**Archives at NCBS**

**Sensitivity Check**

v1. February 16 2023

Hannah James Louwerse, Archives at NCBS

**What is a Sensitivity Check?**

The aim of the sensitivity check is to quickly identify any material within a collection which contains sensitive content during the creation of the finding aid. “Sensitive” material is defined here as material that either violates a person’s rights, could harm the person in question or their family if it were made public or could possibly sour the relationship between a person and the Archive. The sensitivity check also draws attention to any culturally sensitive material which might require additional context added to the catalogue entry. For example, the uses of slurs now considered derogatory and offensive.

By having the sensitivity check at this point in the process it is easier and faster to make non-sensitive material available to the public. It establishes a shorthand for everyone in the Archive to follow when they wish to use material. Of course, this is only temporary as all sensitive material should be reviewed and be made accessible at some point in the future. This can be done by placing an appropriate time embargo on the material or getting permission from the person or their kin to make it available.

**How to establish if something is sensitive or not?**

Below are two lists, one for information deemed not sensitive, the green list, and the other with information deemed sensitive, the red list. The information in these lists applies to both information on donors and third parties whose information is mentioned in donated material, unless otherwise indicated. Please note that what is currently deemed sensitive will change and so the list will have to be reviewed every so often.

Once it has been determined whether the material is sensitive or not, it should be indicated in the correct finding aid column, with red or green respectively. This is where it can be seen by anyone who wishes to use the material. It is then on a later date the red labelled material can be reviewed.

**List of non-sensitive material (green)**

* *Public information*

The first question to ask when checking for sensitivity is, is the information is common knowledge or has been published in some way? If it is, then it is deemed not sensitive and given a green label. Public information can therefore include personal data such as date of birth or wedding announcements and any personal information on a person if it is public including, but not limited to, a person’s sexuality or political allegiances. Additionally, any crimes and misdemeanours, including plagiarism and affairs, can be deemed not sensitive if they are public knowledge.

* *Material with permissions*

If the Archive has been granted permission to make material available with the person being fully informed on where the information has been made accessible, then the material can be given a green label.

* *Academic records*

Any academic records, including exam results, can be made public if the material is older than 30 years and the release of this information will not damage the person’s career.

* *Children*

Information and images of children can be made public if they are over 30 years old. This is to ensure the children in the material are old enough to object via a takedown request.

* *Slander*

Cases of slander or bad mouthing within a professional academic context can be made public as they offer important contextual information to the material. However, it should only be made public if the material is older than 30 years and, if the person is still alive, they have stopped working within that specific field. This is to ensure the information does not hinder their career.

**List of sensitive material (red)**

* *Material under 30 years old*

Any material which is under 30 years old should not be made public, unless it is already public information, or the correct permissions have been granted.

* *Medical records*

All medical records should not be made public while the person is alive. In cases of pregnancy, this information can only be made public if the person who was born from said pregnancy has passed away. Hereditary diseases can only be made public if the grandchildren of the person in question are over 30.

* *Personal information*

Personal information such as addresses, emails, phone numbers, but also passports, visa applications and financial records, which are not publicly available are considered sensitive. But only in cases where the person is still alive or has passed away in the last 30 years.

* *Slander and insults*

Any personal slander or insults which has nothing to do with their work and/or could put a person or their relatives or close associates in danger if it is made public, is sensitive and should not be made public.

* *Personal identity*

Any information on a person’s identity, including gender, sexuality, religion etc., which is not public, is sensitive if the person is still alive or has died in the last 30 years. And it should also be given a red label if making the information could still put their relatives or close associates in danger.

**Cultural sensitivity check**

History, famously, is written by the visitors and archives are mostly filled with the material of people who were, at the time, deemed important to history at the time of archiving. However, as attitudes towards certain groups have changed and people are uncovering a far more multi-layered approach to history, certain archival material is seen in a radically different light. Materials held by archives are seen as offensive, wrong, and not representing what really happened. It is therefore the archivist’s job to give appropriate context to the material, which helps users of the archive understand how, where, why it was created and who was the creator and what was their position at the time. There are many examples of archives offering cultural context to their material and attempting to decolonise their archive, most prominently in places like Canada and Australia, where they are attempting to contextualise indigenous histories.

 This information on cultural sensitivity should be included in the material summary in the finding aid.