



Remembering is a Form of Honouring: Preserving the COVID-19 Archival Record

February 2021

An RSC Policy Briefing

COVID-19 presents an opportunity to preserve a rich and diverse historical record—one intended to honour all experiences and voices, and in recognition of ongoing systemic inequalities shaping the pandemic. But policy changes are necessary in three key areas: how memory institutions are funded and supported; the gaps in our capacity to preserve the digital records that reflect how we communicate with one another today; and how to preserve and make accessible valuable scholarly research into the societal impact of COVID-19. Our goal is to begin a conversation about priorities for archival preservation, the need for greater equity and justice in our preservation practices, and ways to safeguard the existence of historical records that will allow us in future to bear witness, with fairness and truth and in a spirit of reconciliation, to our society's response to COVID-19.

Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthen available resources and infrastructure in the archival sector to preserve the historical record of COVID-19

- Encourage university and college, Indigenous, community (including racialized and marginalized community), religious and other non-governmental archives to preserve records documenting society's response to COVID-19, through policy leadership at the federal level;
- Support them in doing so through the provision of a federal funding stream, such as the extension of the COVID 19 Emergency Support Fund or the Documentary Heritage Communities Program. These grants could potentially be distributed using the Canadian Council of Archives' already well-established allocation infrastructure.¹
- Provide targeted resources to community archives to allow them to preserve the records of their own communities;
- Provide capacity-building support and guidance for the archival sector through LAC, as recommended by the RSC Expert Panel (2014) such as online training resources for how to collect and process pandemic records within a community, sample forms for donation, manuals to apply copyright rules to gathered materials and descriptive processes, and so on;
- Encourage the creation of a dedicated web-based resource tool to help the public and

¹ Culture, History and Sport, "Emergency Support Fund for Cultural, Heritage and Sport Organizations," <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/information-covid-19/emergency-support-fund.html> (accessed November 4, 2020) and Library and Archives Canada, "Documentary Heritage Communities Program," <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/documentary-heritage-communities-program/Pages/dhpc.aspx> (accessed November 4, 2020). The Canadian Council of Archives has served as the conduit for a number of funding programs over the years. See: <http://archivescanada.ca/FinancialAssistance> (accessed November 23, 2020).

researchers locate and access pandemic records across Canada through this funding stream.

2. Create targeted capacity-building measures for digital records preservation

- Build on the recommendations in UNESCO's *Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form* (2015) which Canada signed on to;
- Request the Government of Canada to provide a new "Born-Digital Preservation Program" to provide on-going funding to public and community archives. Using a coordinated approach, specifically encourage these archives through this funding to hire dedicated personnel to oversee the collection and preservation of websites, social media, and other forms of born-digital records. This would include Canadian material on websites on .net, .org, .com and other such domains;
- Formally coordinate web archiving at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Given the often specialist nature of web archiving, a systematic program would help Canada build capacity in this vital area;
- Empower and provide ongoing funding from the Government of Canada for Library and Archives Canada so that they can meet a long-term objective of continually acquiring and preserving a crawl of the entire Canadian world wide web (specifically the .ca domain) and retain it on Canadian digital infrastructure so as to protect Canadian data sovereignty;
- Provide targeted funding for the preservation of other born-digital records *in* Canada. This will require additional funding for either cloud-based storage or further investment in robust national digital infrastructure for long-term storage.

3. Ensure the preservation of research governed by ethical procedures (TCPS2)

- Revise TCPS2 to: identify archives as the mechanism by which the secondary use and reuse of research data and records is effected; expand its consideration of archives beyond those of "national, provincial or municipal" governments; and establish compliance with appropriate practices, standards, regulations and laws as the key indicator of whether an archives might serve as a site of deposit, preservation and access of research data and records;
- Ensure that research grants include funding for the archiving of research data and records, and that researchers negotiate with archives for the deposit of their research records and data in advance of creating research records and data, as part of the ethical review process;
- Strengthen the infrastructure and resources of archives that are capable of serving as centres for the deposit, preservation and access of scholarly research data and records through the provision of funding.