in identifying or advertising their private ventures, products or services.

Copyrights

Copyright laws protect literary, musical and artistic works by ensuring that individual works are not copied without permission from the copyright holder. Assemblies should not reproduce copyrighted material without first gaining permission both for moral reasons and because it may result in legal action against the user.

RECORDKEEPING

The records of an Assembly include such items as the agenda, minutes, task force and other appointee reports, correspondence, membership statistics, financial records, incorporation papers, local bulletins and newsletters, photographs, and any other type of document that enables the Assembly to maintain accurate information and a history of its own actions and its community’s history, status and activities. The Assembly may also find it helpful to maintain a discrete record of policy decisions for ease of reference.

The Spiritual Assembly, as a permanent body, is responsible for maintaining all its records, including Minutes of meetings, correspondence, and financial records, throughout its existence as a Bahá’í institution. Each officer, therefore, on completing his or her term of office, shall turn over to the Assembly all records pertaining to the business of the Assembly.

Shoghi Effendi, in *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, p. 51

ACCESS TO RECORDS

In reply to your letter of May 13th, 1976, the Universal House of Justice instructs us to say that all members of the Spiritual Assembly are equal and should have access to the files and minutes of the Assembly of which they are members. It is, however, within the discretion of any Spiritual Assembly to so organize its files and records that certain items could be listed as “confidential” and access to those so classified could only be had by a specific decision of the Assembly itself.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 8, 1976, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 164

All current decisions should be shared with all Assembly members, even when they have been absent from a meeting. In this way, Assembly members are informed of all Assembly decisions during their period of service.

Without specific Assembly approval, a Local Assembly member should not go back and read minutes containing confidential information from Assembly meetings before he or she was a member of the Assembly. If, for some reason, the Assembly wishes to authorize individuals to review minutes from previous years, it should make a specific decision to give permission to those individuals.

Retrieving Records from Persons Leaving Assembly Membership or Appointment

All Assembly materials, such as copies of minutes, correspondence, files, and so on must be retrieved from any person leaving Assembly membership or appointment (such as appointment to a personal status committee or task force) and copies of such materials residing on personal computers or backups should be erased. If materials are not returned voluntarily by the person, the Assembly should seek guidance from the National Spiritual Assembly about recovering them.

The Local Assembly will want to have appointees sign confidentiality agreements similar to those the local Assembly members sign.

See also:

Legal Action by Assembly — Ch. 4

CONFIDENTIAL MATERIALS

It is of the utmost importance that confidential materials regarding personal status be protected from accidental or deliberate intrusion. Only persons designated by the Local Assembly should have access to confidential records.

Draft copies of confidential materials should be shredded or otherwise securely disposed of when no longer needed, such as when a letter or report is finalized, and a finished copy placed in the Assembly's confidential files.

See also:

Communications — Confidentiality — Ch. 4

Access to Records — Ch. 4

Archives — Record Retention — Ch. 4

Privileged Communications in Civil Law — Ch. 4

Highly Confidential Items May Be Recorded and Filed Separately

As a general rule, all matters acted upon by an Assembly are recorded in its minutes. The Assembly may, however, record highly confidential items separately, but it should be noted in the minutes that confidential items have been separately recorded. Thus, if for any reason the Assembly is requested to supply information concerning such items and it feels that it would be preferable for the matter not to be divulged, it can express its views before acceding to the request.

...The decision about what matters should be treated confidentially is made by the Assembly, which also has the duty to respect requests from individuals who express the wish that certain matters be handled on a confidential basis.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 2, 1987, to a Local Spiritual Assembly

If a Local Assembly makes a decision to begin keeping separate minutes for confidential matters when it has not done so in the past, it is not expected to go back through its minutes from previous years in order to separate personal matters from other decisions. However, it should adopt some means of indicating archival minutes that could contain confidential information.

See also:

Role of Local Assembly in Upholding Bahá'í Law — Ch. 10

Disruptive Behaviors — Responding to Behavior Problems — Ch. 14

ARCHIVES

The purpose of Bahá'í Archives is to ensure that all non-current records and papers of permanent administrative, historical, doctrinal, or sacred value are preserved and made available for research to historians and to the administrative institutions of the Faith.

The importance of the institution of Bahá'í Archives is not due only to the many teaching facilities it procures, but is especially to be found in the vast amount of historical data and information it offers both to the present-day administrators of the Cause, and to the Bahá'í historians of the future. The institution of Bahá'í Archives is indeed a most valuable storehouse of information regarding all aspects of the Faith,

administrative as well as doctrinal. Future generations of believers will be surely in a better position than we are to truly and adequately appreciate the many advantages and facilities which the institution of the Archives offers to individual believers and also to the community at large.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated September 24, 1936, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 4

Maintenance of Local Archives

The archives of a Local Spiritual Assembly consist of the official, non-current records of the Spiritual Assembly, its officers, and appointees. Incorporated Spiritual Assemblies must be especially careful to preserve both the original articles of incorporation and the minutes of its Annual Meetings, in addition to the items that all Assemblies must preserve, as detailed elsewhere. The Spiritual Assembly will need to adopt policies regulating access to records in the archives to ensure that the information is accessible while protecting confidential records.

Every community should keep a file which records the history of the Faith in the locality and may consider recording the recollections of older Bahá'ís. The archives may also include such things as relics, personal papers of believers, community newsletters, photographs, and audio-visual material. If a collection of personal papers contains books and periodicals, these materials are more appropriate for transfer to the library. At the discretion of the Assembly, an archivist or archive task force may be appointed. Some communities may also wish to appoint an historian.

More information about creating or maintaining Bahá'í archives can be obtained from the National Bahá'í Archives by email to archives@usbnc.org.

See also:

- Preparation for Loss of Assembly Status — Ch. 2
- Representatives, Task Forces and Other Appointees — Ch. 3
- Guidelines for Disposition of Assembly Records — Ch. 4
- Electronic Records — Ch. 4
- Preservation of Sacred Relics — Ch. 9

Record Retention

Non-current Assembly records transferred to the archives will need to be appraised by the local archivist or archives task force to determine which records should be kept permanently. Records not having permanent value can be disposed of, although there may be audit and/or legal reasons for some financial and/or legal records to be retained for a specific length of time.

Personal status records and minutes referring to them should never be destroyed.

GUIDELINES FOR DISPOSITION OF ASSEMBLY RECORDS

Records/Information to Be Permanently Retained

- Annual Reports
- Birth, marriage, divorce and death registers
- Child Registration cards for child/youth registrations reported via *eMembership2*
- Correspondence initiated by the Local Assembly
- Correspondence, unique (not a form letter), from:
 - The National Spiritual Assembly and other Bahá'í Institutions
 - Individuals
 - Others
- Registration cards (signed original) for enrollments reported via *eMembership2*
- Financial Records*

- Annual financial reports
- Cash journals and check registers
- Other financial records
- Local bulletins, newsletters, and calendars
- Local committee, task force and other appointee reports
- Membership lists and directories
- Minutes of Assembly, committee and task force meetings
- Personal Status case files
- Photographs of the Spiritual Assembly, Bahá'í community, and community activities
- Publicity files and scrapbooks
- Tellers' reports of Assembly elections reported via *eMembership2*
- Surveys (copies) of local information submitted to other institutions

*Some of these records should be kept for five years. For recommended retention schedules of financial records, see *Stewardship and Development*.

RECORDS/INFORMATION TO KEEP OR DESTROY AT DISCRETION

- American Bahá'í newsletter or magazine, The
- Advertisements, etc.
- Copies of enrollment and change of address forms, etc.
- Correspondence, routine, including Feast letters
- Duplicate annual reports, minutes, bulletins, membership lists, etc.
- Feast audiotapes from the National Assembly
- Newsreels from the National Assembly
- Some financial records, such as paid bills (to confirm which, contact the Office of the Treasurer)

Any item on the “Keep or Destroy” list should be kept if it illustrates or documents an item in Assembly minutes or is a part of the history of the community. For example, a feature story in the Feast newsreel or an article in the local newspaper may inspire the community to undertake a community service project; that particular newsreel or article should be kept as documentation of how the project began.

Items that contain personal information, including copies of enrollment cards, changes of address, duplicate membership lists and so forth, should be treated as confidential and disposed of by shredding or some other secure means when disposal is necessary.

When disposing of outworn or outdated materials containing passages from the Sacred Writings of the Faith, representations of the Greatest Name, or other items that should be treated with reverence, it is preferable to utilize a method which is as dignified and respectful as possible, as determined by your Assembly.

See also:

Use of the Greatest Name — Ch. 9

ELECTRONIC RECORDS

Electronic records are difficult to preserve long-term, due to the rapid obsolescence of both computer software and hardware. Therefore, an official paper copy, for the Assembly files, should be made of all computer-generated Assembly documents having permanent value, such as minutes, important correspondence, financial records, annual reports and local bulletins.

Computer files should be backed up on a regular basis including files for all active documents, data files and emails pertaining to Assembly business.

Assemblies should maintain manual documentation on where and how electronic records are kept, including software product name and version, as well as any information needed to access them such as user names and passwords.

See also:

Archives — Ch. 4

LIBRARY

A Local Assembly may have a library for the purpose of providing both the Assembly and the Bahá'í community access to the Sacred Writings and other library materials.

In addition to a collection of the authoritative texts of the Faith, the library could have collections of introductory and specialized Bahá'í topics, general reference works, books on other religions and subjects concerning the issues of present day society. There could be a lending section and a non-circulating reference/rare book section in the library. Many times, the Bahá'í books and magazines that accompany donations of personal papers to the community archives can be used to supplement the library's collection. A librarian or library task force could be appointed to be in charge of the library.

See also:

Appointments As Needed by Community — Library — Ch. 3

RESOURCE FILES

Local Spiritual Assemblies are encouraged to maintain a file of information on resources available in their area. These resources may include counseling, support groups, and other services such as interpreters, legal, medical, welfare, and shelter assistance resources. This information can then be readily provided to individuals as needed. If the Assembly decides to keep such information as a resource for its community, it should be updated periodically to ensure that it is current. While Assemblies may offer information on various resources, responsibility for choosing service providers remains with the individuals and the Assembly should make it clear that it is not recommending any particular provider.

See also:

Appointments As Needed by Community — Personal Status — Ch. 3

Attendance — Interpreters — Ch. 4

Duty to Investigate and Try to Reconcile Couple — Ch. 12

And in *Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies on Domestic Violence: A Supplement to Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies*, topics listed under "Services and Resources" in the index

Counseling Resources

For believers who wish to receive personal, marital, or family counseling, the Assembly may have a list of counselors whose views are in keeping with the principles of the Faith or it can suggest that the individual obtain a referral through his or her physician, insurance company, local community health center, professional associations, licensing boards, self-help organizations or other resources. However, as with the decision to seek counseling, the final choice of a counselor or a mode of therapy is the individual's responsibility and the Assembly should make it clear that it is not recommending any particular provider.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF FUNCTIONING

Broader legal issues related to the organization of the Assembly such as Incorporation and insurance issues are covered in the chapter on Assembly Organization.