



InterPARES 3 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems
TEAM Canada

General Study Research Proposal: Acquiring and Preserving Digital Records Assessing the Current State of Awareness, Practice and Competency of Small and Medium-sized Archives in Canada

Version 4.3, April 2010

Background and Rationale for Study

Small and medium-sized archives are faced with the monumental tasks involved in acquiring, maintaining and preserving digital records. Small and medium-sized archives are often understaffed and underfunded; these institutions are already struggling to succeed in preserving the memory of the communities they serve. Through their work with Janet Turner, Archivist at the North Vancouver Museum & Archives (NVMA), the Graduate Research Assistants were confronted with the challenges of acquiring, maintaining and preserving digital records. As a small archives, the NVMA is beginning to build the foundations necessary to deal with issues related to the acquisition, maintenance and preservation of the digital records of the North Vancouver community.

The proposed study was conceived as a way to directly communicate with Canada's small and medium-sized archives and learn more about what the archivists in these institutions are focusing on when it comes to acquiring, maintaining and preserving digital records. This is in accordance with the purpose of the InterPARES 3 Project:

The overall goal of InterPARES 3 is to enable small and medium-sized public and private archival organizations and programs, which are responsible for the digital records resulting from government, business, research, art and entertainment, social and/or community activities, to preserve over the long term authentic records that satisfy the requirements of their stakeholders and society's needs for an adequate record of its past.¹

¹ InterPARES 3 Project. "Objectives," InterPARES 3 Project. Available at http://www.interpares.org/ip3/ip3_objectives.cfm.

Understanding the priorities, challenges and current readiness and practices of small and medium-sized archives, with regard to digital records, will enable InterPARES 3 to focus its research for the achievement of its general goal in a more meaningful way.

Most small and medium-sized archives are unprepared and/or unwilling to acquire digital records. Of those that do, it is likely that few, if any, have adequate policies and procedures in place, nor access to the resources and expertise required to ensure the long-term preservation of digital records. InterPARES 3 strives to offer useful guidance to these institutions. Having a better understanding of the current preparedness of Canadian archives will allow InterPARES 3 to do that more effectively. The proposed study may also identify people and organizations with innovative ideas and projects that might be worth further exploration.

The proposed study will focus on identifying and assessing the nature, extent and impact of the challenges faced by small and medium-sized archives with regard to acquisition and long-term preservation of digital records. In so doing, it will aim to address the following key issues:

1. Whether the institution sees acquiring digital records as part of its mandate/mission and whether the institution currently accepts or refuses digital records and, if digital records currently are refused, what the reasons are.
2. Whether the institution already has in place, or actively is planning to develop, policies and procedures that guide the acquisition and long-term maintenance and preservation of digital records.
3. What the institution's relationship is with donors (or potential donors) regarding their digital records; more specifically, whether the institution has begun a dialogue with these types of donors, and, if so, what the nature of that dialogue is.

Research Objective

The objective of this study is to better understand the relationship between the educational, technological and personnel needs of small and medium-sized archives and their willingness to acquire, maintain and preserve digital records. Equipped with this knowledge, InterPARES 3 will be better able to help these institutions overcome barriers/perceived barriers to acquiring and preserving digital records. To this end, the study will focus on identifying and assessing the nature, extent and impact of the challenges faced by small and medium-sized archives with regard to acquisition and long-term preservation of digital records.

As an added benefit, the study will remind archivists of the urgency of these issues. It also will remind archivists that InterPARES does provide useful tools and advice for tackling the long-term preservation of digital records.

Research Products

The products of this study will be:

1. A report compiling the results of the survey
2. A report detailing the conclusions drawn from these results
3. Recommendations to InterPARES 3

Research Questions

1. Given the contexts in which these archives operate, what tools (strategies, guidelines, procedures) do small and medium-sized archives consider to be the most useful and effective for the acquisition and preservation of digital records? What tools are currently used? What tools do they perceive as being useful to them in the future?
2. What are the barriers that prevent small and medium-sized archives from acquiring and preserving digital records and what, if anything, are archives doing to try to overcome these barriers?
3. Do small and medium-sized archives in Canada educate (or have plans to educate) potential donors about digital records management, preservation and donation potential? What is the nature of the relationship between these institutions and their donors? Have relationships changed with donors over digital records? And if these relationships have changed, how?
4. How can InterPARES 3 better assist archivists in small and medium-sized archives to effectively acquire, preserve and manage digital records?

Research Methods

The data for this research will be collected through the use of a self-administered survey of archivists working in small and medium-sized archives throughout Canada. Lists of relevant archival institutions will be found via professional list-serves and the ACA Directory, as well as via provincial archival associations' directories. The survey will be available online for a set time period.

Please see draft of survey attached (Appendix 1).

Plan of Action

Activities	Target Dates
1. Submit survey questions to Behavioural Research Ethic Board	May 2010
2. Conduct literature review	Summer 2010
3. Develop survey questionnaire, initial letter of contact/invitation, informed consent information letter, and online data entry form	May 2010
4. Advertise and make survey available online	June 2010
5. Further advertise the online survey	ACA Conference, Halifax, 10-12 June 2010
6. Compile survey results	July/August 2010
7. Draft report	September 2010
8. Submit paper proposal for 2011 ACA Conference	September 2010
9. Consider writing a paper for <i>Archivaria</i>	Deadline October 2010
10. Present and discuss Draft Report	TEAM Canada Plenary Workshop 7: 24-26 November 2010
11. Final Report	January 2011

Research Team

Lead investigator: Luciana Duranti (or Laura Millar?)

Research Assistants: Cindy McLellan and Shamin Malmas

Dissemination Activities

- Mention in presentation AABC Conference April 17, 2010
- Mention in poster presentation ACA Conference, 9-12 June 2010
- Paper for ACA Conference, 2-4 June 2011
- Paper for AABC Conference, April 2011?
- Paper for AABC Newsletter?

Bibliography

Davis, Susan E. (2008), "Electronic Records Planning in "Collecting" Repositories," *The American Archivist* 71 (Spring/Summer): 168-189.

Appendix 1

Acquiring and Preserving Digital Records in Small and Medium-sized Archives – A Short Survey

The objective of this study is to better understand the needs of small and medium-sized archives when it comes to acquiring, maintaining, and preserving digital records over the long-term. Equipped with this knowledge, InterPARES 3 will be better able to help these institutions overcome barriers to preserving the memories of the communities they serve. To this end, the study will focus on identifying and assessing the nature, extent and impact of the challenges faced by small and medium-sized archives with regard to acquisition and long-term preservation of digital records.

Answers to these questions will be used in aggregate – and no particular institutions will be mentioned. Skip any questions that do not apply.

Institution name:

Number of archival staff:

Professional qualifications of staff member(s):

Hours of operation:

1. On a scale of 1-5 how important is the issue of digital records to archives in general (5 being very important and 1 being not an issue of concern)?
 - 1 (Not at all important)
 - 2
 - 3 (Neutral importance)
 - 4
 - 5 (Very important)

2. What is the current situation at your archives with regard to accepting digital records?
 - Currently accept
 - Currently refuse
 - Plan to accept
 - Plan to refuse
 - Have not yet made a decision
 - This issue has not yet come up

3. If your institution currently refuses or plans to refuse donations of digital records please identify with numbers the top two reasons why (1, 2).
 - Cost of technological expertise
 - Cost of hardware/software

- Lack of staff time
- Lack of staff training
- Not seen as an important area of collection
- Does not fit with the collection policy
- Other _____

4. Does your institution have a policy for the acquisition of digital records? Y / N

- If No, are there plans to develop such a policy?
 - Yes, currently in the process
 - Yes, within the next 2 years
 - Yes, within the next 3-5 years
 - Yes/probably, but I am not sure about the timeline
 - No
 - Not sure

5. Does your institution have a policy for the preservation of digital records? Y / N

- If No, are there plans to develop such a policy?
 - Yes, currently in the process
 - Yes within the next 2 years
 - Yes, within the next 3-5 years
 - Yes/probably, but I am not sure about the timeline
 - No
 - Not sure

6. Have staff or volunteers at your organization noticed an interest/awareness of the special nature of digital records on the part of the archives users? Y / N

- If yes, please characterize the interest. (Topic comes up once a month, only once ever, once a week)

7. Does your institution offer any educational or outreach programs to the public/potential donors? Y / N

- If yes, what sort of programs? (For example, do you provide record keeping workshops or give presentations to volunteer organizations)?
- If yes, are digital records a topic that is brought at these sessions? Please elaborate.

8. Please add any additional comments that you have on these issues.

9. Would you be willing to answer some follow-up questions over the phone? If yes, Please provide contact information.

Thank you for your time! It is greatly appreciated!