



The Association of Canadian Archivists' Position on the 2011 Census: Let's Count Ourselves In

The next census will take place in May 2011. Starting May 2, 2011, all households in Canada will receive a yellow census package.

The 2011 National Census of Canada will consist only of the short-form questionnaire containing 10 questions. In addition, 30% of households will receive the new voluntary National Household Survey (NHS), containing similar questions that were in the discontinued Mandatory Long Form questionnaire. As with the 2006 form, the 2011 Census will also have the informed consent or opt-in clause. Under the informed consent question, Canadians must consent to their census record being released to the public after 92 years. If the "No" box is selected, or if the question is left unanswered, then their personal information will remain confidential in perpetuity.

Archivists should understand the importance of filling out Census questionnaires, the richest source of information for understanding Canadian individuals and Canadian society. The general population, however, needs to be reminded of this and of the worth of responding "Yes" to the informed consent question. In the 2006 Census, the first census to include the opt-in clause, less than 56 % of Canadian residents responded "Yes" to allow their information to be released to public access 92 years in the future. Of the remaining respondents, 32.08 % of Canadian residents responded "No" and 12.34 % of the total population of Canada did not respond to the question. The negative response to the informed consent question rendered the 2006 Census a limited and unreliable research tool to historians, genealogists, and other researchers.

The Association of Canadian Archivists supports participation in 2011 Census and the NHS. We ask all archivists to stress to the importance of participating in the Census, encouraging others to respond "Yes" to the opt-in question and to fill out the voluntary NHS.

In the meantime, the ACA continues to advocate on behalf of its members and the Canadian public at large to ensure that future Canadian censuses contain reliable information that will be accessible to future generations. Bill S-18, *An Act to amend the Statistics Act*, provides for the mandated review of the informed consent question no later than two years following the 2011 Census. The ACA will ask for the removal of the informed consent clause from the *Statistics Act* so that only the 2006 and 2011 censuses are ruined for posterity. We will also call for the return of the Mandatory Long Form portion of the census. Further, we will encourage Library Archives Canada to devote appropriate resources to processing and preserving the born digital version of the census that has replaced older paper and microfilm versions as the archival record. Finally, the ACA will ask StatsCanada to adopt data-processing and machine reading technology that does not separate the nominal from the statistical information when the returns are uploaded into computers. The ACA believes that these steps will ensure that the next census gifts successive generations an accurate and reliable picture of our time. Future researchers are counting on us.