

**Submission to the Royal Society of Canada  
Expert Panel on the Future of Libraries and Archives in Canada  
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As a Canadian archivist who has worked in the profession in several settings over the past twenty years, I would like to thank the Expert Panel for the opportunity to provide a written submission to its examination of the status and future of libraries and archives in Canada. The subject of the panel comes at a critical time in the history and development of these institutions; in many ways, they are at a crossroads. Canadian libraries and archives occupy an essential position in providing literacy, facilitating community development, promoting identity, disseminating information, and preserving evidence critical to democracy and social justice initiatives. Despite the importance of their roles, these institutions face challenges and threats the likes of which have rarely been seen before. As a passionate advocate for the growth and improvement of the Canadian archival community, I hope that the Panel is able to articulate the state of the community and provide recommendations and insight that will influence and improve opinion about Canadian libraries and archives.

In order to set the stage for my submission to the Panel, I feel it necessary to point out the significant differences that exist between libraries and archives in Canada. There has been a fashion recently of combining library and archival programs into one entity. This situation is actually common in smaller communities where a shortage of staff and other resources resulted in one institution serving as the community's library, museum and archives, which has always led to the neglect of at least one of the organization's stated functions. Ostensibly undertaken by larger institutions to meet a perceived researcher need to provide a seamless experience using electronic resources in the online environment, this outcome arguably could be accomplished with an effective database interface and amalgamation of duplicated administrative functions as opposed to the disruption of remaking entire organizations. Some of these library/archives, museum/archives or museum/library/archives/art gallery mergers are so new that their success or failure as a process remains up in the air; there have been no studies of the actual financial and operational effectiveness of these mergers, only a headlong rush to create them. In particular, the merger of the BC Archives with the Royal BC Museum remains a problematic work in process among internal departments and external stakeholders ten years after it was first implemented. Despite its legislated designation as the Government of BC's official archival repository as a result of the merger, the Royal BC Museum has received no records from the Government of BC since the merger ten years ago, the result of disputes surrounding fees to transfer records between the Government and the Museum.

Although this trend might be the rationale for combining libraries and archives within the mandate of the Expert Panel, examining libraries and archives together indirectly assumes they share many points of equality, which is not the case. Below are listed many reasons why libraries and archives are more different than alike:

- **Funding:** Libraries have always been better funded proportionally than archival institutions. The continuing funding received by libraries has allowed them to invest in technology, hire more staff, provide better spaces, and undertake more extensive public programming. In cases where a library budget is small, the corresponding archives budget is even smaller. The typical budget priorities in an archival institution are preservation supplies and staff, leaving little else to undertake other necessary functions such as public awareness, ongoing digitization initiatives, or event programming.
- **Type of material.** Books are discrete entities, usually with many copies. Archival materials are unique, and often comprise many individual items that require analysis and description. Even with electronic formats, a publication is a single file, while electronic archival records can consist of multiple files in a variety of formats.
- **Labour:** It takes more time to appraise, arrange and describe archival records than it does to catalog books. Digitization is similarly more labour intensive in an archival setting.
- **Administrative structure:** Libraries often exist as independent entities. Archival programs are almost always subsets of some administrative structure, either as part of a museum, library, or as specific records creator such as a government or corporation.
- **Access Considerations:** With the exception of rare book collections, libraries provide open access to their holdings through publicly accessible stacks. Even in the case of rare book libraries, the materials they hold are publicly available without restrictions. Archives mediate access to their holdings in many cases, based the need to protect the material physically and, in some cases, the legislative or other requirements to restrict access to the information in their custody.
- **Descriptive standards:** While they share some elements in common, libraries and archives use different descriptive standards that address the specific needs of the materials in their care. Using the wrong standard can produce descriptions that are not useful to researchers; similarly, software designed for one standard rarely meets the needs of the other standard, yet there is typically only enough funding to support one software system.
- **Metadata.** The metadata produced for one book can be used for virtually all its copies held anywhere, and it can be produced at the time the book is published. As its holdings comprise largely unique bodies of records, archival institutions must generate the metadata for each archival fonds or collection, adding to the time required to make material available.

- **Electronic records:** Libraries may receive electronic publications, but they are not unique and are held in multiple institutions. A single institution or collaboration of institutions could generate the metadata necessary for describing these materials and create a trusted digital repository. Every single archival institution in Canada must generate metadata to describe its electronic holdings and, barring a collaborative solution, must create its own trusted digital repository for a much larger volume of electronic records.
- **Awareness:** This is a critical issue that has dogged the archival community for decades. The majority of Canadians are aware of the functions of libraries through exposure at school or university but do not understand what archival institutions do (namely, the acquisition, preservation, and accessibility of Canada's documentary heritage to provide authentic, primary source evidence for all researchers) unless they have reason to use one. Often seen as just a short-term history project to commemorate an anniversary, archival programs or institutions are easy to cut back or eliminate, even at the university level, while cuts to library funding is seen as an attack on a core social service. The lack of understanding surrounding their volume of material, as well as the financial and legislative challenges of digitizing it, leaves archives vulnerable to criticism that they are "simply behind the times," when the actual complexities of the situation are little understood. While there are passionate advocates in the archival community and numerous short-term local initiatives, there is no funding for broadly based, continuing awareness or educational campaigns surrounding the importance of archives, barring the elimination of other core activities. This lack of awareness is systemic and is reflected in the decisions made by policy-makers and politicians who mistakenly think that they understand the role of archives in society and undervalue it as something nice and fluffy rather than view it as an industry with significant economic and social impact.
- **Digitization:** Because books are designed to be publicly accessible, their digitization is an easier process, aside from the author's copyright and perhaps technical issues. Once one copy of a book has been completed, there is no need to digitize any other exact copies. Archival materials are much more complicated. They have different and more difficult copyright issues, such as multiple copyright holders in one fonds or collection. In addition, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation restricts the accessibility of some materials. The unique nature of archival materials means that each fonds or collection at an archival institution must be described individually, and the volume of both descriptions and the material involved is significantly greater than library material.

Leaving the discussion of the differences of libraries and archives, below are my responses to the Expert Panel's framing questions. Although I do not work in the library field, I have answered the questions seemingly directed solely at libraries with archival examples or with personal commentaries on library issues.

## SERVICES

*1. How would you describe the services Canadians, including Aboriginal Canadians and new Canadians, are currently receiving from libraries and archives in Canada?*

Speaking only for archives, there are no programs directed at new Canadians specifically, other than to new users of archives generally, as there are no funds to develop them. Realistically, new Canadians are less likely to use primary source material, in which smaller individual parts add up to a narrative. They would be better served with synthesized, well-sourced secondary materials such as general histories to understand Canadian history or similar topics; the archives could be explored later for more specific studies if they developed a specific interest.

Aboriginal Canadians are a growing user group in federal and provincial government archives as well as religious archives, largely as a result of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) activities and residential school compensation programs. Although receiving cooperation from religious archives, Aboriginal Canadians have received such abysmal service from Library and Archives Canada regarding TRC to the point where the service borders on wilful obstruction. The interest of Aboriginal Canadians in archives will likely continue on a smaller scale as these programs wind down. As creators of archives, there are few successful examples of aboriginally-administered archival programs in Canada despite a large volume of records created by First Nations themselves since the 1960s; typically, First Nations value and are most concerned with the oral histories of elders as opposed to the administrative records of their Councils.

*2. Libraries are currently hybrid operations, constantly pulled toward traditional services by many core users and pulled, equally, by a concern for relevancy from other users and potential users. What issues are libraries facing as they try to make the transition to new service models?*

Archival programs face similar issues, being pulled between providing resources for on-site services to traditional researchers as well as digital services to distance users increasingly accustomed to online research. Archives are also obligated to provide service to regular donors whose records are currently among the holdings while seeking out records creators whose materials represent gaps in the documentary heritage. For example, Canada's multicultural communities are underrepresented in the holdings of most Canadian archives. Although there are few resources available to reach out to those records creators who fill in gaps, archivists recognize when these opportunities occur and make the most of them by building relationships and encouraging donations or the creation of new archival programs.

*3. How do libraries and archives measure outcomes of their service and community impacts?*

Lacking the funding to do regular studies of impact, archives seem to rely on simple statistics of the volume of material collected, the number of in-person and distance users, and the number of people who attend events sponsored by the archives.

However, a significant example of measuring outcomes of their service and community impacts was the reporting undertaken as part of the Canadian Council of Archives' National Archival Development Program (NADP), provided through funding made available by Library and Archives Canada (LAC). In addition to the typical financial accounting for money spent, each project was analyzed for its results in the areas of preserving archival materials, making records of aboriginal and underrepresented multicultural groups more available, and raising awareness. Audited by federal government officials, the NADP was found to be fiscally responsible, accountable, and making progress on achieving the program's well-defined, strategic goals. Despite having this information in hand, LAC cancelled the NADP with no notice; the justifications from LAC were that it had better ways to spend its money and that a majority of the NADP funding had spent on administration. Government auditors had raised no such concerns about administrative costs, and the head of LAC later resigned over his own bloated expenses.

It seems clear that, however hard the archival community works on reporting and justifying its impact, all those reports, letters and studies can be wiped away or ignored entirely by those in positions of authority who lack respect for the work, do not make an effort to understand it, and possess motivations other than advocating for and supporting the work. Hopefully this Panel's report will not meet a similar fate.

Although the archival community will always account for the funds it receives and follow the necessary rules, producing reams of reports and statistics for a disinterested, disrespectful audience hardly seems worth a lot of effort in light of other pressing institutional priorities.

*4. Are libraries the appropriate institutions to catalog, store, and provide access to research data? If not, which institutions should provide these services?*

Because of the nature of research data, archival institutions are better suited to acquire, describe, and provide access to research data. The contextual basis and standards of archival description are better suited to the task than library standards, and archival institutions can provide better linkages between the entirety of the research data, the working papers, and the final research outcomes.

The Panel might find it instructive to compare the two standards side by side when used to describe what would be considered library or archival materials in order to see the benefits and disadvantages of each standard relative to the material that standard is attempting to describe.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

*1. Would Canadians know of, or understand, the contribution you make to library/archival service in Canada?*

Individual Canadians doing research in archives, such as genealogists, amateur and professional historians, and individuals seeking pardon waivers, would be aware of the contributions that I make to archival service in Canada. They might not understand the nature of the work entirely, but they are aware that when they come to the archives with a question, I will try my best to locate the answer using the sources at hand or directing them to any other relevant sources of which I am aware. If a person hasn't used an archives before or isn't a careful reader of footnotes / credits, they likely do not understand the impact of archival work on Canadian society and identity as a result of the general lack of public awareness in society of the work undertaken by archivists.

*2. Describe the services provided directly to users within your context, or whether they are consortial in nature; please describe the mechanisms in place to define, refine and measure the impact of the services.*

The services provided directly to users include online databases, hardcopy finding aids, as well as email and in-person reference services. As a Canadian archival community, the services are incredibly consortial, working with volunteer groups, other archival institutions, and other archivists to answer questions posed by researchers. The Archives Canada national online database of archival descriptions is the collaborative creation of the Canadian Council of Archives, the provincial and territorial archives councils and associations, and archival institutions throughout the province. The small and decreasing amount of funding for archives has driven and institutionalized collaborative approaches within the Canadian archival community – there is simply no other way to achieve what we feel are major projects.

*3. In the digital era, what support for patrons do/should libraries provide?*

For its patrons, archives should acquire born-digital records of archival value, preserve those records permanently in authentic and stable formats, and make them available online as much as possible within certain parameters. Patrons should be able to get the same tools online to find records (descriptions of records, file lists, self-serve copies of items) that they would find in the physical reading room, perhaps even with online assistance from a reference archivist. Digital materials should be available online for research without cost, with the option to purchase copies should a researcher require them. Most archives do provide some level of the digital services listed above, varying according to each institution.

*4. What in your opinion are the specific roles of libraries and/or archives and/or museums and other heritage institutions in community building and memory building?*

Archives provide textual records, photographs, film, sound recordings, and other records necessary for researching and understanding the past. They also provide original materials as well as copies for exhibits. Archival programs rarely get the credit for and understanding of their critical role in community and memory building; it's all about the organization putting on the exhibit or writing the book. Libraries or museums might provide the forum for these activities but only because they have the space and public recognition.

The Ancestry genealogy websites are excellent examples of this archival amnesia – many of the resources on their sites originate from archival institutions, but you'd be hard pressed to realize that fact from the sites themselves or from Ancestry's extensive advertising; admittedly, that situation is not Ancestry's concern. It is a Faustian bargain between archival institutions and Ancestry to provide greater access to material mostly of genealogical interest, and archival institutions lose out on the public awareness front as a result. Who knows what the impact might have been if an archives such as LAC had been given the resources to develop a comparable online presence for its holdings.

Simply put, museums and libraries are much poorer or simply lost without the archival resources to support community building and memory building. Where would the early photographs of Main Street be preserved, or who would have the homestead files of the first settlers? Even when these museums and libraries have archival resources, these materials are often the lowest priority and stuck in backrooms, undescribed and inaccessible; these multi-function institutions (museums/library/archives hybrids) are usually unfamiliar with archival practices and descriptive standards necessary to make archival resources available. While museums and libraries might be a more public face for community and memory building, archival sources are key foundational sources for these activities.

## **NEW DIRECTIONS**

### **Digitization**

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

For my archives, the initial challenge is preserving born-digital material in authentic and permanent formats. Creating a trusted digital repository to serve that purpose is time-consuming and expensive (to date, Library and Archives Canada spent over \$30 million to develop one and has nothing tangible online, even a bibliography, to show for it; only the Ontario Council of University Libraries has created one in Canada). Every archival institution will have to create one, or significant work will be necessary on the part of the community to create a collaborative one that has relatively few barriers to entry (i.e., inexpensive and relatively simple to use).

The other challenge is the huge backlog of pre-existing born digital content that has yet to be donated. An additional concern is the deletion of electronic records that may have ongoing value which is not yet perceived by records creators. The loss of digital records, through crashes and deletions, will likely leave society with a digital dark age, with many topics and issues lacking sufficient documentation to understand them fully.

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

Archives should digitize their holdings, while respecting any legislative or donor restrictions, and make them available online with the necessary metadata, finding aids, and contextual information necessary for effective research. They should continue to acquire paper and digital materials with the intent of making them widely available with the technology available to them, seeking new avenues when they present themselves. Inherent in the digitization process is a commitment to preserving the digital materials in a permanent and authentic format. These principles would also apply to print materials in their care. Collaborations with other archival institutions, libraries, museums, and other partners are a logical and necessary part of this process, assuming archival principles and practices are not compromised and that the archives is treated as an equal partner with full recognition.

*3. What will be the function and future of a brick-and-mortar library or archive in a paperless future?*

Talked about since the 1970s and perhaps earlier, the paperless future is a myth – when people stop making, buying, and using printers, there may be a chance at a paperless future. A paperless future may be the case for libraries, where electronic dissemination of books, magazines, and other media is common, to say nothing of already existing electronic media in their care. Even then, there will be a need to preserve copies of books as historic artifacts. However, I must admit I find it difficult, outside of a special collections / rare book library, to consider a library as a memory institution with materials that require extensive preservation activities.

At a basic level, archives are likely to survive as brick-and-mortar institutions long after libraries because it will take that much longer to describe and digitize the holdings of an archives. Even then, there will still be government departments and individuals creating documents using paper that will need to be preserved as evidence. The courts and legal system are particularly resistant to giving up paper documents even now. As with the tangible qualities of a book, there are inherent qualities to documents and other original formats – yellowed paper, original handwriting, leather bindings – that cannot be digitized and only experienced firsthand. Movement towards a paperless future is happening but will still take time.

## Education

*1. What changes, in your judgment, are necessary in the professional education and training of librarians/ archivists in the 21st century?*

For archivists, they require a thorough grounding in electronic records to deal with the upcoming acquisition, preservation and access challenges inherent in that media.

There are two skills which might be useful. They could augment their public awareness skills, but it seems unlikely that there will be anything but modest and local gains in building awareness of the role of archives in society. The lack of knowledge about the work of archives, even within an organization that has an archives, has been a refrain for decades, and it's unlikely to change without significant funding and focused, national efforts beyond what a small community of archives can muster.

In addition, they could augment their management skills, because few archivists are rising to the level of managing areas that oversee archival programs. However, employers currently do not seem to place any value in archivists managing archival programs, and it seems unlikely that archivists spending more time on management theory will change that perception. It seems more productive to spend their time on honing public awareness skills to convince those managers who are ultimately responsible for the archival program that it has value and is worthy of support. Unfortunately, without increased awareness and appreciation of the value of archives, it will be necessary to repeat the awareness / learning process on a continuing basis as uninformed new managers take over programs from knowledgeable managers.

*2. What conversations do you think need to take place with library, archival, and information studies programs about professional competency requirements, and have they begun?*

Although places like Library and Archives Canada have claimed that the archives schools are not turning out graduates with the skills required, the schools are well aware of the professional competency requirements needed for archivists, and conversations are ongoing.

There may be a sense that they're not turning out the managers needed to run archival programs. In fact, there are very few entry jobs for archival managers, and most jobs are short-term contract positions for arrangement and description work. Why would the schools devote a significant portion of their courses to management skills that are unlikely to be used for years while the archivist "pays their dues" working at low paying, contract processing jobs? In addition, management policies and practices vary at each archival institution, and at best general management theory would only provide basic familiarity with the intricacies of the inner workings of specific institutions – you'd have to learn the specifics on the job in any case.

## Resources

1. *Public libraries are primarily funded by local municipalities, with little funding from any other level of government. Many towns and rural communities are too small to support needed technology. How do we encourage the creation of library systems (or consortia) that can meet the increasingly sophisticated technology-driven needs of libraries—whether urban or rural?*

If the funding picture for public libraries is dismal, the picture for local archival institutions is much, much worse. (For further information, please see “Pennies from Heaven: The History of Public Funding for Canadian Archives” by Marion Beyea and “Lady Sings the Blues: The Public Funding of Archives, Libraries, and Museums in Canada” by Shelley Sweeney in Cheryl Avery and Mona Holmlund, eds., *Better Off Forgetting?: Essays on Archives, Public Policy, and Collective Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

Local municipalities might fund an archival program, but, unless there are individuals actively advocating on the ground, the value of an archival program is only recognized at community anniversaries, and the program is subject to steep reduction or elimination of its resources at other times, perceived at those points by funders as having little or no value. Most small archives rely on their provincial archival association (or, previously, the NADP funding program of the Canadian Council of Archives) for support for advocacy and financial assistance – there is typically only one association per province as opposed to numerous library associations in a given province. There is so little provincial funding available that only small projects can be supported - unless there is a base of local support or a significant local donor, archival institutions are left to struggle on their own with significant preservation challenges.

Is the lack of an archival reference in the question above an indication that archival programs are perceived to have sorted out the funding problem, or that similar issues do not affect them somehow? They struggle with substandard storage spaces, lack of recognition and respect, low staff numbers in relation to the workload, and a lack of necessary technology, especially around digitization and born-digital media.

2. *Assuming academic host institutions have financial resource constraints, and assuming academic libraries are equally constrained, how might these libraries attract funding adequate to meet the expectations of their users?*

In all honesty, academic host institutions and libraries receive so much money compared to virtually all archival institutions that they honestly have no concept of the meaning of financial resource constraints. I can't count the number of times I've walked into an academic library, past its banks of shelving, staff and computers, and then down to the basement where the one archivist works with second-hand furniture, old software, no supplies and poky space ill-suited to the work at hand that they have only because no one else wants it. Libraries and their demands always dominate in these settings.

I find this question insulting, particularly when academic host institutions have cut funding to their archival programs without proportional cuts to their libraries. Some academic libraries have even closed their archives for periods of time, refusing to address properly or understand the needs of this program area – they simply do not understand or care. If academic libraries don't have adequate funding now or are finally feeling some fiscal restraint, that is unfortunate, but other institutions require resources more than they do. Perhaps this is the case of the first cut is the deepest, but in other communities accustomed to regular cuts, they will find little pity. Are academic libraries more important than other libraries or apparently all archives put together? No. If all libraries and archives are being studied as apparently equal partners of equal importance and function, perhaps all the funding received by libraries and archives should be combined and distributed evenly? I'm sure an interesting discussion would arise about value for dollar, justifications for monies spent, and actual institutional needs. I would suggest that the Expert Panel include in its report a comparison of the budgets of all sectors within its mandate, including academic libraries, to determine which sectors are hurting the most.

Given the massive volume of duplicated published material they share, I suggest consolidating all academic libraries to determine what is unique and what is duplicated, obtaining their own funds for and engaging in massive digitization programs to capture those shared published resources, and then closing all of them except for those programs which preserve truly unique materials whose original formats merit preservation. That should free up funding for this sector in terms of space and human resources, leaving only banks of computers to manage and a few special collections areas.

This process is entirely unlikely for a variety of excellent reasons, but the main reason why it will never occur is because academic institutions typically have a particular arrogance, ego and pride; they must maintain extensive collections that confer a particular status upon them that apparently puts them above other academic institutions, regardless of the cost to or common good within the sector. They have had the funding available, through academic budgets or special fundraising among alumni, to be combative rivals for so long that it seems unlikely they would give up willingly or easily the process of competing amongst themselves, proudly trumpeting new acquisitions and building empires.

But they shouldn't worry, as there always seems to be money and passionate advocates for academic libraries. If they still cannot obtain the funding they need, as the setting of one of the more management-heavy library bureaucracies, the several layers of managers at academic libraries surely will surely use all their theories and skills to come up with a brilliant solution, likely involving the elimination of front-line staff and people who actually do work, which will allow them to reallocate the necessary funds so that they can continue unabated their past, increasingly expensive practices.

Another option is to better educate the users and manage their expectations. With their systemic and continual lack of resources, archives have had to disappoint their users for decades as researchers seek to use records that have not been described to any degree whatsoever, let alone digitized and placed online.

Join the club, and embrace doing more with less.

*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 percentage increase will permit my archives to realize the aspiration of its users is too great to calculate and is unrealistic to determine. To realize the aspirations of users, virtually all records in the institution would have to be described and listed to the file level, with those descriptions placed online and many of them linked to digitized versions of those files. Even if legislative and other restrictions were overcome, there are not enough archivists, server space, or digitization equipment, let alone budget, available to achieve that goal. This is true of all archival institutions.

By 2017, my goal for my archives is to have the majority of materials described, with complete file lists for significant holdings complete and uploaded to the institution's online database. A variety of interesting and relevant digital content will be available, drawing a variety of online and in-person researchers. There will be greater capacity for digitization on demand, as researchers request files to be digitized which then can be uploaded and added to the online content. Institutional events linked to local, provincial and national initiatives will raise the awareness of the role of archives in society.

Ultimately, I hope that archives are better known and respected in society so that they are no longer subject to ill-informed decisions and out-of-proportion cutbacks that reduce their ability to properly fulfill their mandates.