

SUMMARY REPORT—CANADA’S ARCHIVES LAUNCH EVENT

November 13, 2015

This document serves as an overview of the Canada’s Archives launch event held on November 13, 2015. More details on specific activities associated with the strategy, informed by the related discussions and feedback, will be conveyed to the community following the next Canadian Archival System Working Group meeting, scheduled for February 2016.

CONTEXT

Building on the momentum of the January 2014 “Canadian Archives Summit: Towards a New Blueprint for Canada’s Recorded Memory,” the Canadian Archival System Working Group set about to develop a strategy to encourage collaboration among members of the Canadian archival community. The Working Group was composed of the *Association des archivistes du Québec* (AAQ), the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA), the Council of Provincial and Territorial Archivists (CPTA) and Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

Beginning in September 2014, the Working Group drafted its first iteration of the strategy document for the Canadian archival community entitled, “[Canada’s Archives: A New Blueprint—A Vision and Areas of Focus 2016-2026](#)”, which contained a vision and strategy for the Canadian archival community over the next 10 years. Over the summer of 2015, the Working Group engaged the Canadian archival community in a process of consultation to gather feedback on the Strategy, which was incorporated into a final version of the document.

On November 13, 2015, a national event officially launched the new strategy with over 90 participants attending the meeting which was held at LAC’s 395 Wellington Street building in Ottawa. Members of the archival community were invited to attend in-person, as well as to submit feedback electronically via email and Twitter using the hashtag #archives2026. This event brought together a diverse audience of archives and archivists, from corporate repositories to provincial institutions, from public and university libraries as well as genealogists and other user groups. Over a dozen individuals submitted feedback electronically, and the discussions during the event became a trending topic in Canada with over 570 posts on Twitter.

THE STRATEGY

Developed on behalf of the Canadian archival community, the Strategy provides a roadmap to guide collaboration and to ensure that Canada’s archives can better respond to the opportunities and challenges, including those of the digital world. The strategy spans a period of 10 years from 2016–2026 and is framed around four areas of focus:

- 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

Advancing the Strategy will require engagement by the whole archival community—the effort required is beyond the scope or capacity of any single member. Members of the Working Group are ready to continue leadership, and are looking forward to advancing this work collectively alongside those interested individuals, institutions and other organizations.

THE LAUNCH EVENT

Keynote and expert presentations

The November 13, 2015 launch event began with a [keynote address](#) by Ry Moran, director of the newly opened National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Mr. Moran discussed the dual role of archives in the process of reconciliation: first, to provide access to the stories of residential schools, and second, to ensure that archives at all levels work with the National Centre to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the Indian residential school system. Mr. Moran underscored the value of archives and archivists, and the role they play as stewards of history and collective memory.

This keynote was followed by four short presentations made by experts from across Canada, each of whom spoke on one of the four areas of focus contained in the Strategy. These presentations stimulated thinking among participants, and kicked-off table discussions about how the community might best move forward. After each presenter, participants at each table were asked to discuss two questions:

1. Who are the experts you know who may want to be involved in the identified areas?
2. What existing projects could we leverage to move forward in these areas?

The first presentation was made by Natasha Zwarich, Professor of Archival Studies, *Université du Québec à Montréal*. Ms. Zwarich presented “The People,” and discussed the importance of collaboration and partnered research. She urged interdisciplinary experts to examine current practices in the archival community, and discussed the importance of establishing dialogue with other groups to highlight the importance of archives and the work of archivists.

The next expert was Jennifer Douglas, Assistant Professor, University of British Columbia, who delivered a presentation on “The Records.” In her presentation, Dr. Douglas suggested, that in her opinion, although the value of records is recognized without question by archivists, this is not the case outside the profession. Dr. Douglas cites examples such as the recent government records scandals, including the deletion of emails related to the Highway of Tears by the provincial government of British-Columbia. Dr. Douglas also suggested that at times, archivists themselves fail to fully recognize the importance of archives, as evidenced, for instance, by the relative silence of the profession in the face of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. She argued that archivists must ask themselves what they can do differently to introduce people to the value and role of archives and their collections, and recommended an open and vigorous debate on the position of archives in society.

The third expert was John Roberts, Chief Privacy Officer and Archivist of Ontario, who delivered a presentation on “The Capacity.” In his presentation, Mr. Roberts stressed that the capacity to deliver involves change, new skills and competencies, and infrastructure. According to Mr. Roberts, while archives are in the long-term game, they often embark on projects without adequately considering sustainability. He suggested that sustainability be evaluated in three ways: investment (i.e., where are the resources coming from?), infrastructure (i.e., what do archives need to deliver?), and innovation (i.e., what is the problem and how can we solve it?).

The final presentation was made by Shannon Hodge, Director of Archives, Jewish Public Library. Ms. Hodge presented “The Profile” and explained how she created a new brand or profile for her archives. During this work, she discovered that the largest contribution came through work with other partners. In collaboration with others, the Jewish Public Library Archives linked its databases and exhibitions, united diverse voices and pooled resources among partners to create meaningful content online and in-person. Ms. Hodge noted that archives exist alongside other partners, and these partners can help archives to become more effective advocates and to achieve greater visibility than they could alone. She ended by sharing her belief that the greatest strength of archivists is their dedication and their passion—two elements that are essential to developing a strong profile for our institutions and our profession.

Plenary session

In the afternoon, event participants contributed to a plenary discussion aimed at identifying priorities. They were asked to consider two questions based on the Strategy:

1. In your opinion, what are the most important activities that we should focus on over the next two-year period (2016–2017 and 2017–2018)?
2. Which activities are feasible in the short term or should be targeted first if we want to move forward logically?

Participants first discussed the questions at their tables, and then shared impressions with the broader group. While the discussion was wide-ranging, the following themes emerged during the plenary:

- Under the theme **Advocacy**, participants spoke to the need to work closely with government decision-makers to help them better understand the value and importance of archives, including through the development of models that depict the total costs associated with acquisition, preservation and access to analogue and digital records. Participants also noted the increasing need to inform creators of archival materials about archives and information management as well as support broader public awareness of the work of archives.
- Under the theme **Education**, participants spoke to the importance of increasing linkages between archival science and professional programs offered by universities and colleges, and to the challenges experienced in the workplace by practitioners. A number of suggestions were made on how theory and research

could be more closely connected to the workplace and the day-to-day operation of archives.

- Under the theme **Collaboration**, participants spoke to the need to partner with the private sector, to increase dialogue with libraries and museums, and to work closely with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation as well as First Nations, Inuit and Métis.
- Under the theme **Capacity building**, participants identified a number of areas of importance including, digitization, digital preservation and e-records management, and work on legislation and standards related to archives.

The way forward

The November 13, 2015 event ended with a presentation by Fred Farrell, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick and a member of the Working Group. This presentation, “[Model for the Way Forward](#),” proposed a series of next steps required to implement the Strategy. The proposal would see the current Working Group transform into a Steering Committee with 12 full members (i.e., two representatives from each of the AAQ, ACA, CCA, CPTA and LAC, and two members at large). The Steering Committee would strike taskforces to advance priority activities. During the presentation, Mr. Farrell underscored that the Working Group was ready to continue providing leadership by way of this Steering Committee, and that members were looking forward to beginning collaboration with interested members of the archival community on concrete projects.

CONCLUSION

On December 18, 2015, the Working Group held a teleconference to discuss the launch event. The Working Group concluded that overall, the national launch event provided an opportunity for the Canadian archival community to engage in the process to develop and begin implementation of the Strategy. Participants shared ideas about the Strategy, identified people and organizations that might be interested in leading certain activities, and discussed the work that should be done first.

Based on all of the feedback received to date, the Working Group will meet again in February 2016 to identify priorities for the first two years based on the themes that emerged during plenary discussions on November 13, 2015, as well as comments received to date. Community-based task forces will be created around these priorities, and members of the community will be invited to get involved in spring 2016.

After the February meeting, the Working Group will communicate next steps and will provide an update during the AAQ, ACA and the Archives Association of Ontario annual conferences to keep the community informed about progress, and to provide a forum for the next discussion of the Strategy. The Working Group understands that progress depends on community engagement and looks forward to working with colleagues across Canada. The proven strength and cohesiveness of the Canadian Archival System and all members of the community will allow us to successfully meet the challenges that lie ahead.