Class B
Places of Deposit Program Review 2017:

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Class B Places of Deposit (PODs) are approved to hold original public records not considered to be permanent but which are of local interest. These are classified as 'temporary records." Class A PODs located in Beechworth, Bendigo and Geelong are accredited to hold permanent public records.

Public records transferred to PODs remain in the custody and control of the Keeper of Public Records and must be made available to the public upon request free-of-charge and within a reasonable period of time.

Since the program began in the mid 1980's, 151 Class B PODs have been accredited by the Minister. Many of those appointments have expired.

This review

Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) is finalising a review of the Class B POD program to ensure that the mechanisms, structures and business activities support an efficient, and sustainable program into the future. The review included a survey completed by representatives from 90 PODs (a 60% response rate) and a number of face-to-face consultations.

The context for the POD program

The ongoing context for the POD program is contained within PROV's *Corporate Plan 2017-18 to 2020-21*. One of the three outcomes that represent the ongoing goals for the organisation over the four years of the current plan is:

> **Utilisation**: The records of government are used by communities to connect to their history and culture.

Supporting this outcome is a Strategic Initiative of *Increase community engagement with public records*. This includes the delivery of a targeted Places of Deposit program that improves the preservation of, and access to, temporary public records held in local communities.

Key findings from the POD survey

The program is of value

- Records held at the great majority of PODs are accessible to the community in a timely way, and that the collections are being used.
- The access to public records by both the community and government agency staff demonstrates the value of these records being held in a local community.
- The majority of PODs have catalogued, or are in the process of cataloguing, their collections.
- The storage conditions of most PODs are very stable and have often improved since appointment.
- Participation in the POD program is considered to be beneficial by the majority of survey respondents and there is prestige for an organisation to be classified as a POD.
- There is strong support for maintaining the POD program and connection with PROV is highly valued.

Things we can do better

- While many PODs are satisfied with the program, there is room for improvement.
- PODs need to be reminded of the requirement to notify PROV if and when they change location so that appropriate inspection action can be taken.
- There is a lack of awareness of the purpose of the program, of POD requirements and responsibilities and of what constitutes a public record.
- The high rate of respondents who said that they did not know whether or not they held temporary or permanent public records again indicates the need for continuing education about public records and POD responsibilities.
- The high 'Yes' self-reported response rate regarding the holding of permanent records indicates a need for PROV to clarify these holdings and work with PODs on an appropriate transfer program.
- Many PODs do not hold public records of either classification.
- Clear, detailed and timely information on POD responsibilities and online attestations will need to be provided.
- It is important to foster clear communications and access pathways for PODs to provide them with advice and support in a variety of ways.
- Action should be taken to improve liaison between local agencies and PODs, with a view to ensuring the preservation of temporary records of local community value.

The findings from the POD survey were in line with feedback from consultations held with PROV staff and POD representatives.

Key recommendations

The POD program should be limited to those organisations holding public records.

PROV's *Corporate Plan* provides the direction for the program which has a focus on "temporary public records held in local communities." It appears that a significant number of PODs do not hold any public records. If an organisation with no public records is not in the program, there would no longer be any requirement for them to meet the POD storage standards or to complete attestations. The fact that an organisation is not a POD would not prevent them from re-applying to become a POD in the future should the organisation receive a commitment from a government agency to receive their temporary records.

Accreditation as a POD should only expire if an organisation no longer meets the appointment conditions and an online attestation process should be introduced with a requirement that this be completed every two years.

The current process for reaccreditation as a POD relies on an organisation managing the POD to contact PROV to attest that their appointment conditions have not changed. The majority of POD appointments have now expired.

For the sake of clarity, consistency and to minimise the administration required, it is recommended that PODs meeting the revised appointment criteria should be accredited for an ongoing period and only have their accreditation terminated when they no longer met any of the appointment conditions. In this arrangement, PODs would be required to complete an online attestation every two years to maintain their appointment status. This would significantly reduce the administration involved in the reappointment process and provide certainty to PODs and a regular connection to PROV.

A number of information resources should be produced for PODs and activities undertaken to promote the program to government agencies and the wider community.

There is a lack of awareness of the purpose of the program, of POD requirements and responsibilities and of what constitutes a permanent or temporary public record. It is important to foster clear communications and access pathways for PODs to provide them with information, advice and support in a variety of ways. Action is also required to improve liaison between local agencies and PODs, with a view to ensuring the preservation of temporary records of local community value.

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An internal PROV audit of all PODs should be undertaken.

An internal audit of files relating to each POD, supported by direct consultation with organisations managing PODs, will ensure that all records relating to public records in POD custody are current and up-to-date. In particular, the audit will confirm POD public record holdings and identify any permanent public records which should eventually be transferred to PROV or a Class A POD. Given the scope of the program, this work will take some time to complete.