



LAC- Aboriginal Documentary Heritage

Introduction

This document should be read in the context of the three following documents, which are available on the Library and Archives Canada website *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 four 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 acquisition core business activities. Each pathfinder project will result in a final report, which will add conclusions about the implementation of the *Documentary Heritage Management Framework* and the *Acquisition Orientation Instrument*. Based on observations, the final report will be more effective in contributing to the achievement of LAC's mandate, within the current operating environment.

Renewing a collaborative strategy

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) acknowledges that Aboriginal heritage represents a significant and vital part of the Canadian landscape. LAC is committed to its role in the acquisition and preservation of this heritage, as well as enabling the Canadian public to discover it.

Over the years, LAC has been successful in many initiatives to increase Aboriginal representation. Much of this work has been done in cooperation and consultation with Aboriginal communities as illustrated in reports such as:

Library Services to First Nations in Canada, 1994.

"All Our Relations" Aboriginal Resources and Services Report and Recommendations, 2001.

Library and Archives Canada Report and Recommendations of the Consultation on Aboriginal Resources and Services, 2004.

[\(<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/020008/f2/020008-7000-e.pdf>\)](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/020008/f2/020008-7000-e.pdf)

Aboriginal Libraries and Archives Survey, 2008.

LAC is developing a new strategy to further develop and manage its extensive Aboriginal collection. In order for this strategy to adequately reflect the realities and needs of Aboriginal communities, LAC is interested in receiving guidance from Aboriginal communities on developing the strategy and also wishes to consult other key stakeholders with respect to Aboriginal documentary heritage throughout the country. LAC will increase collaboration, and develop new partnerships, to build reciprocal relationships. In the spirit of cooperation, LAC will listen to what Aboriginal communities have to say, and within its capacity and mandate, act upon recommendations in a transparent manner.



A collection that reflects the voices and diversity of Aboriginal communities

In order to develop an informed strategy, LAC must first consider to what degree its collection is representative. LAC should increase the number of publications and documents within its collection that communicate the voice and perspective of Aboriginal peoples, and not only publications and documents about Aboriginals or created by others. We recognize that there is a fundamental distinction between a *documentary heritage by* Aboriginals and a documentary heritage *about them*.

LAC's documentary heritage must also reflect the diversity and richness of Aboriginal culture and heritage throughout Canada. The perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal peoples, whether regional, local, provincial, territorial or national, bear witness to unique Canadian realities. In order to accurately represent and understand the contributions of Aboriginal peoples' experience in Canada, LAC's acquisition of Aboriginal documentary heritage must be based on the themes, events, individuals, communities, and nations that Aboriginal peoples themselves identify as significant.

By virtue of LAC's mandate, the "national significance" criterion that governs its approach should reflect the needs and perspectives of communities that may have different criteria for judging the importance of an individual, event or historical fact. LAC should not autonomously define what is or what is not important at a national level for Aboriginal communities with respect to documentary heritage. These communities should be able, whenever possible, to determine and develop criteria for determining what is important.

LAC must also remember that Aboriginal individuals and communities are not the only stakeholders when it comes to Aboriginal heritage. All Canadians benefit by the inclusion of the Aboriginal perspective which is paramount to an accurate and complete representation of Canada.

Challenges and issues relating to the acquisition, preservation and discovery of LAC's Aboriginal collection

Although LAC aims to be as inclusive as possible, there are nevertheless challenges regarding the acquisition, preservation and accessibility of its documentary heritage which must be taken into account in any Aboriginal collection development strategy:

LAC's Capacity to Acquire, Preserve and Provide Access to Documentary Heritage

Some documents may not meet LAC's acquisition criteria, may not be available, or LAC may not have the capacity to process and make them accessible. Increasing acquisitions of Aboriginal documents, in order to better represent the "Aboriginal voice" in the national collection, is certainly an important goal, but these acquisitions must nevertheless be subject to LAC's ability to ensure preservation and access.

Conflicting Interests and Responsibilities



LAC is also in an ambiguous situation with respect to conflicting interests that are sometimes encountered. Some Aboriginal communities are increasingly taking on self-governing functions that have been traditionally carried out by government departments. As a result, archival documents will increasingly remain in the communities and/or will be managed by them. In addition to being engaged in self-government and/or self-determining initiatives, Aboriginal communities are also expressing their intention to take charge of their tangible and intangible heritage. Memory and cultural institutions have reached a stage at which the issue of returning Aboriginal heritage to its communities of origin is being addressed. Communities want to build research or interpretation centres and take charge of their history, their culture, their past and their image. LAC recognizes that resources in Aboriginal communities are often lacking and wants to identify how it can collaborate and work together with Aboriginal communities to the extent that it is able.

Collaboration

What role should LAC play in these contexts? The answer to this question must take into account the fact that LAC is not always perceived as neutral in relation to the federal government's interests. Therefore, collaborative effort must be formal, transparent and sincere, to eradicate any possible distrust towards LAC. Relationships of trust must be built between Aboriginal communities and organizations and LAC, which must be considered part of the solution, and not the problem.

Preservation

Historical marginalization of Aboriginal peoples has affected how Aboriginal documentary heritage has been created, and challenges its survival. Nevertheless, LAC is the repository of a very rich documentary heritage concerning Aboriginal peoples. As the guardian responsible for these documentary resources, LAC must continue to demonstrate its commitment to Aboriginal peoples by ensuring that this heritage, sometimes fragile and ancient, is adequately and respectfully preserved and handled. For example, many documents that are important to communities are in audio-visual form, particularly oral narratives that represent unique ways of transmitting historical and cultural knowledge. LAC knows that the preservation of these recordings is often threatened if they are not stored in optimal conditions. Today, Aboriginal language is still evolving to other forms of media literacy, not just print.

Description of Material

LAC must also recognize its relative inability to make known all of the information on Aboriginal peoples that is contained in its collection. Since some material is not adequately described, information is sometimes unavailable. This problem exists more frequently in private and government archives, but also in collections of documentary arts and publications. As a result, in addition to acquiring new documents, efforts must also be directed towards producing a better description of the documents that it has. Making the existing Aboriginal presence more identifiable



than it is at present is another way of increasing the number of documents about Aboriginal people, while ensuring their visibility and availability.

In order to measure the degree of sufficiency of Aboriginal material and the current gaps in the national documentary heritage, it is essential to have data on the state of LAC's collection, other collections in memory institutions across Canada, and the status of collections held by Aboriginal communities and organizations.

Resource Discovery and Access

When addressing the issue of access to Aboriginal records, several important questions emerge: Do Aboriginal people have sufficient access to documents about themselves? Are LAC's tools (guides, inventories, descriptions) sufficiently accessible? How can LAC determine what should be prioritized in terms of accessibility? Do LAC's descriptions reflect their realities and perspectives? What are the needs of Aboriginal communities in terms of the content of their documentary heritage? What areas should LAC focus on in order to address these gaps?

In order to answer these questions, LAC must work closely with Aboriginal communities and organizations to develop a joint plan to acquire, preserve and provide access to Aboriginal documentary heritage.

Working collaboratively and in partnership to support a national Aboriginal collection

An informed collection development strategy must take into account the entire network of key stakeholders in this area, namely the Aboriginal communities, and knowledge and memory institutions who have an interest or specialize in Aboriginal documentary heritage.

A shared responsibility

LAC is clearly not the only institution that collects Aboriginal materials, since archives, libraries, museums and cultural centres across Canada also hold Aboriginal heritage collections. The long-term preservation of this documentary heritage is not only a shared responsibility between LAC and Aboriginal communities, but also with other memory institutions in Canada that are interested in this field. Although LAC is already working in collaboration with other Canadian memory institutions, the roles, mandates and responsibilities of each institution with an interest in Aboriginal heritage have not always been clearly defined in relation to each other. A collaborative effort and a broader discussion are required to achieve this common goal.

In view of the above considerations, LAC is interested in examining the issue of Aboriginal documentary heritage in partnership and collaboration with Aboriginal communities and memory institutions in order to collaboratively develop strategies and approaches to ensure the long-term preservation of this documentary heritage as well as its discovery by Canadians.



In order to obtain the best representation of Aboriginal communities possible, LAC must first identify appropriate and interested Aboriginal organizations and communities and then work in cooperation to develop an evolving, ever-green joint plan. Canadian Aboriginal archives, libraries and cultural centres that preserve documentary heritage can assist in defining the role(s) that LAC can play, and in identifying Aboriginal communities' needs, projects and recommendations. Finally, other knowledge institutions such as provincial archives, libraries and museums, as well as provincial professional librarians' and archivists' associations, are potential partners.

Conclusion

In March 2010, results obtained by the implementation of the project described in this document will be used to achieve the objectives of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in two respects. First, each of the eight pathfinder projects will produce specific operational deliverables, which will further LAC approaches and practices in particular areas of activity. In addition, the lessons learned during the implementation of each pathfinder project will help validate LAC's guiding principles and key roles, and will inform LAC's approach with respect 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 our institution prepares to reexamine its approach to Canadian documentary heritage in order to continue fulfilling our mandate so that we may better serve Canadians.