

Vision 2017

The Future of the Canadian Archival Community

The Canadian Archives Summit: Conclusions, Observations and Possible Next Steps

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Notice:

This reports was received by the Summit Organizers in May 2014. The Organizers are sharing the reports, in both English and French versions, with the broader archives community to continue dialogue initiated during the Summit. Please note that these documents include recommendations and opinions that have been provided by the authors. The report is not approved by the Summit Organizers and should not be treated as such. It is meant to stimulate and encourage ongoing discussions.

Introduction

The Canadian Archival System (CAS) constitutes the unpublished documentary heritage of the country. It comprises our collective social, cultural, political and economic memory.

The Canadian Archival System has evolved and adapted over time establishing a network of over 800 institutions, or “900 points of light “ as Lois Yorke has characterized it , which taken in a systemic and holistic way constitutes a key element of Canada's collective documentary heritage.

However, it must be asked: does the Canadian Archival System still work? The challenges facing the archival community in 2014 and likely for the next decade are significant, complex and far-reaching, and addressing them will require a concerted effort by all components of the community to ensure the archival system's future.

“The most successful strategies are visions, not plans.”

Henry Mintzberg¹

The current Canadian Archival System has been shaken by funding reductions, the shift of the digital paradigm and enhanced and specialized demands of users. It requires a new vision, blueprint and strategy to achieve a rearticulated goal.

The Canadian Archival System, which will be referred to as the CAS, consists of the two professional associations: the Association of Canadian Archivists (**ACA**) and the Association des archivists du Quebec (**AAQ**), le Reseau des services d'archives du Quebec (**RAQ**), the Canadian Council of Archives (**CCA**), which is the coordinating body for the System and which represents the provincial and territorial archival councils and institutions, the Council of Provincial and Territorial Archivists (**CPTA**) which represents the provincial and territorial government archival institutional heads and Library and Archives Canada (**LAC**). There is no *de facto* leader in this “system”, rather it functions as a web or network with the “system” at its head.

The Need for a New Vision/New Blueprint

The convening of the Canadian Archival Summit was predicated on the need for the archival community to map out and shape the future as a community.

¹ Henry Mintzberg: “The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning”. Harvard Business Review, January-February 1994, p107

The Summit: *Towards a New Blueprint*, brought together more than 600 participants in over thirty-two sites across the country to provide the broad archival community with an opportunity to consider its future, and to discuss and envision the archival services Canadians need and expect in the 21st century. The Summit sought to animate the development of a new vision for the archives system in Canada and its components. The work of building on the Summit's ideas and deliberations continues through the annual meetings of the professional archival associations and provincial councils.

Establishing the vision for the CAS for the 21st century will require, among other things, an examination of: the fundamental questions around the role of archives and the archival profession in 2014; the critical funding issues facing the CAS; and the concept of the record in the digital environment. It will require the development of strategies to manage in that environment and the renewal of leadership in the archival community. It should also, by logical extension, discuss and examine the roles of the organizations involved in CAS governance.

The Current Environment

The Summit's papers, presentations and deliberations suggested that a complex myriad of issues characterize the current archival environment, arising from the digital paradigm; the changing roles of the archivist; the shift from "place to space"; the life cycle of records and archives; and the continuing reduction or stagnation of public funding at all levels in an era of continued fiscal restraint. Are these **the** key issues for the community?

The complexity of the current environment requires "new ways of thinking" in the words of a key Summit participant, Chad Gaffield. Issues in this environment which were raised in the discussions across the country include, but were not limited to:

- *The design of the new blueprint should accommodate small, medium and large archives and institutions with different levels of collection, support and linkages.

- *The view that hierarchal models of governance would be replaced in the near future by distributed models of governance and that archival institutions could no longer be the sole custodians of archival documentary heritage.

- *Encouraging deeper collaboration with other heritage and information professions such as librarians, museum curators, social researchers, records and information managers, lawyers, journalists, and information and privacy commissioners.

- * The challenges inherent in a digital environment where a deluge of digital records will result in complex issues in the management of electronic records, both digital born and digitized: of continuing migration strategies from one platform to

another; ensuring digital preservation and storage; continuing access; and determining digital authenticity. These issues will challenge archival institutions while, at the same time, they are addressing the continuing legacy of analogue materials.

*Public sector and institutional support at all levels has been shrinking over the last ten years as governments and institutions face issues of economic restraint, declining revenues and increasing costs. The lack of stable and sufficient funding for archives has occurred across all levels of government, as well as in institutions such as universities and in the private and not for profit sectors.

*Core mandate funding has been replaced by short-term project funding, resulting in different priorities tailored to funder/sponsor/partner interests that may not always align with those of the archival organization but which may be required in order to keep other longer term projects and some services functioning.

*As archives begin to assess what elements in their collection can be monetized as potential sources of revenue, some have realized that many collections suitable for monetization are not always easy to identify, as not everything has equivalent value. Many archival documents are unique “one-of-a-kind “evidence of a particular set of activities at a particular time and may not offer any interest to sponsors or commercial partners. There are indirect costs of collaboration in these endeavours.

*Public-private partnerships are good examples of where some archives have made appropriate decisions in the public interest, yet their share of returns on investment in the benefits from digitizing components of their collections have not always have been equitable to the value of their content.

*Large private sector partners can be truly reliable and welcome collaborators providing opportunities for revenue generation but they can also influence the long- term functions and priorities of an institution.

*Developing new approaches to description such as Rules of Archival Description (RAD) for digital records, including how to be more “user intuitive” and/or using the equivalent of “keyword search” in online archival catalogues is preoccupying archivists.

*Engaging new audiences that may never have been in an archive previously, but with whom the institution may wish to establish a relationship. Acquiring new archival collections can build on these new or non-traditional audiences.

If these are the key issues for the community, then that is what the change required in the new vision and blueprint has to address.

Observations from the Summit

The Archival Summit pointed out the need for fundamental change in the way which archives carry out their mandates and how they organize to do so. There was general consensus that while there is a need for a new vision and blueprint, there was not a clear understanding of what was needed, what its shape or composition should be and how to get there.

In some instances, there were varied views on the degree of need for change. Some posited that the 'system was broken'; some thought that the structure remained strong, and some wondered whether the "system" existed at all. Nonetheless, most discussion reports expressed the view that the new vision must build on the concept of the current CAS, using the national organizations (ACA, AAQ, CCA, CPTA and LAC) as the foundation for the new vision and blueprint.

The ideas generated by the Summit can be categorized by the following themes:

New Vision and Blueprint:

The development of the new vision and resulting blueprint for the archival system/community will require leadership, time, patience, the ability to ask and answer difficult questions, trust and creativity

The blueprint must have several dimensions and must serve all archives: small/medium/large institutions, whether governmental, institutional, not-for-profit, community or local.

The blueprint must build on the current CAS foundations.

The vision and blueprint must be characterized by increased collaboration among all players and allies.

Should the new vision only serve archives? What about archival-like organizations?

Leadership:

Will be required from all organizations/associations/individuals.

Should seek "new blood" and greater engagement of new/younger archivists in the development of the vision.

Should consider the possibility of creating one large umbrella organization incorporating the current CAS components into a new entity.

Should consider the need for a re-mandated or restructured CCA 2.0 if no new funding emerges.

What should the role of the P/T archives in the new vision and blueprint be?

What should the role of the university archives be?

What should LAC's role be?

Should there be a role for archival scholars?

New Roles and Responsibilities for Archives:

What will the governance model be? Hierarchical? Distributed? Sole custodians or shared custodians?

How do we more closely integrate records management and records managers into the broader archival fold?

How do we best balance institutional and public research roles?

How do we best balance between institutional-driven and user-driven roles?

How do we increase collaboration with our allies and other networks of expertise to create a true network of networks approach?

How do we plan and manage to pool resources so as to develop pods or centres of expertise (e.g. the development of regional TDRs) or in particular areas of specialization? (i.e. the GARM model of the past)

New Roles and Responsibilities for Archivists:

How do we position archivists at the point in the early 'life cycle' of digital creation so as to better respond to the management and assure the long term accessibility of digital records?

Should we consider the idea of user-centred "archivism" (i.e. how to encourage and advise people and organizations to manage their own current digital archive.) "Archiving the now" was how one discussion described it.

How should we plan to provide advice to new external partners? (e.g. the private sector or communities of interest)

How do we best balance the issues of accessibility with the historic need to be the keepers and guardians of the record?

Should archival educators consider adding to the curriculum in the areas of collaborative strategy development? fundraising strategy? promotion and outreach?

Communication and Outreach:

A recurrent theme in almost every discussion was the need for more robust and directed communication and outreach. This theme mirrors the recurrent call for greater communications regarding archives and their importance in the studies of the archival community for the last forty years: Symons, Wilson, Applebaum-Hebert, and Cameron. The comments and suggestions ranged from the

role and importance of archives for accountability, for identity and memory (Millar) and for evidence and information and privacy purposes (Cavoukian); to speaking beyond the “converted” by the developing a broad-based communications strategy for the community and system. Discussions also focused on:

How to develop greater public awareness in the general public of the importance of archives?

How to develop greater awareness in the minds of decision makers at all levels of government and philanthropic organizations of the importance of archives?

Do we require a system-wide strategy to better communicate the role of archives and the value proposition for supporting democratic accountability and societal memory?

Who in the CAS should be responsible for developing and executing the communication and outreach strategy?

Community:

How do we better reach out to the new communities and new users that make up the Canada of the 21st century?

How do we reach out to assist private groups and/or individuals creating and keeping their own records/archives?

How do we best address the growing expectations of users who may be attuned to more intuitive models of description and search?

Do we need to understand the differing needs and expectations of discrete types of users? For example, specialized users at varying degrees of sophistication, members of the general public, and new users new to the archive.

The updating/revision of RAD for digital content to describe and support the sharing of metadata between institutions for linked collection development.

Sustainability:

A broad theme that encompasses:

The **digital** sustainability of ever-growing numbers of born-digital or digitized records and collections that will need to be preserved, curated and/or migrated to new platforms or systems almost fifty years after Moore’s Law in 1965 predicted that the capacity of digital technologies would double every eighteen months!!

The need for a community-based pan-Canadian digital record strategy to help ensure the records created by both the public and private sectors in 2014 will continue to be accessible in twenty years.

The pressing need for a pan-Canadian network of Trusted Digital Repositories for future accessibility and long-term preservation by pooling resources among institutions and organizations on a local, regional or provincial basis.

The **funding** sustainability issue is also paramount for archives and archival institutions in an era of deepening government and public sector restraint.

What is the strategy for the CAS should there be no additional public funding made available to the archival community?

How would the CAS function in the next 2 to 5 years if there is no additional funding?

If no new funds are available, how should we determine our priorities?

Where and how could we engage alternate sources of funding?

How do we encourage philanthropic donors to consider archives within their donating mandates?

Do we need to build more fee for service models without negatively affecting issues of public accessibility?

Do we need to develop fundraising strategies for the community and equip local and regional institutions and organizations to conduct their own fundraising campaigns?

Strategic Priorities:

A number of initiatives that could be considered as “strategic” policy or program opportunities for the CAS/community to consider undertaking came out of the discussions. These include:

A pan-Canadian Acquisitions Strategy;

A pan-Canadian Digital Archival Strategy;

A pan-Canadian Digital Repository Strategy; and

A Canadian Archival Communications and Outreach Strategy.

An additional concept of one pan-Canadian archival collection, which could be referred to as the *One Big Collection*, could envisage a strategy of areas of archival concentration in a number of Canadian archival institutions and repositories in order to create networks of expertise and focus so as to create unique repositories of archival materials that could be linked with other institutions to create a pan-Canadian archival collection—the *One Big Collection*.

A Suggested Approach

Organizational change specialists suggest that looking at a system from a holistic perspective and the way that the components in the system are positioned in relation to each other, influences its dynamics.² It is assumed that there are no isolated events in systems, and that everything connects with everything else. This interdependence influences roles, relationships and responsibilities within the

² Dannemiller Tyson Associates: “Whole Scale Change” (San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2000)p.25

system. A particularly important property of the system is that no component or subsystem can do what the system itself can do. The components are interrelated and interdependent. The CAS fits this description very well.

Whole system organizational methodology theory and techniques for influencing systems change suggest that, in order for success, the entire community needs to be engaged in the work of planning its own future, by envisioning a new future, a new approach or a new system.³ Given the interrelations and interdependence of the system, and in this case the CAS, discrete solutions affecting only one component cannot resolve complex system-wide problems. This is a particularly important factor in determining long-term solutions for system-wide problems.

Therefore, in order to change or reframe a system,⁴ it is crucial for the community's leadership to guide the system in a collective exercise of changing the current frame, or in the understanding of a particular set of ideas that have been functioning sufficiently long enough that it will require those ideas to be seen or understood in different ways.⁵

This ambitious exercise of community-led rethinking was the intention of the organizers of the Canadian Archives Summit. The Summit provided a forum for the collective archival community to consider its future and to work together to develop a new blueprint and a new vision for the archival system in Canada, very much in keeping with the "whole systems" approach.

Possible Architecture

"Reframing" the Canadian Archival System.

In concert with 'whole scale systems change' approaches, the concept of 'framing' may be a useful way to lead people in an exercise in creating a new vision for the CAS.

Framing is an approach in organization theory that posits that a "frame" is a set of ideas or assumptions that are carried in our heads: think of 'maps' that help to negotiate a particular territory and provide a tool for navigation. ⁶

Reframing is a way of seeing the same thing, for example the Canadian Archival System, in a different way. It only requires the ability to understand and use

³ Barry Oshrey: "Seeing Systems" (San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1995) p.28

⁴ Lee G Bolman and Terrence E Deal: "Reframing Organizations" (San Francisco Jossey-Bass, 2003) p.12-15

⁵ Dannemiller Tyson: op cit p.26&175

⁶ Bolman & Deal: op cit p13

multiple perspectives to think about the same thing in more than one way, creating an alternative to the current situation.

Within the same context, a structural frame approach⁷ suggests that in using a reframing exercise, the discussion must evolve into the articulation of the vision, goals, networks, rules, relationships and values of the CAS. The reframing could include the same system components or new ones and could reframe current or different relationships.

“Form Follows Function”

Louis Sullivan⁸

Sullivan’s adage is an architectural dictum that posits that the shape of a structure should be dictated by its function. Therefore, the functions will influence and shape the structure required to implement those functions.

The Canadian Archives Summit held in January 2014 was launched with the understanding that the archival system in Canada required a wide discussion of the need for a new blueprint and vision and the mobilization of a significant number of community members, allies and stakeholders to begin the rethinking and re-envisioning process. The Summit used a series of background papers and “agents provocateurs” to pose the difficult questions required to stimulate the discussion. Once the functions envisaged by the new vision and blueprint become clear, the design of the functions it requires can be developed accordingly.

In order to develop that vision, a number of fundamental questions and the identification of key issues facing the archival community emanating from the Summit’s deliberations need to be posed by, and to, the community regarding its future goals, objectives, structure and roles, and will require concerted consideration in order to move the CAS forward in the new environment. These questions include:

- *Do we need a new vision as well as a strategy for archives in Canada?
- * Should the new vision only serve archives?
- *Could we readjust or realign the old model in order for it to continue to work?
- *Should we assume that the NADP or other federal funding could return?

⁷ Ibid p.14

⁸ Louis Sullivan “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered”. Lippincott’s Magazine March 1896 p.403

*If not, then what is required to generate alternate funding for archives?

*How could the CAS function in the next five years with no additional funding?

If the above questions have been answered, the next set of questions could focus on the strategies and implementation required by the System to adapt:

*Do we have the right infrastructure for the CAS in 2014?

*Do we require refocused or new mandates/roles for the core organizations in the CAS?

*Given the changing environment, does the CAS still have the right priorities?

*How should we establish new priorities?

*How should we do it collectively?

*Has the “business” of archives changed? In what ways should it change in the 21st Century?

*How could we promote greater public awareness of the importance of archives?

*Who should be responsible for advocating with policy and decision makers?

*How could we enhance collaboration both in and outside of the archival community?

*Who should we engage as our allies to effect this new blueprint and enact its vision?

A Transitional Process for Consideration

Following the January Summit, the Summit organizers proposed to continue to build on the Summit’s ideas and deliberations through the annual meetings of the ACA and AAQ professional associations. Those meetings will be held soon and will be key to continuing both the momentum and the need to engage the community in a continuing dialogue.

A vision renewal strategy, whether transitional or transformational, is a difficult and complex task for any system or organization. Nonetheless, a renewed vision and

blueprint for its execution will be required for the Canadian Archival System in order for it to survive.

A possible strategy for consideration could be to use the occasion of the professional associations' meetings and the appointment of a new Librarian and Archivist of Canada to explore the idea of a **Transitional Council**, made up of the Summit organizing committee, which includes representation from the ACA, AAQ, the CCA, the CPTA and adding a place for LAC to participate.

The Transitional Council ideally could reflect the following principles:

- Members should be leaders;
- Members should be innovative;
- Members should jointly possess an in-depth knowledge of the key issues;
- Members should make the commitment to spend the necessary time to accomplish the tasks;
- Voices outside of the current CAS should be considered.

The Transitional Council, drawn from the archival community, could have a dynamic mix of archival thinkers, managers and staff. Expertise in areas of key issues in financial management, monetization, building relationships with creators, users and non-traditional archives would be important assets of council members to possess.

The Transitional Council could be the leadership body that develops a draft **Vision 2017** for consideration of the community in the fall. Perhaps LAC could be asked to consider hosting a facilitated "table de concertation" with this Transitional Council which could spend a day or a day and a half developing a draft vision that could be brought to the wider community for discussion and finalization.

The draft Vision could be the starting point for a small number of Working Groups drawn from the associations, councils and community that could be charged with areas such as exploring *New Roles for Archives and Archivists; Communications and Outreach*; and exploring *Funding Sources and Fundraising*. Perhaps an additional Working Group could be established to explore how the System could work with no new sources of funding. These Working Groups could be mandated and overseen by Transitional Council.

Issues for consideration by the Transitional Council and WGs could include but not be limited to:

Vision for 2017

- *Describe how the CAS would look in 2017:
 - in terms of mandates/missions /roles?
 - in terms of relationships with allies/partners?
 - in terms of relationships with users/public?
- *What would be the main features?

- * What critical shifts would be implied in this new vision
- *What would be different for the community, users and partners

Strategy and Implementation

- *Where are we now?
- *What are the gaps between the present and the vision?
- *What would we need to do to get there from here?
- *What would be the key challenges and how could these be overcome?
- *What are the major intersections, interdependencies and synergies that would need to be taken into account in moving forward?

The establishment of a Transitional Council would require trust, credibility, openness, and creativity and a certain degree of faith. The leadership of the Canadian Archival System is up to the challenge.