



Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives

Collection Description Policy

A025 V01

Purpose

This policy aims to provide high-level information on The ArQuives policy on describing collections. It outlines information about the processes used by staff and volunteers when creating and maintaining collection information. This policy will help facilitate LGBTQ2+ community and public access to the collections it holds.

Scope

This policy, and related procedures apply to all The ArQuives volunteers and staff members who act on behalf of The ArQuives in carrying out their roles and responsibilities. This policy and associated procedures must also consider other institutional policies.

Definitions

Collections: the collected material of a museum, library, and archives acquired and preserved because of their potential value as examples, reference material, or objects of aesthetic or educational importance.

Description: The recording in a standardized form of information about the structure, function, content and context of records.

Public: For the purpose of this policy, clients, users, researchers, and the general public will be referred to as “the public.”

Staff: A staff member is anyone who is a paid full-time, part-time, probationary, temporary, or casual worker.

Volunteer: A volunteer is anyone who, without compensation or expectation of compensation beyond reimbursement, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of The ArQuives. For the purpose of this policy, interns will be referred to as “volunteers.”

Website: Any website or database The ArQuives maintains. Websites include our main site, Online Collections Portal, and Digital Exhibitions site.

Institutional Responsibility

This Policy remains a working document; it will be reviewed and revised as necessary by The ArQuives staff.

1. Executive Director will be responsible for:
 - a. The implementation of the Collection Description Policy
 - b. Reviewing and researching potential changes to the policy
2. The Board of Directors will be responsible for:
 - a. Approving and reviewing the Collection Description Policy
3. Collections staff and volunteers will be responsible for:
 - a. Reviewing and following the Collection Description Policy.
 - b. Requesting additional training or clarification from their supervisor on any questions should they need it.

Policy

1. All collections at The ArQuives are described to establish who, when, where, and how the records were created and facilitate access.
2. The ArQuives follows Canadian professional standards of description for its library, archival, and artifact collections. These standards are used as guidelines that, when necessary, are adapted to meet the needs of The ArQuives and the LGBTQ2+ communities being described.
3. The ArQuives maintain the historical language in its original form. This practice allows us to preserve the original context of the record, book, or object.
4. The ArQuives creates and maintains a Statement on Language posted on our Online Collections Database. This statement warns researchers that some language may be considered offensive, inappropriate, or unacceptable by contemporary standards or may be explicitly racist, sexual, or violent. Certain language and descriptions may not be appropriate for all users.
5. When appropriate, The ArQuives will use a content note in the description notifying users that the description or item in the collection includes challenging or potentially offensive language or imagery. The purpose of this will be to allow researchers the opportunity to mentally and emotionally prepare themselves for the language/image or allow them the opportunity to avoid the record entirely.

6. The ArQuives will describe collections using accessible language that is clear and direct. This includes using terms that directly refer to violent acts, such as hate mail, transphobia, homophobia, rape, murder, or other forms of violence, when appropriate.
7. The ArQuives will clearly name instances of racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination when creating collection descriptions.
8. Collections will be described using an “active” voice rather than attempting the “neutral” voice considered a part of traditional archival description. This includes when describing oppressive relationships and situations.
9. The ArQuives use the language of the individual when they self-identify and explicitly disclose their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, disability, or other identifiers in all collection descriptions.
10. The ArQuives policy avoids misrepresentation by assigning descriptors based on assumptions or third-party information. The ArQuives will not make assumptions about race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, disability, or other defining characteristics when creating collection descriptions. This may cause some themes to be less keyword searchable to researchers and make it more challenging to determine the extent of these individual groups.
11. Person-first language (PFL) or Identity-first language (IFL) will be used for descriptions that include elements of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, disability, or other identifiers based on the donor’s preference.
12. The ArQuives will focus on LGBTQ2+-centered description practices rather than focusing on that of the general public or academic researchers. This includes using language from the LGBTQ2+ communities and their collections rather than attempting to change the vocabulary.
13. The ArQuives staff or volunteers may use explanatory comments, which will be placed in square brackets.
14. In extreme cases, The ArQuives may choose to withhold the original title of a file, item, object, or book in the public-facing database. The public-facing database will hold a supplied title that will be placed in square brackets. The original title will remain on the file, item, object, or book. This shall only be done to protect personal information and vulnerable community members. All descriptions will consider the potential vulnerability of the LGBTQ2+ community, and staff and volunteers will reflect on how much personal information to include in descriptions. Notable information will be limited or restricted if it could compromise the safety of the individual.
15. All volunteers and staff should approach collection descriptions rooted in professional values and ethics. This framework allows for trust between the community, staff, and volunteers and promotes responsible descriptive practices. This will hold staff and

volunteers accountable to the LGBTQ2+ community, researchers, the public, and each other.

16. The ArQuives will work to use community-derived subject headings from the [Queer Metadata Collective](#) and [Trans Metadata Collective](#), including but not limited to [The Homosaurus](#). The ArQuives will adapt to fit the LGBTQ2+ community profile and language when necessary.
17. The ArQuives reviews legacy descriptions to replace inappropriate or inaccurate language that might have been used previously by past volunteers and staff. We acknowledge that previous material descriptions might not reflect how a donor may have chosen to self-describe or identify. Reviewing this material will take time as the breadth of legacy descriptions for the collection is extensive.
18. The ArQuives will retain a copy of the original description for any legacy descriptions that are updated. A note in the updated catalogue description or finding aid should state that changes have been made and the date of the change. This shall be accompanied by documentation of the reason behind the change.
19. The Executive Director shall keep documentation on changes.
20. Whenever possible, collection descriptions shall include a processing information note that allows the LGBTQ2+ community and researchers to see when the collection was processed and any notes on description practices. This may or may not include a note of positionality from the archivist.
21. The ArQuives provides a Collection Description Feedback Form on the Online Collections Portal, Digital Exhibitions site, and our main website. The public can use this form to offer feedback on the collection descriptions, errors, omissions, or copyright issues.

Name Changes

22. The material donor will be consulted to determine which name(s) and other identifiers they would like used in collection descriptions, ideally contributing to their Biographical Sketch.
23. Donors and third parties referenced in the material can request that previous names not be used in public collection descriptions. The name will remain part of the original records but will not be included in the public catalogue or descriptive records.
24. Individuals can request changes to their names and pronouns at any point.
25. Individuals can also request what terminology they would like The ArQuives to use to refer to their name changes, i.e. birth name, assigned name, dead name, previous name, or former name
26. When the individual cannot be contacted or is deceased, The ArQuives will use the name that they were last known to use.

Amendment, Modification or Variation

This policy may be amended or modified in writing after consultation and agreement by the Executive Director and Board of Directors. The Executive Director shall be responsible for reviewing the policy every three (3) years or with greater or lesser frequency as warranted. This review process seeks to correct any oversights in previous terms of reference and account for new circumstances since the last review, including new public health measures.

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To give feedback on this policy, [click here.](#)

Additional Resources

[Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Working Group](#)

[Toward Culturally Competent Archival \(Re\)Description of Marginalized Histories](#)

[Library and Archives Canada Historical Language Advisory](#)

[University of Waterloo Language in Archival Descriptions](#)

[SCRC Statement on Potentially Harmful Language in Archival Description and Cataloging](#)

[List of statements on bias in library and archives description](#)

[Queer Metadata Collective](#)

[Trans Metadata Collective](#)

<https://homosaurus.org/>

Michelle Caswell, "Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 87, no. 3, July 2017.

Society of American Archivists. "Statement of Principles" *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)*.

https://github.com/saa-ts-dacs/dacs/blob/master/04_statement_of_principles.md

<https://wellcomelibrary.org/content/documents/policy-documents/access-to-personal-data.pdf>

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1dq0aEhyQ6L69cPa4fmIg0wl6iD1156fTDPXBegTRgNM/edit#gid=765941674>