

## **Halifax Regional Municipality Archives' Submission to the Royal Society of Canada's Expert Panel on the Future of Libraries and Archives in Canada**

Thank you to the Royal Society of Canada for this opportunity to comment on the future of archives in Canada, and thank you to the panel members for your work synthesizing and analyzing our input. This submission focuses on the state of one municipal archives within the Nova Scotia and Canadian archival systems, and the framing questions regarding digitization and resources:

1. What are the main challenges of born-digital material for your institution?
2. What role libraries and archives should take in the digitization , the dissemination and the long-term preservation of Canadian heritage (print publications and archives)?
3. What percentage increase to your current budget would permit you to realize the aspirations of your users? If you received an increased budget and consistent adequate resources, describe your library/archives in 2017.

### ***Mandate and Services of HRM Archives:***

Halifax Regional Municipality Archives is a relatively recent addition to the network of archives in Nova Scotia. Established in 2006 from the repatriation of municipal records from Canada's oldest public archives, the Nova Scotia Archives, HRM Archives' mandate is to identify, acquire, preserve and promote access to municipal government and non-government archival records and publications documenting the history of our region.

HRM Archives is part of the municipality's information management unit, and is staffed by one full-time archivist supplemented by the occasional assistance of students, volunteers, and externally-funded contract archivists. HRM Archives preserves approximately 3 linear km of documents, 9,000 photographs, 20,000 maps and plans and some audio-visual material, and responds to around 60 requests per month from academics, students, local residents, developers, genealogists, media, creative artists, municipal staff and councillors, as well as managing the constant ingest of new material transferred from departments and donated by community groups. Our storage environment is adequate for most of our holdings, but does not include the specialized environment that is optimal for photographs and audio-visual holdings. Future storage space for the archives' holdings is predicated on a reduction in the storage required for paper semi-active records; we still are far from being a "paper-less" municipality, however, and long-term storage capacity is a concern.

To promote the archives to our users and new audiences, we rely primarily on our web-site, our on-line database and the municipality's social media presence. While we occasionally put on

displays, tours and other outreach activities to build awareness of our program, these can be time-consuming and a strain on resources.

Acquisition of community records is welcome but not done proactively; we respond to donations offered which fit our mandate, and participate in Nova Scotia’s Co-operative Acquisition Strategy. The transfer of municipal government records is our chief priority.

As a government archives, we do not charge for public access to our holdings. Reproduction fees are levied from public users under a cost-recovery model, while commercial users are charged higher usage fees. We have limited drop-in reference hours (9hrs/wk) and also respond to remote requests via phone or email. While we do not charge research fees, we do limit the amount of research we will do for an external client (1hr/yr). The archival program is financed through the Municipality’s Information Management budget, but has no budget dedicated for preservation or digitization.

***HRM Archives within the context of Provincial and National Archival Networks***

HRM Archives relies on the mutual support available within the provincial and national archival networks. The training, cooperative approaches and funding available through the Council of Nova Scotia Archives (CNSA) and the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) have been vital in strengthening our local archival program.

HRM Archives uses the CNSA’s Archway provincial catalogue as another means of publicizing our holdings; however we have no presence on Archives Canada, the national catalogue because there have been no uploads from Archway since before we were established. The renewed platform for Archives Canada will soon rectify this long-term problem.

There is a desperate need for a national funding program for archives. With the loss of the National Archival Development Program (NADP), archival institutions across Canada are struggling to meet their mandates to acquire and preserve documentary heritage. Of particular concern is the looming challenge of digital preservation and increasing access to digital heritage content online. For a small sum of money, the NADP had a high return on investment.

Because of the Archives’ limited resources, the majority of our efforts go into maintaining basic operations. Most of our major processing projects have only been possible because of external funding from programs such as the NADP. Since its creation in 2005, Halifax Regional Municipality Archives has received over \$50,000 in matched-funding through the NADP:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Received</b>	<b>Project</b>
<b>2005</b>	\$ 2,500.00	Preservation Assessment - to ensure our new facility met preservation standards and to recommend improvements
<b>2006</b>	\$ 8,450.00	Description of Repatriated Material - made bulk of holdings accessible via our new on-line database
<b>2007</b>	\$12,331.00	Preservation of Halifax City Engineer's Office Maps and Plans - 500,000 reviewed, selected, described - including original Halifax City Hall architectural drawings and Africville settlement maps

Year	Received	Project
2008	\$10,000.00	Halifax County Records Processing - made accessible Poor Farm and County Home records among 50 other series
2009	\$ 8,320.00	Microfilm Holdings Review - inventory work that is allowing fast and cheaper digitization from the microfilm
2010	\$12,000.00	Halifax Archival Processing Project -critical Clerk's Office records including original lease to Point Pleasant Park, and large donation from Halifax Civic Historian and Halifax waterfront preservation activist Lou Collins
<b>Total:</b>	\$53,601.00	The fruits of much of this work can be seen at: <a href="http://halifax.ca/archives">http://halifax.ca/archives</a>

The NADP provided a vital training ground for new information professionals. The 13 recent graduates we hired with federal money have gone on to work at various national and international institutions, provincial councils of archives, universities, and even our own institution. The NADP has provided these graduates with a head start in their careers, provided critical hands-on experience, and allowed them to contribute meaningfully to the national economy.

The NADP also funded training and advisory services through a strong network of provincial councils and archives advisors. That network is now weakened as many of the archives advisors were funded through the NADP. As an archives with few staff, HRM Archives counted on access to these training opportunities to keep current to meet preservation challenges and to contribute content to Canada's on-line digital heritage.

The NADP is a stellar example for other jurisdictions to follow. When the Province of Nova Scotia created its Provincial Archival Development Program in 2008, it was leveraged and based on the NADP.

***Challenges of Born-Digital Holdings:***

1. What are the main challenges of born-digital material for your institution?

HRM Archives does not yet have a digital preservation strategy, policy or procedures. We struggle to meet expectations to preserve and provide access to our current holdings, and are not adequately prepared for the approaching digital onslaught. While staff has acquired some experience in this area, training needs to be frequent in the continually changing realm of digital preservation. Little high-level training and support is available in Canada, and even less in the Maritimes.

HRM Archives is more fortunate than some small archives, as we have the support of an IT department and work within the corporate information management unit to encourage good digital record-creating practices. The challenges of long-term digital preservation are specialized, however, and require different standards and best practices than regular IT

security. Thus equipment and server space may be less scarce than the required expertise. While many digital preservation processes can be automated, some, like migrating records from obsolete carriers (eg. floppy discs), require considerable human-hours.

Elected officials are likely unaware of the potential loss of our digital documentary heritage. There has been little leadership from either the provincial or federal governments in tackling this issue. Canadian archivists look to the research efforts forging ahead in the U.S., Australia and Europe for practical solutions and experience. The U.S. National Archives and the Library of Congress have recognized this as their main challenge and have funded co-operative programs like the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation (NDIIP). There are good models for Canada to follow.

### ***Role in Digitization***

2. What role libraries and archives should take in the digitization , the dissemination and the long-term preservation of Canadian heritage (print publications and archives)?

For the most part, HRM Archives digitizes on-demand as clients request digital copies of holdings, or as digital copies are needed for exhibits. We are able to digitize textual records, photographs and microfilm on-site, but out-source any large-format, audio-visual or bulk digitization. We are doing some bulk-digitizing of frequently-used records, some through the support of the provincial archival funding program. Our digitized records are disseminated via our web-site, and our on-line archives database, where records are presented in context and with the value-added archival descriptions which enhance their usefulness.

Copyright restrictions do limit which digitized holdings we can make available on-line, but the *Copyright Act's* provisions for libraries, museums and archives do facilitate research.

Libraries and archives are excellent access points for Canada's digitized content. We need to consider more creative and bold funding sources to increase the quantity of that digital content. We are under no illusion that we can digitize even a fraction of our holdings with current funding. A more co-ordinated approach would ensure institutions are not digitizing the same material and making their digital content universally available.

Users increasingly expect our holdings to be digitized and available on-line. We either need to adjust that expectation because of the huge investment needed, or find a way to make that investment. Our middle-road of mass digitization of frequently-used material and then digitization-on-demand for the rest is currently the most we can do, but this means much material of potential interest is hidden from on-line researchers. Archives have started out digitizing their pretty, quirky or heavily-used material - but there is so much more.

Digitization funding must also consider that providing digital access involves more than rendering a digital copy. Some records may require conservation before they can be digitized. Without the metadata that should be recorded with the digital image, the item is useless, or at least robbed of its context and the information that will allow it to be used legally into the

future (copyright, technical details). That metadata is created by archivists and is built on the archival arrangement and description that is a pre-requisite for digitization.

### ***An Adequately Resourced Future***

3. What percentage increase to your current budget would permit you to realize the aspirations of your users? If you received an increased budget and consistent adequate resources, describe your library/archives in 2017.

The aspirations of our users would be to have all of the Archives' holdings arranged and described and freely available on-line; to broaden our acquisitions to document more fully activity in our region; to be more integrated into the local community; and offer responsive reference services.

These expectations cannot be accomplished on our own, nor does it make sense to work towards these goals in isolation. To achieve a cohesive and sustainable digital archival system we must work co-operatively with other memory institutions, our local community, and a strong provincial and national network of archives.

In an ideal scenario, tripling our budget would create an HRM Archives in 2017 that would:

- have three additional archivists to do processing, reference and outreach activities
- increase or change our reference hours to allow evening and weekend access (at least until everything is on-line!)
- participate in and create outreach opportunities to integrate the archives in the local community.
- liaise with community groups (especially African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq groups) to ensure a broader spectrum of the region's activities are represented in our holdings. Embark on proactive, targeted acquisition.
- have a digital archivist and digital preservation lab to support digital preservation of our born-digital and digitized holdings, and work with records creators to promote good digital records-creation.
- have environmentally-controlled storage appropriate to each record-type and with adequate growth space to 2027.
- be working towards financing a temporary army of digitizers to re-format our holdings for digital accessibility

These are reasonable goals for a municipal archives, ones that we work towards as we can within our present reality.

Thank you for this opportunity to explain our challenges and dream of a future where we can meet those challenges and the expectations of our users. Please ask if you require any clarification or further information.

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