



## Acquisition Priorities: Private Archives Working Group

### 1. Introduction

This document should be read in the context of the three following documents, which are available on the Library and Archives Canada website ([link](#)) Library and Archives Canada's Story Continues; the Documentary Heritage Management Framework; and the Acquisition Orientation Instrument.

This document is part of a series of eight discussion papers that seek, through practical projects, to validate the four guiding principles and the key roles of the Documentary Heritage Management Framework developed by Library and Archives Canada (LAC) during summer and fall 2009. Specifically, each pathfinder project seeks to demonstrate the applicability of these principles and roles in the context of the acquisition business pillar. Each pathfinder project will result in a final report, which will add overall conclusions about the implementation of the Documentary Heritage Management Framework and the Acquisition Orientation Instrument. Based on observations, the final report will be even more effective in contributing to the achievement of LAC's mandate, within the current operating environment.

### 2. Background

The mandate of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) includes the development of Canada's documentary heritage through the acquisition of archival material from the private sector. Material is acquired through donation and purchase, and the selection process is guided by current acquisition strategies. A new Documentary Heritage Management Framework is being designed which, in conjunction with the Acquisition Orientation Instrument, will replace existing acquisition strategies. Since one of the key principles informing the new framework is the concept of sufficiency, this pathfinder project has been created to test sufficiency through an analysis of acquisition of private archival material by LAC.

### 3. Priority Identification for Private Archives

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) reviewed its private archives programs to get an overall picture of the successes and shortfalls in acquisitions to date. This review also identified the partnerships currently in place with other institutions, and potential partners.

The review found that most of the successes fell within certain time periods when the institution had devoted considerable time and energy to building a stable collection. Examples include: pre-Confederation archives, prime ministers' records, cartographic records up to 1899, documentation of the First World War, and audiovisual material created before 1970.

It was also clear that many of the shortfalls occurred when acquisitions had not reached a critical mass of documentation. Examples include: records created by Aboriginal communities or individuals, records created by recent immigrant groups and digital records. A general shortfall was noted in collecting records created outside of central Canada.

Other program areas experienced a mixture of successes and shortfalls. These programs were typically well-established areas of collecting which not only experienced the problems common to managing expectations from donors and clients, but also had not reached a point of stability in their original objective.

Each of these programs was examined against the key acquisition principles of significance, sufficiency, and sustainability. While the test of sufficiency proved to be useful in highlighting



strengths and weaknesses of certain programs, it did not reveal which programs could reduce their collecting activity.

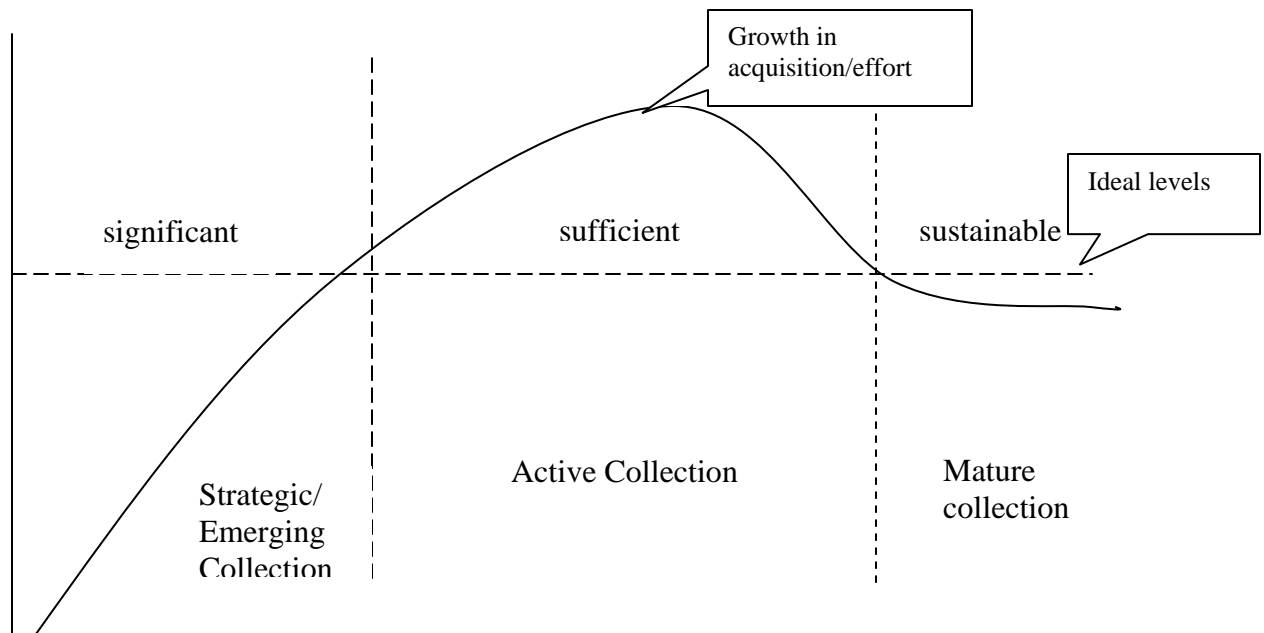
In an overview of current holdings, it was determined that a considerable portion of the private archival collection is, in fact, already stable. Archivists know their collections well and have priorities regarding acquisitions, based on holdings and existing resources. In practice, the scope of collecting may be narrower than official LAC policies would indicate.

A further observation was that few partners were identified in the Canadian archival network that related to non-cultural collecting areas, such as business and science. The cultural network of collecting institutions seemed to be more highly developed, perhaps because there is more collecting done in these areas.

#### 4. Analysis Model

Given these observations, it might be helpful to consider the lifecycle or development curve for private archives acquisition areas. The relative importance of the significance, sufficiency, and sustainability were assessed. While all of these factors are relevant, one takes precedence over the others depending on the stage of the acquisition activity.

#### Stages of Acquisition Activity



Year 1

Year X

#### Strategic or Emerging Collection:

A strategic or emerging collection area is one that is actively seeking out new sources of documentation for issues and events of contemporary interest, and is usually identified as a strategic priority. Some early successes have been demonstrated, but no sustained momentum is in place for ongoing acquisitions, nor is there a national recognition for LAC having the expertise



in these areas. Characteristics of such areas would include: perceiving a shortfall in holdings, defining an acquisition strategy, contacting the community of creators, building internal capacity and infrastructure, searching for partners and supporters, acquiring first collections, and developing momentum and awareness. Issues of significance predominate, such as the importance of the area or theme in comparison to active and mature programs, and whether or not any collection relating to the area is nationally significant. These areas have difficulty securing needed resources and support which are currently used by active collecting areas. *Example:* Non-governmental Aboriginal Archives

#### Active Collection:

An active collection area is one that is reaching a mature level, but which continues to receive ongoing transfers through established agreements. For these collections, LAC is recognized as being a specialized collector of such material with a good track record of success. Issues associated with this stage relate to dealing with a surplus of donation offers, difficulty in choosing which collections to acquire, pressure to acquire strategic priorities rather than records that would be part of the mature collection, and difficulty in determining the point at which the collecting area is mature and no further acquisition is required. There is also the complex network of other collecting institutions to consider. Questions of sufficiency predominate. Active programs are preoccupied by their program management issues and are less able to refocus on newer initiatives. *Examples:* Music Archives, Political Archives

#### Mature collection:

A mature collection area is one that is sufficient for research purposes, with minimal new acquisitions anticipated. Additions to a mature collection are acquired only when the records on offer have exceptional value. These mature collections still require significant expertise to provide access to the records, and to assist in the process of consolidating individual programs into a larger portfolio. They represent our past successes, and are the end goal for other collection areas not at the "mature" level. This stage of development generally indicates that acquisition choices are easier to make, and current holdings are already described and accessible. The focus of expertise is on making collections known and interpreting them through exhibitions and digitization, via internal or external networks, or on reusing and reinterpreting the work of earlier generations. Sustainability issues are most dominant. Reaching this stage may free up expertise and resources for newer, more active acquisition programs, but subject expertise may not be easily adaptable. *Examples:* *Ancien Régime* and pre-Confederation Archives

## 5. Analysis Process

For each of the identified private archives acquisition areas, the principles of significance, sufficiency, sustainability and society should be applied in order to profile current acquisition programs as either emerging, active, or mature collections.

For each of these stages of development the following questions must be considered.

**Mature Collections:** Could these collecting areas be more effectively and efficiently managed within a broader thematic grouping, considering that the predominant challenge to this part of the collection is providing ongoing access and interpretation? How would the existing network of partners support this goal?

**Active Collections:** Is it possible to identify all or part of an active collection area as nearing a mature status? For these areas, what work remains outstanding to reach that level of collection development? For those program areas at a more active level of acquisition, what resource commitments are required in order to continue the current level of activity over the next four



years? What are the anticipated results? How would the existing network of partners support this goal?

**Emerging Collections:** For these program areas has a formal acquisition strategy with identified target communities/creators? Has the acquisition strategy been formally approved by LAC? Discussed with partners? Have the resource requirements for initiating an active acquisition program been identified and approved? How would the existing network of partners support this goal?

## 6. Consultation

LAC will need to consult with other memory institutions to determine the feasibility of the Documentary Heritage Management Framework. Do the concepts of emerging, active, and mature collections make sense in the Canadian archival community outside of LAC? Are there other aspects that need to be considered when determining the status of a collection? After discussions on the framework itself, LAC will continue to consult with other memory institutions as it maps collecting areas against the framework.

## 7. Next steps

An analysis of identified program areas according to the Documentary Heritage Management Framework will be completed by January 31, 2010, in consultation with other memory institutions. Based on this analysis, an assessment will be made by March 31, 2010, as to which program areas should move from an active collecting status to a mature collecting status, and which should continue as active collecting areas. Emerging acquisition programs will also be confirmed, and strategies to support their development over the next four years will be identified.

The results of this analysis and decision making will be incorporated into the next version of the acquisition strategy for private archives, 2010–2015.

## 8. Conclusion

The final report in March 2010, will describe the results obtained by the implementation of the project described in this document and will be used to achieve the objectives of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in two respects. On the one hand, each of the eight pathfinder projects will produce operational specific deliverables, which will develop approaches and practices of LAC in respect of certain specific activity areas. On the other hand, the lessons learned during the implementation of each pathfinder project, in the context of the four guiding principles and the key roles, feed the LAC approach to the acquisition, preservation, and the resource discovery of Canada's documentary heritage. Your comments and feedback on this discussion paper will support the modernization work of LAC, as it prepares to revise its approach to meet the challenges of the digital environment in order to continue fulfilling its mandate, and thus better serve Canadians.