The Archival Collection of the Office of NIH History is not an official archive. It shall accept select materials relating to the 27 Institutes of the National Institutes of Health and direct inquiries on document accession to the following agencies consulting with the records manager of the National Institutes of Health Office of Management and Assessment: The National Archives and Records Administration, The National Library of Medicine and agencies related to the National Institutes of Health. The Office of NIH History will accept select non-permanent materials that assist with research. Examples include NIH almanacs, directories and collections that explain the role of NIH in the history of a government established biomedical agency. Any of these accessions would be done in collaboration with the NIH Records manager, NLM and NARA. The purpose of the Archival Collection is to broaden and deepen NIH’s understanding of its history to be accessed in one place.

The current collection holds print copies of NIH publications. There is a small oral history collection. The Office History collection primarily maintains and seeks those collections that do not fall within the categories of permanent retention in the National Archives records schedule. Files are arranged according to the office file plan: Biographical files, Institutes Reference files, General NIH History pamphlets and Subject files for reference use.

The purpose of the Office of NIH History is providing materials to digitize and include in the Internet Archive or the NLM digital repository for preservation. Any original photographs in the collection are at risk due to fluctuations in temperature and humidity control. This policy reflects changes to the nature of the collection as of 2012 when primary source materials, such as photographs and audio-visual materials were sent to the National Library of Medicine and the National Archives.

The Office of NIH History collects and maintains information so as to convey history of each NIH institute. The Office shall not collect primary source materials of scientists or researchers on the NIH campus, the Office shall not collect books except those relating sources used from the Office. When files are donated to the Office, the archivist and director review the materials in conjunction with the NIH Records manager, the National Library of Medicine head of collections and the National Archives point of contact for NIH to determine the repository for any paper, photographic or archival resource. Due to space constraints the office will encourage potential donors to contact alternative depositories.