

Canada's Archives: A vision and areas of focus for 2015-2025

Community consultation

In January 2014, the archival community convened the *Canadian Archives Summit: Towards a New Blueprint for Canada's Recorded Memory*. Held in Toronto and live streamed to more than 695 participants at 34 sites across Canada, the Summit allowed the archival community to consider its future and to discuss what Canadians need and expect of archives and archivists in the digital environment. The event was the culmination of a number of developments affecting archives – challenges in succession planning and a changing workforce; new user approaches and expectations; a number of Expert Panel studies focused on archives; as well as reductions in government investments in culture and heritage in the wake of the global economic crisis. These developments were far-reaching, and were emerging at a time when challenges of the digital environment were being acutely felt by Canadian archives.

Coming out of the Summit, the Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ), Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), Canadian Council of Archives (CCA), Council of Provincial and Territorial Archivists (CPTA) and Library and Archives Canada (LAC) came together to develop a renewed vision and areas of focus for the Canadian Archival System. Since its first meeting in September 2014, the Canadian Archival System Working Group has served as a forum to advance discussion of the future of Canada's archives in a way that is strategic, focused on results, and participatory.

Canada's Archives: A vision and areas of focus for 2015-2025 is the outcome of the Working Group's discussion to-date. The strategy document has been reviewed and refined by the executive councils and boards of the AAQ, ACA, CCA, CPTA and LAC, and will be shared with archives and archivists, with users, and with others in the community for a period of consultation.

At this time, the Working Group invites the Canadian Archival System and the broader archival community to provide feedback on the vision, areas of focus and related actions described in the strategy; and to provide comments on how members of the system can best work together to realize these over the next 10-year period.

Please comment on the draft strategy document by completing the [online survey](#) by August 1, 2015. For additional information on the Working Group or the strategy document, please contact your respective association or council.

The Working Group looks forward to continuing discussion of the strategy with members of the Canadian Archival System, and to planning an official launch of the strategy in late 2015.

Sincerely,

Association des archivistes du Québec
Association of Canadian Archivists
Canadian Council of Archives
Council of Provincial and Territorial Archivists
Library and Archives Canada

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Preface

More than at any period in history, archives and institutions that care for them play a key role in society. The effective management of records and information is critical to good governance today, and essential to building the archives of Canada's democracy tomorrow. And with the momentum of open government initiatives, citizens' expectations of archives are only increasing.

This confidence in records, archives and democracy is at the heart of the *Universal Declaration on Archives*. Adopted in 2011, the declaration positions archives as "... authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions [and playing] ... an essential role in the development of societies..." And this idea has been further developed more recently by two respected Expert Panels, one from the Royal Society of Canada and the other from the Council of Canadian Academies.

In the digital environment however, the place of records in society has changed, and with it the work of records and information managers and archivists. Today, the archival perspective is more important and not less so. This is made clear by factors like the need to manage increasing volumes of digital information; the need to respond to users' expectations for access to data, information and knowledge instantly and from anywhere; and the need to respond to citizens' interest in accessing and using historical material about their families, communities and about Canada in new and innovative ways.

But archives are also unique among documentary heritage institutions, and face a special challenge in the digital environment – a challenge driven by their core mandate to preserve and provide access to digital and analogue records and archives in perpetuity. And in the face of this challenge, archives are under pressure to respond. The report of the Council of Canadian Academies describes "... increasing indications that suggest Canada is now lagging behind other countries in its response to digital opportunities" (p. 38).

There is now a sense of urgency for archives and archivists, and for all others with an interest in records and archives, to come together and take collective action to respond to the digital environment. Only by working in collaboration will archives make the fundamental transition required to ensure full participation in the digital world.

The business of archives must continue to transform, seeing archivists reach out to records and information managers, and records creators to ensure that today's digital information is captured and preserved for tomorrow; seeing archivists put a renewed focus on ensuring the legacy of analogue material is accessible now, and well-conserved for continuing access in the future; and finally, seeing archives and archivists seek out strong and lasting alliances with communities of users, with industry and with other professionals.

Purpose

This strategy lays out four areas of focus to guide collaboration among members of the Canadian Archival System over the next 10-year period from 2015 to 2025. These areas of focus provide a framework to situate a range of activities meant to advance the management of archives for citizens; and support members of the Canadian Archival System to act on opportunities and challenges – to capture and preserve today’s digital records and information, and to continue to steward Canada’s analogue legacy.

The strategy is a high-level roadmap for collaborative action. The areas of focus that it describes are not the responsibility of any single member of the Canadian Archival System. Rather, the strategy seeks to engage all those with an interest in archives to move forward collectively, on behalf of all Canadians.

The strategy was developed through a collaborative process involving a number of key players in the Canadian Archival System. Likewise, the strategy will be implemented collaboratively. Progress against the strategy will be monitored regularly by a Steering Committee.

The strategy should be seen as a complement to the individual program and service offerings of all 800 of Canada’s archives – in federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions; in religious organizations, non-profit and for-profit corporations; as well as in local memory institutions in communities across Canada. It should also be seen as a complement to the initiatives of Canada’s records and information management and archives professional associations; archives councils and other similar organizations; as well as allies in academia, information and communications technology (ICT), and other sectors of society.

As Canada approaches its 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017, members of the Canadian Archival System will define a path forward in collaboration to ensure that Canada’s archives remains strong and available for access at the 200th anniversary and beyond.

Concepts

The strategy is built on four key concepts that serve as a framework for the vision and areas of focus that follow.

1. The success of any strategy for Canada’s archives has a direct link to the effective and efficient management of records and information today.

This strategy defines *RECORDS* as information created, received, and maintained by an individual, family or organization for personal or business purposes, for legal obligations, or for both. The work of Canada’s records and information management professionals, and of their respective professional associations to establish appropriate processes, and to plan and develop information technology (IT) platforms to manage information are essential precursors to the long-term preservation and access to this information.

2. The concept of archives is multi-faceted, incorporating notions of archives as an object or group of objects, as a physical space or organization, and as a professional calling.

This strategy defines *ARCHIVES* as:

- Records created, accumulated or used by an individual, family or organization in the course of its activities and identified for preservation.

- An organization that manages the records of individuals, families or other organizations; and / or a division within an organization mandated to maintain its own particular records.
- A professional discipline focused on the management of records, and / or on the administration of organizations mandated to preserve and provide access to them over time.

3. The Canadian Archival System brings together Canada’s records, its organizations and its professionals – essentially, those with a shared interest and an agreement to work cooperatively, and to use common standards, processes and tools to advance the archival pursuit.

The strategy defines the *CANADIAN ARCHIVAL SYSTEM* in a way that reflects the multi-faceted understanding of archives described above. Members of the system include:

- Canada’s federal, provincial and territorial government archives.
- Councils and related organizations at the national, provincial and territorial levels.
- Archives in non-profit and for-profit Canadian organizations.
- Archives professionals and their respective associations.
- Religious and community archives.
- University and academic archives.
- Archives in libraries, museums and historical societies, etc.

Together, members of the Canadian Archival System work to acquire, preserve and make accessible records and archives that touch all aspects of Canadian life; to develop the people and competencies required to support the archival endeavor; and to build the capacity required to ensure that Canadians are able to access records now and into the future.

4. Members of the Canadian Archival System work in close collaboration with the archival community.

This strategy defines the *ARCHIVAL COMMUNITY* as a diverse group, or groups, of individuals and organizations brought together by a shared interest in records and archives, and by a shared concern that they are preserved for access now and into the future. The community includes users of records and archives (e.g., academics, genealogists, historians, professional researchers, Canadian public), but it also includes creators of records and information; industry and the ICT sector; all levels of government; and other cultural and documentary heritage institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, galleries).

Vision

Archives preserve decisions, actions and memories. Archives are maintained on behalf of all Canadians – citizens and society, the archival community, and all others with an interest in Canada.

By working together in a coordinated, collaborative and inclusive manner, and by engaging communities who share our concern about records and archives, members of the Canadian Archival System strive to ensure open access to society's analogue and digital records to support accountability, transparency, and the effective functioning of democracy; as well as the development of meaningful personal and collective identities. The Canadian Archival System also encourages research and innovation to support the use of archives in today's knowledge economy.

Areas of focus

Over the next 10-year period, members of the Canadian Archival System will work in collaboration, alongside the broader archival community to achieve this vision by focusing in four areas:

- The Records – Building the archives of Canadians for Canadians, and for the world.
- The People – Engaging all with an interest in records and archives.
- The Capacity – Making archives sustainable today and tomorrow.
- The Profile – Making archives visible.

The Records – Building the archives of Canadians for Canadians, and for the world

Common processes and tools must be developed and used by all organizations involved in the acquisition, preservation and provision of access to archives. These processes and tools must be subject to continual review to ensure a close alignment with the evolving ways that society creates, uses and accesses records and information. They must be designed in ways that support archives to work together where collaborative approaches are of benefit.

1.0 Standards, best practices and policies

- 1.0.1 Identify Canadian experts, and engage them in the development of mechanisms to maintain national standards and best practices over time.
- 1.0.2 Identify existing and required standards, best practices and policies in the areas of records and archives; and increase information about them to encourage their uptake in Canada. Relevant areas include but are not limited to:
 - Administration and management
 - Government records and information management
 - Appraisal and acquisition
 - Arrangement and description
 - Digitization
 - Analogue and digital preservation
 - Interoperability and open data
 - Services
- 1.0.3 Foster relationships with other organizations involved in the development of standards, best practices and policies generally (e.g., Canadian Standards Board, Society of American Archivists, International Council on Archives, International Standards Organization).
- 1.0.4 Build Canada's presence in international standards work by:
 - Developing a presence on international standards committees and groups, and by documenting and promoting this participation.

- Developing mechanisms to bring international expertise back to the system.
 - Increasing engagement by sharing information on standards, best practices, and policies with international partners.
- 1.0.5 Beginning with the *Rules for Archival Description*, take steps to ensure that Canada’s national standards are up-to-date and reflect the needs of the digital environment.

1.1 Acquisition

- 1.1.1 Develop and formalize a national approach that fosters collaboration among Canadian organizations that acquire records and archives, built on shared processes and tools to support coordination between organizations.
- Establish a steering committee of Canada's federal, provincial and territorial archives, and other interested organizations (e.g., university libraries and archives, religious archives, museums and galleries, etc.), to consider what is required to coordinate acquisition activities in Canada.
 - Foster an exchange of information in areas such as collecting mandates, acquisition criteria and strategies, and other scope-defining documents related to private archives across Canadian organizations.
 - Undertake a gap analysis and an assessment of best fit.
- 1.1.2 Establish mechanisms to exchange information in areas related to government records and information, including records disposition, appraisal strategies, etc., across Canadian organizations.
- 1.1.3 Explore options to coordinate approaches to web harvesting as an acquisition mechanism, including ingest, preservation and access to harvested materials.

1.2 Preservation

- 1.2.1 Establish Canadian centers of expertise in analogue preservation by:
- Communicating the existence of in-demand resources that reside in Canadian organizations (e.g., specialized tools, equipment, expertise, etc.).
 - Establishing permanent expert groups in key areas and for key formats.
- 1.2.2 Identify gaps in analogue preservation, and establish priorities for collective action (e.g., key at-risk holdings, marked lack of expertise, capacity, etc.).
- 1.2.3 Develop case studies of collaborative approaches to managing and preserving digital records and archives; and based on these, seek opportunities to increase collaboration in the preservation of digital records and archives – among larger organizations in the Canadian Archival System, and between these organizations and the broader community (e.g., academia, ICT sector, etc.).
- 1.2.4 Undertake an assessment of options that would enable smaller members of the Canadian Archival System to develop basic digital preservation skills and capacity, employing collaborative models.

1.3 Discovery and access

- 1.3.1 Continue the ongoing development of Canada’s national union catalogue for archives (i.e., ARCHIVESCANA.ca), and develop options to increase participation by smaller or independent organizations (i.e., those outside of existing contributing networks).
- 1.3.2 Develop strategies to prepare existing records, archives and data sets for release as open data, and to incorporate records and archives into open linked data projects.

- 1.3.3 Establish mechanisms to exchange information on various aspects of open government activities, across Canadian organizations.
- 1.3.4 Develop best practices to optimize search and discovery of archives on the broader Internet, and engage defined user groups in this work.
- 1.3.5 Identify viable models for platforms to incorporate user-contributed content to improve access to archives, and share these models across the system.

The People – Engaging all with an interest in records and archives

All stakeholders of archives must be actively engaged with the archival endeavor, and with one another. They must foster open, generative and flexible relationships, and must remain open to new approaches. By engaging all with an interest in or a stake in records and archives, archives will be better positioned to respond to the rapid and ongoing changes in the digital environment.

2.0 Workforce and professional development

- 2.0.1 Survey archival employers to better understand the diverse range of required skills and competencies, and develop a standard set of competencies for archival workforce.
- 2.0.2 Develop a profile of the current archives workforce, and identify trends and gaps, as well as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (e.g., records managers, IT specialists, preservation experts, database designers, marketing and promotion, digital standards, etc.), with a view to making recommendations to further developing the existing archives workforce.
- 2.0.3 Develop strategies to increasingly engage new professionals in archives work (i.e., both archives professionals and non-professionals) to ensure that the system's workforce is diverse, multi-faceted, and aligned with the skills and competencies required in digital environment.
- 2.0.4 Enhance relationships among national, provincial and territorial, and regional archival professional associations to increase the coordination of their respective professional development offerings.
- 2.0.5 Identify emerging leaders in the archival community, and make sure these individuals have access to leadership development programs and career pathways.

2.1 Engagement

- 2.1.1 Develop common strategies to engage other members of the archival community in archives work:
 - 2.1.1.1 Engage volunteers to develop capacity within archives, and to establish special interest groups (e.g., enthusiasts, students, genealogists, etc.) that can be leveraged for archives projects.
 - 2.1.1.2 Engage First Nations communities to identify existing opportunities and promote archives education, and to introduce archival skills and competencies into the management of records created and maintained within these communities.
 - 2.1.1.3 Engage users of records and archives (e.g., academics, genealogists, historians, professional researchers, Canadian public) to increase their understanding of new approaches to programs and services, and of other initiatives being undertaken to respond to the digital environment.
 - 2.1.1.4 Engage creators of records and information to ensure that creators understand what is required to maintain reliable and authentic digital content over time, and that they are aware of available resources to help them maintain their digital information.
 - 2.1.1.5 Engage industry, especially the ICT sector, to develop solutions for challenges faced by archives, such as the capture of digital records and information, digital preservation, migration, access and use, etc.

- 2.1.1.6 Engage all levels of government to strengthen linkages between government information and accountability, transparency and good governance.
- 2.1.1.7 Engage other cultural and memory institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, galleries) to link archives to their programs in ways that reach Canadians

2.2 Research and innovation

- 2.2.1 Identify ways to promote Canadian research in and about the records and information management, and archives fields undertaken by both academics and practitioners.
- 2.2.2 Identify approaches to increase the dissemination of Canadian and international research findings in records and information management, archives, information technologies, etc., and to link these findings to archives work through continuing education, conferences and journals and other publications.

The Capacity – Making archives sustainable today and tomorrow

A range of innovative approaches to resourcing and organizational capacity must be in place to support acquisition, preservation and access to records and archives in perpetuity. These approaches must be founded on business models that recognize the fact that in an environment of limited resources archives must seek to be perennially self-sustaining.

3.0 Value and impact

- 3.0.1 Establish connections with allies already involved in work to define the value of culture and heritage (e.g., tourism sector, libraries, museums and galleries) in Canada and internationally.
- 3.0.2 Develop models to qualify and quantify how records and archives contribute to cultural and economic measures of Canadian society, as well as to present information on the programs, activities and collections in Canada's archives.
- 3.0.3 Foster dialogue with academic researchers and statisticians to ensure that records and archives are on the radar when surveys or other activities are planned and undertaken.

3.1 Recognizing total costs

- 3.1.1 Develop models to depict the total cost to acquire, preserve, and provide access to records and archives in the analogue and digital environments.
- 3.1.2 Develop strategies to ensure that the archival community recognizes total costs, especially key groups like donors, academics, governments, etc.
- 3.1.3 Engage academics, professional associations, research granting bodies, etc., to ensure that grant submissions include:
 - An acknowledgement of the availability and accessibility of relevant records to fulfill the proposed project (e.g., a research schedule that recognizes processes to provide access to required records under access for information legislation, etc.).
 - A set of provisions to resource work to be undertaken by archives in order to fulfill the proposed project, including but not limited to digitization, access to complex databases or other formats, etc.
 - Clauses requiring deposit of research outputs within archives organizations as a precondition to fulfilling grant stipulations.

3.2 Funding and partnerships

- 3.2.1 Explore models to introduce service fees for those requests that extend beyond basic research and use, as well as models to see archives receive compensation for the commercial use of material in their collections.
- 3.2.2 Create common strategies and approaches to support archives to engage private sector partners to fund projects and initiatives, and to disseminate and communicate these strategies broadly (e.g., at conferences, professional development offerings, etc.).
- 3.2.3 Develop standard partnering and collaborative arrangements to increase access to records and archives online, including through licenses.
- 3.2.4 Promote existing government funding opportunities (e.g., Young Canada Works program), and engage funders with a view to seeking equity with other funding streams in the culture and heritage fields (e.g., arts, museums).

The Profile – Making archives visible

Archives must be made visible – this includes archival records, archival organizations and archival professionals and other archives’ workers. To promote a coherent profile for archives, an increasingly coordinated approach to internal communications, advocacy, marketing and outreach must be developed and implemented.

4.0 Advocacy

- 4.0.1 Develop mechanisms to increase regular communications with all levels of government on issues that impact records and archives with a view to influencing policy and decision-making to increase access for Canadians.
- 4.0.2 Develop a toolkit to support organizations who undertake mass and social media campaigns, public speaking, research, etc., on issues of relevance to archives.
- 4.0.3 Draft an advocacy strategy to align and coordinate messaging across organizations in the Canadian Archival System.

4.1 Marketing and outreach

- 4.1.1 Develop a brand or profile for Canadian archives based on a set of main messages, and clear objectives and timelines to engage targeted stakeholders using both traditional and social media.
- 4.1.2 Engage universities (e.g., academics, faculties, libraries), professional associations, research granting bodies, and other related organizations to ensure proper citation of records and archives (i.e., as a parallel to ethical research standards) with a view to increasing their visibility.
- 4.1.3 Develop archives education toolkits for primary, secondary and post-secondary students to increase awareness and use of primary sources.
- 4.1.4 Develop strategies to link records and archives to contemporary issues and events.

Next steps

The vision, areas of focused and related actions described in this strategy are the result of extensive discussion among members of the Working Group –AAQ, ACA, CCA, CPTA and LAC. The ideas expressed here also build on the strong foundation established during the Canadian Archives Summit in January 2014.

The Working Group's immediate next step is to share this strategy document with the Canadian Archival System and the broader archival community for comment. This period of consultation is planned from April to July 2015, and should be considered as the first step in a much larger effort to move the Canadian Archival System forward over the next 10-year period.

Over late summer-early fall 2015, the Working Group will consolidate comments received from the community in order to prepare a final strategy document. An official launch of the strategy will be planned in late 2015 to kick-off implementation and the development of targeted action plans.

Drafting a vision, areas of focus and related actions for collaboration between members of the Canadian Archival System and the broader archival community has been a significant undertaking. While nowhere in the preceding strategy document does the Working Group propose an approach for governance, roles and responsibilities or resources, it is clear that engagement and an ongoing commitment will be required by all members of the Canadian Archival System in order to achieve the vision described above, and to move forward together. A Steering Committee will need to be established, and mechanisms put in place to review the strategy regularly and to monitor associated action plans.

At this point, the Working Group is seeking input from the Canadian Archival System and the broader archival community through a period of consultation – not just on the vision, areas of focus and related actions contained in the strategy document, but also on how members of the system can best work together to realize the strategy moving forward.

Members of the Working Group have an ongoing commitment to working in collaboration to advance this strategy – Canada's national associations and council, as well as the federal, provincial and territorial archives. This alone is not enough – these founding members must be joined by others in the system, as well as by all in the archival community who are ready to work with archives and archivists on shared approaches.

The Working Group is pleased to issue an open call for feedback, and sessions are planned at both the AAQ Congrès 2015 and the ACA Annual Conference 2015 to socialize this strategy.

Please send your comments using the online survey no later than August 1, 2015:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CanadianArchivalSystem>

Please also feel free to contact your respective association or council for any additional information – AAQ (Marie-Pierre.Aube@concordia.ca), ACA (kaharvey@uoguelph.ca), CCA (ljlwilson@uvic.ca), CPTA (Fred.Farrell@gnb.ca), and LAC (guy.berthiaume@bac-lac.gc.ca / hilary.morgan@bac-lac.gc.ca).