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Memory of the World

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER COMPANION

This *Companion* is an aid for those preparing nominations for the International Memory of the World Register. It should be read in conjunction with the revised edition of the *General Guidelines* (2021). In this way, the *Companion* may serve to clarify some operational aspects of the General Guidelines, based on an accumulation of set practices from implementing them since 2021.

The *Companion* may be updated over time as internet linkages and other details change.

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# 1. Introduction

This Companion is for everyone who has heard about the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme and is interested in being a part of it, especially by **nominating items of documentary heritage for the Memory of the World International Register**. For full details of the nomination process, refer to the *General Guidelines* and especially the admissibility and selection criteria in **Section 8.2**. *Inadmissible nominations* and **Section 8.3**. *Criteria for inscription*. **This Companion provides the basic information needed to complete a nomination.**

## *What is the 'Memory of the World' (MoW) programme?*

It is UNESCO's flagship programme that aims to ensure the preservation and dissemination of documentary heritage, including valuable archive holdings and library and museum collections worldwide.

It is one of three UNESCO initiatives for protecting and raising awareness of the global cultural heritage. The other two are the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,* which maintains the *World Heritage List* of buildings and natural sites of outstanding universal value, and the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage* which recognizes and supports the survival of oral traditions and culture. The three approaches complement each other, but there is an important difference.

While the *World Heritage* and *Intangible Heritage* conventions are strongly focused on the protection of the specific places and traditions on the "lists" which they create, MoW supports the preservation and accessibility of the documentary heritage **at large.** Its registers, too, are highly selective and identify documents of great significance which must be preserved. But they also have a symbolic and practical function as a means of convincing a wider public of the need for preserving documents which will never find their way onto any register: a kind of shop window for a much larger objective.

MoW is underpinned by the *Recommendation concerning the preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage including in digital form*, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in November 2015.

MoW relates to the world's *documentary heritage*. The programme has three objectives:

- To facilitate preservation, by the most appropriate techniques
- To assist universal access
- To increase awareness worldwide of the existence and significance of documentary heritage

It aims to alert governments, decision makers and the public at large that preservation of,

and access to, documents of all kinds need increased efforts, especially in the digital environment, which offers truly democratic dimensions in the production of and access to new and existing documents.

MoW began in 1992, in response to a growing concern about the state of preservation of, and access to, the world's documentary heritage. MoW was established as a long term approach to changing the way the world's documentary heritage – in libraries, archives, museums and elsewhere – is valued, protected, used and supported by nations, governments, communities and individuals.

## *What is a document? What is documentary heritage? What are memory institutions?*

The *Recommendation* adopts the following definitions:

A **document** is an object comprising analogue or digital informational *content* and the *carrier* on which it resides. It is preservable and usually moveable. The content may comprise signs or codes (such as text), images (still or moving) and sounds, which can be copied or migrated. The carrier may have important aesthetic, cultural or technical qualities. The relationship between content and carrier may range from incidental to integral.

**Documentary heritage** comprises those single documents – or groups of documents – of significant and enduring value to a community, a culture, a country or to humanity generally, and whose deterioration or loss would be a harmful impoverishment.

Significance of this heritage may become clear only with the passage of time. The world's documentary heritage is of global importance and responsibility to all, and should be fully preserved and protected for all, with due respect to and recognition of cultural mores and practicalities. It should be permanently accessible and re-usable by all without hindrance. It provides the means for understanding social, political, collective as well as personal history. It can help to underpin good governance and sustainable development. For each State, its documentary heritage reflects its memory and identity, and thus contributes to determine its place in the global community.

**Memory institutions** may include but are not limited to archives, libraries, museums and other educational, cultural and research organizations.

These formal definitions are discussed in more detail in Appendixes 5 and 6 of the *General Guidelines*, and depending on the material you are proposing to nominate it is important to have a good understanding of them.

By way of illustration, the following notes enlarge on these formal definitions.

**Groups of documents** being nominated should be logical and coherent in their character. The size of the group does not matter; what holds the group together does. A

*collection* is a self-contained group of individual documents that have been brought together by a particular circumstance, reason or purpose (for example, subject matter, character, provenance, or historical relationships). An archival *fonds* is the whole group of documents made or received by a person or organization in the course of their normal activities and kept for future reference, and in which the administrative context and relationships between records is preserved. A *holding* is a set or larger grouping of defined collections and/or fonds. It is possible that collections, fonds or holdings may have become split between two or more institutions for various reasons.

Generally, in **traditional (analogue) text documents**, content and carriers form a unit which is usually considered as the *original*. Such documents may owe much of their importance to the specific nature of the carrier (for example, an illuminated manuscript or a photograph recorded on a particular kind of paper) or its circumstantial associations (for example, a music score written by a famous composer or a collection compiled or owned by a renowned person).

In the case of **machine-readable or reproducible documents** – that is, all audiovisual documents except analogue photographs, and all digital documents – the carrier, although necessary to physically contain the information, is sometimes of lesser or even no importance in the context of Memory of the World. This is because digital and audiovisual information is generally preserved by migration from one storage platform and carriers to the next. However, this is not always true. There are cases where the particular carrier on which the content is stored could be the reason for a document's inscription (for example, a phonoautogram, or the oldest data on punch cards). Motion picture film may have characteristics (such as an obsolete colour process) which give the carrier a particular importance.

**Digital documents** may be categorized in three groups:

- Digitised documents – that is, digital surrogates made from analogue originals
- Fixed born digital documents – that is, finite documents created in the digital domain, without analogue originals
- Dynamic born digital documents – such as active websites or continually enhanced digital resources, like social media or educational media

Here it is essential to understand which category the documents belong to as the information required in the nomination is specific and critical. As this requires an extended explanation, you may wish to read the **Explanatory Note on Nominating Digital Documents for Inscription**. Here, it may also be advisable to refer to the second edition of the **UNESCO/PERSIST Guidelines for the Selection of Digital Heritage for Long-term Preservation**.

**Examples of documents:**

Documents come in an immense range of forms and content. The following are some examples:

- ✓ **Text documents** include manuscripts (of any age), books, newspapers, posters, correspondence, business records and computer files. The textual content may be recorded in ink, pencil, paint, digits or other medium. The carrier may be paper, plastic, papyrus, parchment, palm leaves, bark, stone, fabric, hard disk, data tape or many other materials.

- ✓ **Non-text documents** include drawings, maps, music scores, plans, prints, diagrams or graphics.

- ✓ **Audiovisual documents** include sound discs, magnetic tapes, films, photographs – whether in analogue or digital form, however recorded and in any format. The physical carrier may be paper, various forms of plastic or celluloid, shellac, metal or other material.

- ✓ **Digital documents,** regardless of their content, may also be termed manifested documents. They are accessed through digital devices in their various forms – laptops, tablets, smartphones, personal computers, digital television screens etc. – and are an assemblage of data from a variety of sources on a single or multiple devices, or from one or more data carriers on a single device.

## *How do MoW and the registers work?*

MoW fulfils its responsibilities through a Paris-based UNESCO Secretariat and a network of committees and initiatives around the world that operate in accordance with the programme's *General Guidelines*. You can connect with MoW through whichever committee seems most convenient to you.

At the time of writing, MoW has about 80 committees spread across the *international*, *regional* and *national* domains. They have separate websites and operate independently but in conformity with the *General Guidelines*. The network is constantly growing, so a good entry portal is the main MoW website.

- ✓ For example, the Australian National MoW Committee maintains a national register and is a member of the Asia Pacific Regional Committee (MOWCAP). Australian documentary heritage is inscribed on the national, Asia Pacific and International MoW registers.

**The structure of MoW is set out in detail in Section 5 of the *General Guidelines***. For the purposes of the **International MoW Register**, the important bodies are the MoW Secretariat, the International Advisory Committee (IAC) and its Register Subcommittee (RSC).

The Secretariat receives, checks and verifies all nominations and confirms this with the nominator. It then passes the nominations to the RSC, which, after an admissibility check, researches each nomination and arrives at an initial assessment as to whether the nomination meets the selection criteria or not. It presents its assessment to the IAC,

which further evaluates the nomination and decides whether or not to recommend the nominated item for inscription. In line with **section 8.5.3.5.4** of the General Guidelines, as revised, its recommendations for inscription, as a whole, go to the Executive Board of UNESCO in the form of an Information Document. The Executive Board then endorses such recommendations as a package so that the successfully nominated items can be inscribed on the Memory of the World International Register. The rest of the nominations may fall under 'Provisional inscription', 'Refer and Resubmit' and 'Rejection'. Such nominations are communicated to the nominators by the Memory of the World Secretariat, with clear reasons given for the IAC's decision, in order to assist the nominators to revise their nominations, should they so wish, for the next cycle. Such nominations are not included in the Information Document presented to the Executive Board.

All this happens over a two-yearly cycle. In each cycle, nominations must be submitted before an announced deadline, and this is followed by the assessment phases.

**The assessment process and feedback**

The RSC/IAC assessment processes are set out in **sections 8.5.3.4** and **8.5.3.5** of the *General Guidelines*.

To the extent needed, the process is interactive. If further information is needed, there will be correspondence between the Secretariat and the nominator. Nominations, once complete and verified and adjudged admissible by the RSC, are posted on the online platform, as provided for in **Section 8.5.2.3** of the *General Guidelines*, after which Member States may provide comments, additional information, including contestations, using an appropriate form available on the MoW website. Comments, including contestations, that go beyond the admissibility and inscription criteria will be subject to **Section 8.6.5.2** *Nominations contested on other grounds*. This section is applicable only to concerned Member States.

Notice that, although only Member States have access to the online platform, they may, as per **Section 8.5.3.2.1** of the *General Guidelines*, provide access to nomination files hosted on this platform to non-public documentary heritage and/or relevant national stakeholders for the purpose of facilitating the submission of comments or contestations by any individual or entity. This is specified in **Section 8.5.3.3.2** of the *General Guidelines*, which requires that a specified window will also be declared during which public comments, support or other information relevant to aspects of any current nomination, may be lodged by any individual or entity through Member States, as specified in **Section 8.5.1** (Submission) of the *General Guidelines*. For instance, the sender may wish to provide information to supplement the nominator's case, or may contest the nomination on the grounds of its content or whether the admissibility and selection criteria have been met. Comments which go beyond these areas, however, will not be considered by the RSC.

Given that it is only Member States who may grant private individuals and entities access to the online platform, on a case-by-case basis, it may be advisable for interested

individuals and entities, once the call for nominations is published on the MoW website, to approach the concerned Member States. Practically, this could be through the National Commission for UNESCO or, in the absence of a National Commission, the relevant government body in charge of relations with UNESCO, or through the national MoW committee, where one exists, to express their availability to comment on any nominations the Member States may deem fall within their expertise and experience.

The RSC takes account of all public comments, feedback from referees and UNESCO bodies, and information gleaned from its own research. Following this, the RSC's initial assessment is advised to the nominator, and the nominator has the opportunity to respond. After this interaction, the nomination moves to the IAC.

### *Why the registers?*

In any walk of life, we know that highly selective lists gain more interest, publicity and impact than generalised statements. They are easily understood and present a focused message. So, it is with MoW. As mentioned above, the registers serve as a showcase for documents which, by their obvious significance and symbolism, draw the attention of decision makers as well as the general public to a much larger need. They help to make a generalised ideal – the preservation of documentary heritage – accessible and concrete.

By progressively identifying, recognizing and highlighting significant and irreplaceable documentary heritage, the larger objectives of preservation, access and awareness are promoted and advanced. The inscription of an item on any MoW register is an **affirmation** by UNESCO of its permanent and outstanding significance. It also raises the stature of the institution that holds the item(s). Over time, the registers will contribute to re- interpreting perceptions and understanding of world history by making little known documentary heritage more visible.

### *Where can I see the registers?*

The registers can be seen online. The International Register can be accessed through the UNESCO MoW website, while the regional and national registers are available via the respective websites of regional and national committees. Each inscription includes summary information and pictures; if the items have been digitized and are accessible online there might be a link to them. For more detail, the main sections of the nomination documents themselves can also be read online.

## The Registers

### *Why are there different registers?*

There are different registers to intensify the work of preserving documentary heritage, and to weave Memory of the World's net more tightly. There are separate **international, regional** and **national** MoW registers.

The inscriptions in each register are based on *essentially* the same criteria, adapted to the cultural setting in which it belongs. Each register is separately administered by the relevant international, regional or national MoW committee. **The fundamental difference among the registers is only the *extent of geographic influence* of the documentary heritage that they include.**

The oldest, largest and best known is the *International MoW Register*. It began in 1997 and for many years it was the *only* MoW register. The other registers have been created more recently.

The world's documentary heritage is so vast and complex that a *single* register would be unwieldy and unworkable. Geographically-based registers also allow *appropriate regional and national expertise* and local resources to be applied to assessing nominations in a way that would never be possible if there was only a single register.

**The registers are not a hierarchy.** In UNESCO's eyes, all are equally important, and all inscriptions have equal value in the sense that UNESCO endorses/recognizes the significance of every inscription.

***Every MoW register has its own nomination process and timeframe. For simplicity, this Companion focuses on the process of nominating to the International MoW Register. However, similar steps and issues apply to all other MoW registers. The regional or national MoW committee concerned can provide the nomination information and forms for its own register.***

## *Why nominate? What is the benefit?*

**Being inscribed on a MoW register is not an end in itself. It is a beginning.**

Inscription on a register publicly affirms the national, regional or world significance of the documents and makes them better known. They become part of the visible continuum of documents that have had a substantial impact on cultural and social history, assisting history to be re-interpreted over time. Inscription encourages accessibility and attracts publicity. It carries the symbolic weight of UNESCO endorsement and the right to use the MoW logo, which is in itself an affirmation of UNESCO's recognition. It is therefore a source of pride and distinction. The stature of your documentary heritage and/or your institution benefits by association with the inscriptions already on the registers; and it visibly justifies government or other expenditure on your institution and the documentary heritage in its care.

There is a strategic value in the inscription of your heritage in one of the registers. It varies according to circumstances. It reflects positively on the organization responsible for its safety, care and preservation. Sometimes it can help to attract sponsorship and funding to protect heritage under threat. Sometimes it has the effect of making the documentary heritage more secure. There are cases on record where inscription has even saved an

entire archival institution from closing and being dismantled.

## *Who can nominate?*

There are three categories of nominators. Firstly, nominations, including joint nominations, may be submitted only by Member States through their National Commission for UNESCO or, in the absence of a National Commission, the relevant government body in charge of relations with UNESCO, involving, if one exists, the relevant national MoW committee.

Secondly, notwithstanding the above, any person or organization, with the prior written consent of the owners or custodians, may submit nominations through the National Commission for UNESCO or, in the absence of a National Commission, the relevant government body in charge of relations with UNESCO, involving, if one exists, the relevant national MoW committee, of the Member State concerned by the nomination.

Thirdly, international organizations, as specified in **Section 8.5.1.4** of the *General Guidelines*, may submit nominations through the MoW Secretariat, provided such organizations have obtained approval through the National Commission for UNESCO or, in the absence of a National Commission, the relevant government body in charge of relations with UNESCO, of the Member States concerned, if the nomination concerns one or more Member States.

In practice, most nominations come from institutions, such as libraries, archives or museums. They propose items that are usually in their own custody. They are best placed to provide the kind of information needed by the Secretariat for assessment purposes. But nominations also come from a range of private and public organizations, from international organizations and from private individuals.

## *What's the process? Is it competitive? Are there quotas? Can I get help?*

**Nomination is not competitive.** Every nomination is judged against the criteria. Either it satisfies them or it does not.

Generally, there is currently no overall limit to the number of nominations that will be accepted from each country or organization. For the International MoW Register **only,** there is a limit of two nominations from institutions and/or individuals per country in each two-year cycle: this is a practical way of managing the workload. (If more than two nominations are received, the national MoW committee of that country – or if there is none, the UNESCO National Commission and/or relevant regional committee, will be asked to adjudicate on their priority). However, that limit **does not apply** to joint nominations involving a partnership between institutions in two or more countries, and they are not counted as part of the quota of each participating country. UNESCO fosters international cooperation.

**If you need help in preparing your nomination** you can ask any MoW national or regional committee, or you can ask the Secretariat to refer you to a mentor who can explain the

range of information you need to compile and how to compile it (this is called technical advice). Of course, there are protocols: the mentor **cannot** prepare your case for you and **cannot e**xpress an opinion on whether your nomination has a good chance of success.

**There are deadlines.** The international and regional registers, and most national registers, accept nominations on the basis of a two-year cycle. Your nomination must be received before the announced closing date or it will be deferred to the following cycle.

## *What's the 'Incidental Process'? How are contested nominations administered by the MoW Secretariat?*

**Provisions of the General Guidelines on contestations.** In general, contestations may be advanced on technical and other grounds. 'Other grounds' for contestation go beyond the criteria for admissibility and inscription, as described in the General Guidelines.

**Approaches to contestations and how they are administered by the UNESCO MoW Secretariat.** The General Guidelines envisage two approaches towards any such contestations. These approaches include: (a) dialogue initiated by the Member States themselves, in terms of section 8.6.5.2.3 of the General Guidelines; and (b) dialogue mediated or facilitated by a third party, in terms of 8.6.5.2.4 of the General Guidelines.

In the past cycles (2022-2023 and 2024-2025), none of the contesting parties triggered section 8.6.5.2.4 of the General Guidelines, which would have required an intervention by the UNESCO Secretariat through nominating 'a mediated/facilitated dialogue', where a mediator/facilitator agreed by the concerned parties would have engaged in such dialogue in 'good faith and in a spirit of understanding and cooperation …'

Rather, for the cycles cited above, as there was no request directed to the Director-General for a mediator/facilitator, the dialogues were initiated in terms of section 8.6.5.2.3 of the General Guidelines, whereupon 'any further processing of the file through the cycle will be pending on the results of the dialogue process established by the concerned parties.' In such cases, the MoW Secretariat, by email, formally informs both parties of the contestation and that they should initiated dialogue. The Secretariat includes in its email contact details of the nominators and their Permanent Delegations and National Commissions, including National Committees, where these exist.

If requested, the MoW Secretariat may serve only as a channel of communication between and among parties that have no established diplomatic and transmit documentation relating to the dialogue process initiated. The MoW Secretariat does not take sides but may encourage the parties to work expeditiously and constructively as they seek a solution.

**Scope of reporting on the contestations.** Furthermore, section 8.6.5.2.7 of the General Guidelines enjoins upon the UNESCO Secretariat to inform the Executive Board 'on the progress of the dialogue on all ongoing contests'. This means that ALL contests, however initiated, are reported on in the same Information Document that includes the IAC's recommendations for inscription. As a matter of practice, the scope of reporting is limited to the number of ongoing contests and to the fact that dialogue has been initiated by the

concerned Member States. The titles of such nominations are not included, nor are the names of the Member States concerned. For those Member States keen on such details, they can be found on the online platform set up for Member States exclusively and those the Member States may wish to grant access to the platform, in line with section 8.5.3.2.1 of the General Guidelines. Such nominations are marked as “contested.” As opposed to the past, nominations are no longer available to the public on the Memory of the World website. Only successful nominations, after being endorsed by the Executive Board, are placed on the website for public consumption. As such, the UNESCO Secretariat does everything it can to observe confidentiality in administering all the nominations received, including and especially, those contested.

**Is there anything that can be done to forestall contestations?** First, prior consultation among Member States concerning nominations that may implicate other Member States may preempt the grounds for contestation. In other words, it is important to consult those Member States for which the nomination might include sensitive materials, and engage them in some prior dialogue about how to go about preparing the nomination form.

Second, a Member State may wish to consider a joint nomination where the documentary heritage concerns other Member States. Such international cooperation is important and advances the cause of dialogue.

Third, should a contestation be considered, the grounds for such contestation need to be clarified so as to assist the nominating party to better address the issues of concern to the contesting party. This may quicken the process of resolution.

# 2. Constructing a nomination – a guide to completing the form

An annotated copy of the nomination form for the **International MoW Register** can be accessed electronically through the online platform or as a pdf document on the MoW website.

The annotations explain how each section of the form is to be completed. The information below is an extended commentary on the "heart" of any nomination:

- ✓ The criteria for inscription
- ✓ The "contextual information" that assists the assessment.

## Sections 1.0 to 5.0

These sections are largely self-explanatory. It is important to give some thought to the **title** of the nomination: it should be descriptive and, if possible, memorable – and not too long.

The **summary** is what you write **last –** it is the "shop window" of your nomination and should summarise the key elements, arguments and explanations.

## Section 6.0 Identity and description

**6.3** Groups of documents must be finite, not open ended. The description provided here needs to be sufficiently detailed to allow the assessors to fully understand the character, size and content of the collection or fonds being nominated.[1] In some cases, a catalogue might be appended to the nomination. For larger holdings, where that is not a practical approach, a descriptive statement, perhaps accompanied by accessioning or registration numbers, or a link to an online catalogue, may be a better approach.

**6.5** Setting out the **history** and **provenance** of a collection or document – its "life story" – is critical. Explain what you know about it, from when it was created to how it arrived in your institution. In some cases, the provenance story may be a simple one: in others, where documents have passed through many hands over time, it may be more complex. You may not even know the full story: just give the fullest account you can.

**6.5.1** Describe what you know about the **authenticity** of the item or collection. This is a threshold test: is the documentary heritage actually what it appears to be? There are endless historical examples of fakes and forgeries – copies or replicas that purport to be originals, deliberate hoaxes or deceptions, "real" documents whose content has been altered, and so on. These documents can take any form. Establishing authenticity is not

[1] Nominally the collection or fonds may be open ended, but the items nominated would need to be clearly circumscribed (for example, up to a certain date or box number.)

necessarily a simple issue. Digital technology provides vast possibilities for manipulating text, images and sounds in ways that leave no trace of the alteration.

- Example: The NOVA *"Viking Deception"* website lists a number of famous hoaxes: *http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/vinland/fakes.html*

Sometimes originals no longer exist, and establishing authenticity becomes a matter of identifying historical copies, which may in turn have their own original and distinguishing features as, for example, in the case of mediaeval manuscripts. Audiovisual media, in particular, are readily copied and originals may no longer exist. The oldest carrier may not necessarily have the most authentic content. Films and photographs can be altered in a variety of ways to change their content.

**6.6 The bibliography provides evidence of the impact and influence of the** documentary heritage, and what scholarly attention has been focused on it. The key here to develop a list of citations that is as diverse and geographically widespread as possible. It can include monographs, articles, theses, websites, audiovisual sources – everything that helps to provide the widest picture. If the bibliography is very long it may be useful to make it an appendix to the nomination form.

**6.7 Referees** are asked to comment on your nomination and whether, in their view, it meets the selection criteria. Those cited by the nominator often choose to send general letters of support. Those selected by the RSC may be asked to give in-depth answers to specific questions. For obvious reasons, all referees need to be independent voices, preferably also from other countries, who can make an informed comment on the nomination. So that they can speak freely, their identities are kept confidential within the assessment process.

## Section 7.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

**Historical context**

Explain the **historic** context of the nominated document(s) to help with an understanding of their significance. Describe the backdrop to circumstances resulting in lasting impact or that provide greater context.

### 7.1 Primary Criteria

This is where you present **the case for inscription** by demonstrating how the documentary heritage you are nominating satisfies the criteria. We will look at them in turn, but remember *that you do not have to satisfy all of them*. In many cases only some of the criteria will be relevant, but you have to satisfy **at least one** of them.

#### *7.1.1 Historic significance*

What does the documentary heritage tell us about the history of the world? The nomination form and the criteria in the *General Guidelines* (see **Section 8.3.5.1.1** *Historical significance*) lists several points that may apply to the heritage you are nominating. Decide how to set this out in your own way: you are giving an explanation, not answering a series of questions. Here are some suggestions as a starting point.

What can you say about the ways in which the documentary heritage reflects the time of its creation? Times change: there are periods of political, cultural or social change, of evolution of ideas and beliefs, of revolution and regression, of contact between peoples of contrasting cultures. Does the documentary heritage help us to better understand a particular period in history and its turning points, and changing patterns of life and culture?

Remember that documentary heritage does not have to be "old" to be of significance. The concept of antiquity is relative: in some countries, documents dating back 100 years are seen as "recent"; in others, they are seen as "old". Documents from the recent past may be significant for their ability to demonstrate the impact of an important event or movement.

*Examples:*

- *Hittite cuneiform tablets from Bogazköy, Turkey*
  *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/turkey_hittite_cuneiform_tablets_bogazkoy.pdf*
- *Tuol Sleng Archive, Cambodia:*
  *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/cambodia_tuol_sleng_genocide_museum_archive.pdf*

Places and locations can be significant because of cultural and historical associations. Did the location influence the course of events? Was it the birthplace of political, social or religious movements that had an impact on later history? Did the environment itself influence the way in which those movements developed? How do the documents provide evidence of this?

*Examples:*

- *Construction and Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Two-Plus-Four-Treaty of 1990, Germany*
  *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/germany_berlin_wall.pdf*
- *Commemorative Stela from Nahr el-Kalb, Lebanon*
  *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/commemorative_stela_of_nahr_el-kalb_mount_lebanon.pdf*

World history may be influenced by leading personalities, so documents may have an intrinsic association with the life and work of a person or people or cultural group that have a major impact. It can be in any field: literature, music, arts, sciences, politics, religion, sports and so on.

*Examples:*

- *The Constantine Collection, Trinidad and Tobago*
  *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/trinidad_constantine.pdf*
- *Nikola Tesla's Archive, Serbia*
  *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/serbia_nikola_tesla_archive.pdf*

Does the documentary heritage demonstrate an important innovation or major theme or development in the march of history? For example, great inventions – everything from the wheel to the internet – have shaped the course of history and the progress and development of nations and societies. The emergence of the concept of the nation state (the basis for the structure of UNESCO) was an historical evolution.

*Examples:*

- *Patent DRP 37435 "Vehicle with gas engine operation" submitted by Carl Benz, Mannheim (29 January 1886 Germany) https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/germany_benz.pdf*
- *Human Rights Archives: Argentina, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, etc. https://www.unesco.org/en/memory-world/grid?hub=1081*

### *7.1.2 Form and style*

Much documentary heritage is unremarkable in its physical nature – for example, manuscript or typescript paper records. But some documents display innovative qualities, or high levels of artistry, notable aesthetic characteristics or a particular connection between content and carrier; carriers are objects and artefacts as well as a container of information.

Sometimes the form and style is related to social or industrial conventions or needs, may be characteristic of particular places or periods in history, or may be the output of particular industrial processes. They may typify a disappeared or disappearing style.

*Examples:*

- *Ancient Naxi Dongba Literature Manuscripts, China https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/chinaancientnaxidongbaliteraturemanuscripts.pdf*
- *Sakubei Yamamoto Collection, Japan https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/japan_sakubei_yamamoto_collection.pdf*

### *7.1.3 Social, community or spiritual significance*

This concept is another way of expressing the significance of a document or set of documents in terms of their spiritual or sacred values. You need to show how a community's **present** attachment to the documentary heritage is demonstrated: for example, a community may be strongly attached to the heritage of a beloved leader, or a saint. You should provide evidence of how this attachment is expressed.

Application of this criterion must reflect living significance – the documentary heritage must have an emotional hold on **people who are alive today**. Once those who have revered the documentary heritage for its social/spiritual/community significance no longer do so, or are no longer living, it loses this specific significance and may eventually acquire historical significance.

- *Examples:*
  *Illuminated manuscripts of the Koran, Christian Bible, Buddhists texts, etc., woodblocks and textiles; character-based hand calligraphy; obsolete audiovisual carriers*

https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/slovakia_basagic_en.pdf
https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/korea_tripitaka.pdf
https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/denmark_hamburg_bible_bertoldus.pdf

### *7.1.4 Gender Equality*

As this element is one of two Global Priorities of UNESCO, nominated items should, as far as possible, include a gender analysis describing any specific aspects that relate to gender equality and/or contribute to acknowledging the significant roles that women have played in history. This should include what the nominated documentary heritage tells us about the lives of women and girls, and any impacts on women and girls and/or on gender equality. There are four categories as described below:

**1. Do no harm**

This means that the documentary heritage is not expected to contribute at all or only marginally at best to gender equality. It concerns specific or limited actions that may be technical in nature or do not have an impact on gender relations. As such, gender equality is not considered as a key factor in the significance of the documentary heritage.

*Examples:*

- *The Phoenician Alphabet, Lebanon*
  https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/lebanon_phoenician_alphabet.pdf
- *First Byurakan Survey, Armenia*
  https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/armenia_first_byurakan_survey_en.pdf

**2. Gender-sensitive**

The documentary heritage identifies and acknowledges existing gender differences and inequalities between women and men but does not make any attempt or effort to address the inequalities, although it may include references to gender equality.

*Example:*

- *Qiaopi and Yinxin Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese, China*
  https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/china_qiaopi_and_yinxin.pdf

**3. Gender-responsive**

Existing gender differences and inequalities, including inequalities in participation rates and in deriving benefits, are identified and acknowledged. The documentary heritage will describe historical events or specific policies and actions which addressed the inequalities and resulted in improvements.

Examples:

- *Nita Barrow Collection, Barbados*
  https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/barbados_nita_barrow_collection.pdf
- *Nehanda and Kaguvi mediums' judgement dockets, April 1897, Zimbabwe*
  https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/zimbabwe_nehanda_kaguvi_en.pdf

**4. Gender-transformative**

The documentary heritage describes historical events, initiatives, policies or practices which challenged existing discriminatory practices and underlying causes and factors that caused inequalities. It will provide evidence of actions that had a transformative effect on history and society. The actions either influenced or led to radical change.

*Examples:*

- *1893 Women's Suffrage Petition, New Zealand*
  *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/new_zealand_1893_women_suffrage_petition_0.pdf*
- *Aletta H. Jacobs Papers, Netherlands & USA*
  *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/netherlandsusa_jacobs_eng.pdf*

## 7.2 Comparative Criteria

### *7.2.1 Rarity or uniqueness*

A **rare** item may or may not be unique or irreplaceable: it is one of a small number of surviving exemplars of a type or class of document. The classic example is the "rare book": thousands of copies may have been printed but only a few copies are known to survive. Each one of these may have unique attributes while still sharing in the common attributes of all surviving copies.

**Unique** means one-of-a-kind – it is not the same as **rare.** It usually applies to an original document, or a document which has defining characteristics that are not shared by any other document which may be similar to it. Irreplaceability reinforces the value of uniqueness: no copy or surrogate can have the same significance or intrinsic character as the unique original.

### *7.2.2 Completeness, condition*

Describe the condition of the documentary heritage. Depending on the nature of the document or the collection, the description will need to be sufficiently detailed to allow an appreciation of current risk and/or conservation needs, as well as establishing whether its integrity has been compromised. For example, in the case of a paper document, individual pages may be torn or incomplete or replaced by copies, or they may be missing altogether. The document may have been altered or defaced in other ways. Archival records may have been removed from their archival series or fonds, thus compromising their integrity. In the case of a motion picture film, segments may be missing or the film may be scratched or damaged.

The importance of the **carrier** as well as the **content** matters here. There is sometimes a critical relationship between the two, with one shaping the other, and the artefact value of the carrier also has to be appreciated. Some documents (such as those utilizing certain photographic colour processes) cannot be replicated exactly by any known technology. A

photographic or digital copy of a mediaeval manuscript is very different object from the original, even if the textual content can still be read easily.

In the case of *audiovisual media,* many important works survive only in incomplete form, or in "reconstructed" versions that assemble the best material from sources available at the time. Such versions may be superseded by later discoveries.

*Example:*

- *Metropolis: https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/germany_metropolis.pdf*

### 7.3 Statement of International significance

This should be written carefully and thoughtfully.

Summarise the points you have made in 7.1 and 7.2 above and make the case for **authenticity** based on the provenance of the documentary heritage.

Then explain **why this document is important to the memory of the world.** What has been its influence and impact – positive or negative – on life and culture beyond the boundaries of a nation state or region? Why would its loss impoverish the heritage of humanity? Influence can be direct and immediate, or indirect and subtle and only discernible over time. Sometimes it can be measured numerically (for example, through an Internet search); sometimes it can be inferred because of events that followed its creation.

## Section 8.0 Discussion with stakeholders

Who else has an interest in your nomination? Who else might be affected by it?

Nominations do not always come from the owners or custodians of the documentary heritage: sometimes they are submitted by others. It is obviously important, however, that owners and custodians are part of the discussion because it is the custodian who is responsible for managing the heritage and providing for its safekeeping.

Sometimes there will be wider communities with whom prior discussion is appropriate, whether for social, spiritual or professional reasons. Such discussion adds strength to a nomination and can produce additional information to be incorporated in the argument and the significance statement. It is important to also consider whether any party may be offended or aggrieved by the potential inscription of the documentary heritage – for example, whether it could breach privacy of persons living or dead, or portray a given community or section of society in a negative light. These factors do not of themselves diminish the significance of the documentary heritage, but prior consultation wherever possible will strengthen the nomination and assist the settlement.

Those who have done past research on the documentary heritage can lighten the load of the nominator by providing additional information and provide a scholarly basis for the nomination.

## Section 9.0 and 10.0 Risk assessment and management

**9.1** The survival of all documentary heritage is at risk in the long term. Risk is minimized by good professional practice in handling, storage, preservation and access practice, and by the predictability and security of its custodial situation. MoW is concerned about both the short and the longer term.

Many carriers are physically and electronically vulnerable and the practicalities of preservation are often not popularly understood. Storage and climatic conditions may be critical. Many institutions have very limited economic resources, facilities and skills to ensure longer-term preservation, and social, political and security conditions may not be conducive to document survival. MoW makes a judgment about the level of threat by taking all these factors into account. Inscription can sometimes significantly improve a document's safety and chances of proper care and long-term survival.

**10.1** **A Management plan** is highly desirable. If there is one, include it in the nomination. If there is not, explain why and provide details about proposed conservation, storage and access strategies.

Management plans can be elaborate or simple but they must be **realistic**. Most institutions do not have an ideal environment or limitless funding and just have to do the best they can for the time being – and it is important that they say so!

An ideal – *repeat, ideal* – management plan would include a statement of the significance of the documentary heritage, refer to the institution's policy and procedures for access and preservation, set out a preservation budget, describe the available conservation expertise and facilities, describe the physical environment in which the documentary heritage is held (for example, air quality, temperature and humidity, shelving, security) and include a disaster preparedness strategy.

## *A final word - the virtue of brevity*

Your nomination should be comprehensive, but it should be no longer than is necessary. Filling your nomination with unnecessary repetition or arguments that do not address the criteria only makes the task of assessment more onerous. Your nomination will be judged by its quality, not its quantity. If it exceeds, say, 15 pages, you should check to see whether everything you have included is needed to make the case for inscription. There is no mandatory minimum or maximum length – just use your common sense.

# 3. The outcome: what happens after inscription?

## *Announcement of inscription*

Successful nominations are announced in a press release issued by the Director-General, and all nominators are informed of the outcome by letter from the Secretariat. The new inscriptions are then listed on the MoW website.

## *Ceremonies and presentation of certificates with examples*

All successful nominators and custodians receive an official certificate of inscription. In the absence of any other alternative, this is simply delivered by mail. But that is missing an opportunity for promoting the inscription. A formal certificate presentation is potentially a high profile media event that benefits both the recipient institution and UNESCO. As its means permit, the UNESCO Secretariat will be happy to cooperate in such arrangements.

## *Publicity*

Custodians of inscribed heritage are encouraged to publicize their status and to draw public attention to the items that have been inscribed. For example, a number of institutions have placed inscribed items on public display; have digitized them so that they are readily accessible; have promoted the recognition through their website; and have sold reproductions as products. The only limitation is imagination.

## *Use of the UNESCO/MoW logo*

The use of the name and logo of UNESCO is subject to the prevailing rules of the Organization at any given time and unauthorized use is strictly forbidden. However, custodians of inscribed heritage are entitled to use a UNESCO/MoW logo, and are encouraged to do so. This is sent to custodians on request.

## *What if your nomination is rejected? You can apply again…*

If your nomination is unsuccessful, you can resubmit it in future rounds. However, if you submit it unchanged more than three times it will not be further accepted. So, you should review the arguments you presented and consider whether there is additional information you could offer in support of the nomination. Take into account any feedback you received from the Secretariat; and consider whether there are additional authoritative referees who could support your case.

# 4. FAQ

## *Everything you wanted to know, but were afraid to ask…*

### Digital documents, including databases and websites

If nominating a digital document or collection it is important to read the **Explanatory Note on Nominating Digital Documents for Inscription**, so that your nomination will provide the assessors with all the needed information.

### Audiovisual documents

Audiovisual media exist in a wide variety of analogue and digital formats. Identifying an "original" or earliest surviving generation is sometimes a matter of judgment. For analogue documents, the relationship between content and carrier may be important to its character. See further comments in the **Explanatory Note on the Expanded Definition of Documentary Heritage** as well as the **Explanatory Note on Inclusions and Limitations**.

### Artistic, literary and musical works

This is, by its nature, an area of unclear boundaries in which MoW has established its precedents with care. See the discussion in the **Explanatory Note on the Expanded Definition of Documentary Heritage**.

MoW does not seek to inscribe artistic, literary or musical works *as such*, based purely on their artistic, literary or musical merit. However, it does inscribe documents that show the genesis of an important single work, group of works or of a whole œuvre, or depict a prominent state of a work, and/or the biographical and societal context of an important artist or work.

To suggest a hypothetical example, one may nominate a group of letters that reveal the relationship between two Renaissance painters. These are documents. But their actual paintings would be ineligible for nomination *unless* they had significant documentary value and satisfied the criteria for inscription on a MoW register.

- *Examples of inscriptions: Metropolis, Gutenberg Bible, Astrid Lindgren Archives, Wizard of Oz, Bayeux Tapestry, Gothic architectural drawings, Beethoven's 9th symphony MSS, the Bayasanghori Shahnameh, Carlos Gardel tango recordings, Russian posters, Song of the Nibelungs poem*:

  *https://www.unesco.org/en/memory-world/grid?hub=1081*

### Artefacts and objects

Similar issues can arise in relation to artefacts and objects. There is a sense in which

every analogue document – a book, roll of film, sound disc or even a single sheet of paper - is a physical object. Many items that one might primarily perceive as museum objects, such as stone stele, obelisks or bells, can satisfy the MoW definition of **document.** The boundaries become less clear with objects that do not obviously meet that test, but have such an integral association with a documentary heritage collection that to exclude them from the collection might detract from its significance. Such cases are unusual and, again, will be treated with care.

### Exclusions from the international register

As a practical necessity, experience has shown that certain types of document should not normally be considered for inscription on the International MoW Register. Two indicative examples are the papers of contemporary political leaders and political parties, and national constitutions (or similar documents), as discussed in the **Explanatory Note on Inclusions and Limitations**.

### "Whole of institution" nominations

While the nomination of a collection, a fonds or a group of collections and fonds is welcome, the nomination of the *entire contents* of an archival, library or museum institution is unlikely to be successful, unless it demonstrates a significance, unity and coherence beyond the *coincidence* of material which happens to reside in the same institution. Further, such nominations do not usually meet the test of being closed and finite – the holdings of the institution are constantly changing.

### Monetary value

Some items on MoW registers have considerable monetary value. The very fact of achieving inscription may have the effect of enhancing that value in some quarters. However, the monetary value of any item, collection or fonds is **irrelevant** to its significance in the MoW context. The Programme does not take account of such monetary value.

### Ownership, custody, copyright and management

Nomination and inscription on a MoW register does not in any way affect existing ownership, possession, control or copyright in the documentary heritage. UNESCO does not gain any form of proprietorial interest. However, there is an *implied* commitment by the owners of the heritage that it will be managed and cared for properly. Inscription also means that UNESCO has a continuing and informed right to monitor this commitment and the well-being of the inscribed material and may periodically contact custodians for this purpose. That is why the nomination document asks you for such details as storage conditions, security and details of the management plan relating to the material.

### Review and removal

Inscription is deemed as permanent, but there are circumstances under which they can

be removed from a register. Among the possible reasons are serious deterioration or damage to the heritage that destroys its significance, or if a reassessment demonstrates the ineligibility of the documentary heritage against the criteria under which it was inscribed.

Such a decision would not be taken lightly. It would follow the due process set out in **Section 8.9** of the *General Guidelines*.

### What does nomination cost?

Nothing but preparation time. UNESCO does not levy a fee for receiving or processing a MoW nomination.

### Why do you have to nominate "originals"? Why won't copies do?

The "original" is where maximum information is found and authenticity is verifiable. In most cases there is only one original. See **Section 8.3.3** of the *General Guidelines*.

Where originals do not survive, MoW seeks to ensure that the earliest surviving generation or copy is identified by the nominator. This may be a matter of research and judgment; for example, in the days before printing, manuscripts were copied by hand and may exist in several variant versions, which may be of great antiquity. Closer to the present, the question of identifying an original can become more complex – and even impossible.

In such cases, where documentary heritage may exist in multiple copies and variant versions of equal validity – for example, early printed books or feature films in differing versions or multiple languages – it may be preferable to nominate the **work** that exists in a number of exemplars, rather than one specific item. All exemplars would then be listed in the nomination (or even added afterward, if further exemplars are subsequently located).

*Examples:*

- *Metropolis: https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/germany_metropolis.pdf*
- *Gutenberg Bible: https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/gutenberg_bible_nomination_form.pdf*

### Why "closed" and "fixed"?

It is not possible to reliably assess a collection, fonds or group that is in a fluid state, nor could UNESCO award a MoW logo to documentary heritage whose character might change without its knowledge. That is why what is nominated must be finite and preciselydefined. Incremental growth in an inscribed collection can be accommodated through a supplementary nomination process: see **Section 8.7**of the *General Guidelines* (Additions to existing inscriptions). Further, an exception is made for certain types of born digital objects. See the **Explanatory Note on Nominating Digital Documents for Inscription**.

### Does the nominator have to own the material being nominated?

No. While it is unusual for nominations to be submitted by parties other than the owner or custodian of the documentary heritage, it is permissible.

### Does the nominator or the custodian have to be a public institution?

No. MoW makes no distinction between public or private, commercial or non-commercial organizations, nor between institutions and individuals.

*Examples:*

- *Carlos Gardel:* *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/uruguay_records_carlos_gardel.pdf*
- *Christopher Okigbo Collection:* *https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/50africaokigbopapers.pdf*

### Does material have to be old to be nominated?

No. Age and significance are unrelated.

## References


1. **General Guidelines of the Memory of the World Programme**: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378405

2. **UNESCO 2015 Recommendation concerning the preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage including in digital form**: https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-preservation-and-access-documentary-heritage-including-digital-form

3. **Explanatory Note on Nominating Digital Documents for Inscription:** https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/nominating_digital_documents_inscription_note_en.pdf

4. **Explanatory Note on the Expanded Definition of Documentary Heritage:** https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/expanded_definition_documentary_heritage.pdf

5. **Explanatory Note on Inclusions and Limitations:** https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/explanatory_note_inclusions_limitations_en.pdf