



Association of Canadian Archivists Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

The Association of Canadian Archivists' Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct ("the Code") is intended as a guide for all people who participate in archival work—the management, care, custody, preservation, and accessing of records—regardless of their title, employment status, education, or membership in a professional association. The Code is aspirational in intent; it seeks to represent an ideal to work toward. For these reasons, the principles set out below use an inclusive "we."

The Code guides individuals where decisions relating to the management of records and archives are not clear cut. This can emerge when there are conflicting priorities or values, or when new situations arise. The Code provides both a structure for defining an issue, e.g., is the issue practical or professional in nature, and a means to evaluate what is behind the issue and guide how to move forward.

The Code supports work with both public and private materials in the Canadian context and strives to provide a balance between the needs of an open and democratic society and those of the communities represented in records or archival holdings so as to ensure the ethical management of culturally sensitive materials.

Underpinning the Code is the understanding that making records available and protecting them for future use is a societal good. The principles in the Code aim to guide our decisions toward outcomes that preserve the records' context over time and respects values specific to the Canadian context.

Some of the terms used in the Code may be unfamiliar. Readers are encouraged to seek clarification from records and archives specialists, including archivists, records managers, information and privacy officers, conservators, and records management and archival science educators.

The Code is structured in two parts. The first five principles address what we do and the remaining four address who we are.

1. CONTEXT: We gather, maintain and communicate knowledge about the context in which records are created, used, and preserved.

- a. We exercise due caution and diligence in documenting and preserving the relationships between records and the activities that created them, as well as between records and the aggregations in which they belong, recognizing that these relationships are a necessary component of the records themselves.



- b. Recognizing that records originate in and are influenced by a complex interplay of legal, administrative, informational, and cultural factors over time, we strive to continuously improve our preservation and representation of these contexts.
- c. We draw guidance for gathering, maintaining and communicating records' context from:
 - i. established principles of archival theory, such as *respect des fonds* and respect for original order;
 - ii. institutional policies and guidelines governing records and our responsibilities to them;
 - iii. laws and regulations, particularly with regard to privacy and data protection;
 - iv. discourses adjacent to—or distinct from—traditional archival ideas but still relevant to archival work (see also principle 6.a); and
 - v. the communities from which the records originate, or that they represent.
- d. We recognise that discrimination, trauma or violence may be inherent in the circumstances of records creation and transmission, and that these considerations may have a bearing on how the records are described, preserved, and accessed.

2. PRESERVATION: We preserve the identity and integrity of records for which we have responsibility—in relation to the activities set out in principle 4—and have a fundamental duty to ensure they are capable of being preserved through time in a usable and understandable manner.

- a. Recognizing that preservation is the first condition of access, we strive to maintain an appropriate balance between preserving records and providing access to them.
- b. We collaborate with those having specialized knowledge on how best to preserve records and maintain the ability to reproduce them.
- c. Where the integrity of records cannot be preserved, we accurately record the changes consequent to each preservation action. In such cases, we also document the elements of a record that have been lost or changed and the likely effects on the reliability, accuracy and authenticity of the records.
- d. If it is not possible for our institution to preserve the integrity of records, we seek to transfer custody of the records—and, as appropriate, responsibility for them—to other organizations that have the means and the mandate to preserve the records.
- e. We document all decisions to deaccession or destroy records, in keeping with principles 1.a and 7.b.

3. ACCESS: We make records available to the widest possible audience in a manner consistent with their content, source, and the statutory obligations that govern the jurisdiction in which we work.



- a. We respect the privacy of the individuals who created or are the subjects of records, especially persons and communities who had no voice in the creation, transmission, disposition, or preservation of the records.
- b. In providing and managing access to records, we are sensitive to the evolving contexts of individuals (living or dead), organizations, or communities that are the subjects of the records, reconsidering access conditions as necessary in light of that sensitivity. As set out in principles 1.a and 7.b, we document all such decisions.
- c. We respect the social, cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts of records for which we have responsibility. This might mean, for example, using Indigenous demonyms in describing and making accessible materials pertaining to Indigenous communities (see also principle 5), or using terminology specific to marginalized or minority groups.

4. VALUE: We have a duty of care in the selection, acquisition, description, deaccessioning, destruction, and provision of access to records.

- a. We document our decisions regarding the selection, acquisition, description, deaccessioning, destruction, and provision of access to records, as set out by principle 7.b below, detailing in particular:
 - i. the evidentiary nature of the records, including their regulatory context (judicial, administrative, institutional, etc.) and any changes to that context over time; and
 - ii. the meaning conferred on the records by the circumstances of their creation, use, and transmission (see also principle 1.a).
- b. We ensure, to the extent that it is within our power, that records authorized for destruction are destroyed promptly and in a way consistent with their significance and sensitivity so that they cannot be recovered without resort to extraordinary measures.

5. SOVEREIGNTY: Twenty-first-century Canada recognizes not only the sovereignty of the Crown but also that of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. Records and information relating to Indigenous Peoples is administered in a way that is consistent with guidance provided by and in consultation with Indigenous communities.

- a. We are familiar with, and stay apprised of developments in contemporary published guidance on information governance as it pertains to Indigenous communities, including, but not limited to:
 - i. The [final report and calls to action](#) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
 - ii. The principles of [Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession](#) (OCAP) articulated by the First Nations Information Governance Centre
 - iii. The [Considerations and Templates for Ethical Research Practices](#) articulated by the National Aboriginal Health Organization



- iv. The [Protocols for Libraries, Archives, and Information Services](#) articulated by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information, and Resource Network

6. KNOWLEDGE: We continually seek to increase our knowledge of records—their creation, maintenance, use, and preservation—and the individuals, societies, communities, and organizations they document.

- a. We share our expertise and experience and are open to new insights into records and archival work, regardless of their source.
- b. We recognize and respect non-documentary approaches to maintaining cultural and organizational evidence and memory.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT: We consider, analyze and evaluate the processes, methods, and technologies used to create, use and manage records with the intent of balancing our responsibility to optimize the value of records—and users' access to them—against any risks and costs associated with doing so.

- a. We actively support openness, transparency, and information sharing initiatives.
- b. We promote and contribute to the establishment of documentation policies and practices supporting accountability—including documentation of our own processes and decisions, both in the organizations for which we work and in society as a whole.
- c. We are mindful of, and document wherever possible, the biases inherent in records and information processing systems.
- d. We strive to ensure that the resources needed to maintain and provide access to records and archives are sustainable over the long term. (See also principle 2.d).

8. SOCIETAL BENEFIT: We use our specialized knowledge and experience for the benefit of society as a whole.

- a. We communicate and emphasize ethical considerations to law- and policy-makers where laws and policies affect or relate to the creation, transmission, use, maintenance, preservation, and accessibility of records.
- b. We proactively engage with colleagues in other fields, particularly those related to information technology, in order to increase mutual understanding and consideration of the medium- to long-term consequences inherent in innovation and technological change, particularly as they relate to the obsolescence of existing technologies.

9. PERSONAL INTEGRITY: We conduct our work in a way that does not discriminate against, harass, or take advantage of others.

- a. We conduct ourselves in a collegial manner in professional interactions.



- b. We actively support plurality, diversity, and inclusion.
- c. We do not inappropriately reveal or profit from information gained through our privileged access to records.
- d. We do not use or disclose our privileged knowledge of individuals' research interests or findings without their consent.