Broadcast Records of the Voice of America

The VOA Media Asset Management Branch is assessing broadcast records dating from early 2000 up to 2013 for disposition. This mix of permanent and non-permanent media records exist on obsolete carriers and may become available or destroyed as VOA completes its review. Media records are not available for public request or inquiry during the VOA assessment.

As an entity of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, a U.S. federal agency, the Voice of America is required to transfer records that have permanent value and warrant preservation to the National Archives and Records Administration once the agency no longer needs them to conduct regular current business. This is also true for VOA’s sister federal entity, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting. USAGM’s grantees, RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN, are not considered federal agencies and are not mandated to archive records to NARA.

Permanent records for VOA and OCB may include media in the form of published radio and television broadcasts disseminated abroad (i.e., published, aired, or otherwise made available to the intended audience). NARA appraises and accepts records of federal agencies that fall under the Federal Records Act through the scheduling process. Because agency programs vary in importance, the number of record series or systems designated as permanent will also vary. Federal agencies are given unique identifying numbers, known as record groups, and agency records are scheduled and cataloged in accordance with their assigned record group. Records of VOA and OCB can be found in record group 517, USAGM, and record group 306, U.S. Information Agency, USAGM’s predecessor agency. For more information about records that have been permanently accessioned at NARA, please see https://www.archives.gov/research/start

Due to the large volume of programs produced by VOA, only a small fraction of recordings have been scheduled as permanent. At NARA, researchers will find permanent records for VOA broadcasts that have met certain selection criteria and generally were produced in the English language. NARA considers programs to have permanent value based on one or more of the following criteria: programs submitted or selected for awards and honors; programs or original coverage by VOA or OCB of significant historical events or personages; programs selected by the various language services that reflect and document important milestones in the broadcast history of each language service; media appearances, press conferences, speeches, remarks of the members of agency; media appearances, press conferences, speeches, remarks, etc., by the heads of OCB and VOA; VOA or OCB coverage of presidential speeches, press conferences, trips, etc., including coverage of their families, when available; and/or coverage of visits to the United States by foreign heads of state.

All other broadcasts have been determined to be temporary and will eventually be eligible for destruction or donation to an appropriate institution that will provide public access to them. NARA regards broadcasts in languages other than English, generally as temporary, often because English-language descriptors are not available or the content is not reflective of NARA’s selection criteria.

When the Voice of America, MAM Branch, prepares broadcast media content for transfer, it groups the content by office of origin (separating content produced by the VOA News Center and each of VOA’s 47 language services), date-range and format. The MAM Branch then works with the USAGM records manager and NARA to determine final disposition, designating them as either temporary (disposable) or permanent (archival). Broadcast records that NARA releases as ‘temporary’ may be offered to the Library of Congress or other repository approved by NARA. Records that the Library of Congress declines may be destroyed. If another cultural heritage institution or repository expresses interest and has the capacity to maintain a collection and provide free access to the collection, a donation or permanent loan agreement may result.

Examples of collections at repositories other than NARA or Library of Congress:

Leo Sarkisian ‘Music Time in Africa’ at the University of Michigan. http://mtia.sites.uofmhosting.net/

Willis Conover Jazz Collection at the University of North Texas https://library.unt.edu/music/collections/willis-conover/

Ukrainian Collection – at the Ukrainian Archive-Museum https://www.umacleveland.org/

Judy Massa’s ‘Country Music USA Collection’ at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum https://countrymusichalloffame.org/

Media records will be offered to NARA and will be processed as noted above. Potential repositories interested in obtaining more information about maintaining a collection may submit an inquiry to VOA-Library@voanews.com