



Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives

# The ArQuives Collection Development Plan 2023- 2027

## The ArQuives Collection Development Plan 2023-2027

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## Plan Purpose

The ArQuives Collection Development Plan 2023-2027 is a document to articulate collecting priorities for the organization over the next five years. This plan will allow The ArQuives to make consistent and transparent decisions regarding new acquisitions that will enhance the collection, improve our programming, and work to address the systemic historical inequities within our organization.

The Collection Development Plan has been created as a part of an ongoing process to make our collections more accessible to the public and offer transparency of our professional practices. This work has included a significant redescription project for all archival collections to bring them to professional Canadian archival standards, a large cataloging project to describe artifact and artwork collections, making our collections accessible to the public via our Online Collections Portal, and a Collections Review Project that reviewed our collecting practices by assessing our existing holdings.

The Collection Development Plan 2023-2027 has several goals, including supporting staff and volunteers working with the collection, and creating a transparent document to guide The ArQuives' decision-making process so that we are accountable to ourselves, our Strategic Plan, and our community. The ArQuives holds an amazing collection of material and the aim of this Plan is to actively work at making it more representative and accessible to the community.

The ArQuives will use this plan in conjunction with the following policies, procedures, and documentation:

- A001 Acquisition Policy
- A025 Collection Description Policy
- B001 The ArQuives Deed of Gift
- B002 Reader Registration
- Strategic Plan 2023-2027

This plan will be supported by annual budget allocation for processing collections and making descriptions accessible online, partnerships, and yearly programming including exhibitions, events, tours, and educational programming.

The Collections Development Plan 2023-2027 has been created with the following principles at its core: access, representation, documentation, inclusion, contextuality, respect, reliability, reciprocity, responsibility, and preservation.

## Vision and Mandate of The ArQuives

The ArQuives aspires to be a significant resource and catalyst for those who strive for a future world where LGBTQ2+ people are accepted, valued, and celebrated.

The ArQuives was established to aid in the recovery and preservation of our histories. Its mandate is to acquire, preserve, organize, and give public access to information and materials in any medium, by and about LGBTQ2+ people, primarily produced in or concerning Canada while maintaining a research library, international research files, and an international collection of LGBTQ2+ periodicals.

## Collection Positioning

The ArQuives is the only institution dedicated exclusively to the collection, preservation, and public access of LGBTQ2+ Canadian life and history. The ArQuives is one of the largest LGBTQ2+ archives in the world and has become so thanks to the support of the LGBTQ2+ community, who have provided 100% of our operational budget and nearly all collection donations.

We acknowledge the work of LGBTQ2+ archival organizations in Canada dedicated to collecting and preserving LGBTQ2+ history and to various collections within provincial, city, and educational institutions that collect, preserve, and make accessible LGBTQ2+ history. We acknowledge that The ArQuives is not always the right repository for collections and that local access should take precedence if that is the desire of the community or donor.

The ArQuives is the oldest and most established LGBTQ2+ archives in Canada and we will continue to accept LGBTQ2+ collections from across the country, notably when there is no other organization where it might be safe. The ArQuives continues to be an independent organization that reports to its members and not to any level of government or corporate institution. Our independence is our strength as we work to ensure that LGBTQ2+ collections stay in the control of the LGBTQ2+ communities rather than in a larger institution.

## The Collection

The ArQuives Collection can be divided into four main categories: library, archives, artifacts and artwork, and reference material.

## Library

The James Fraser Library holds over 24 000 fiction and non-fiction titles. This includes Canadian and International publications focusing on LGBTQ2+ history. The collection also includes monographs, periodicals, and zines.

## Archives

The archival collection holds the personal papers of individuals and the organizational records of community groups, businesses, and collectives from across the country. This collection includes photographs, A/V material, posters, journals and diaries, and ephemera.

## Artifacts and Artwork

This collection includes over 5000 3D items, including t-shirts, buttons, matchbooks, costumes, leather, trophies, board games, toys, flags, and matchbooks. The artwork includes various mediums, including sketches, watercolours, acrylic, and oils. This collection also includes our National Portrait Collection.

## Reference

Reference material includes published material, including newspaper clippings and vertical files that document people, places, and events.

## Acquisitions Policy Update

The Society of American Archivists Dictionary of Archives Terminology defines an *Acquisition Policy* as “guidelines outlining the scope and selection of materials that support a repository’s mission.” In other words, the policy says what will and what will not be collected by an organization.

In 2016 an Acquisition Policy was created by volunteers from the Operations Committee and was approved by the Board. In 2020, Collections staff at The ArQuives, in collaboration with volunteers and interns, began evaluating the 2016 Acquisition Policy (A001) and the Art Acquisition Policy (A002). A decision was made to merge the two documents and update the policy to be more transparent and less procedures orientated. Separate documentation for procedures would be written separately. The feedback from the Collection Review 2021-2022 was considered when creating the new policy. Staff and interns worked to compile examples of other Acquisition Policies, notably from institutions that held library, archival, artifact and artwork collections. In the summer of 2022, a copy of the new Acquisition Policy was sent to Collection volunteers for review and comments. In the fall of 2022, The ArQuives Board of Directors approved

the updated Acquisitions Policy. A copy of the Acquisition Policy can be found on our website.

## Collection History and Importance

The ArQuives was founded in 1973 as the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives. The original statement of purpose from 1975 lays out two aims “The collection, preservation, and arrangement of information and materials in any medium by and about gay people, with emphasis on Canada; and the encouragement of and assistance in the use of this materials, as well as assistance in the search for new sources.” At our founding, there were no other LGBTQ2+ archives in Canada, and none of the major libraries or archival institutions in Canada were collecting LGBTQ2+ material. Any material from those institutions was overwhelmingly published print material and did not include many archival papers or artifacts. As such, the decision to collect nationwide was made from the founding of the organization, notably, as there was no reason to limit the scope with no other organizations collecting at the time.

The mandate has remained largely unchanged, though “gay” has been updated with more inclusive language to ensure that the entire spectrum of LGBTQ2+ experiences is represented within the wording. The Collection Development plan sees no changes to what we collect as we continue to have a sweeping and inclusive mandate. The plan does, however, name specific communities within the larger LGBTQ2+ community as priorities, especially those with many intersecting identities that are not represented or represented well within the collections.

Though The ArQuives identified the need for active collecting (asking for collections) as early as the 1980s, the ability to do so was hampered by many factors, including lack of funding, the dependence on volunteers for labour, and the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. As such, the history of collecting at The ArQuives has been passive (accepting what is offered), routine (accruals from existing donors), or reactive (in response to changes, closures, or mergers within the community). As the Collection Review has shown us, the passive approach to collecting over the past 50 years has led to certain communities being overrepresented and others being ignored.

For a full history of The ArQuives, please see Appendix A for further reading.

## Access to the Collection

In the early years of The ArQuives, limited public service space was available, and we had yet to arrive at the advent of online searchable databases. As such, accessing collections, understanding the scope of the archives, and searching collection

descriptions were challenging, if not impossible. In 2009, The ArQuives moved to 34 Isabella Street, which increased our capacity to welcome researchers and the public into the space. Since adding our online Collections Portal in 2018, demand for in-house research has consistently grown with local, national, and international researchers. It also demonstrated the depth and breadth of our collections through what is requested by researchers. In 2020, COVID-19 halted our in-house researchers, and access to the collection became very difficult. With ongoing Ontario lockdowns, we were closed to researchers until early 2021, when we started opening up again by appointment.

## Online Access

In 2012, The ArQuives launched its first Omeka site to share digital collections and exhibitions. This platform allows The ArQuives to promote and celebrate our collections and enable users to see themselves represented in the collection, especially those who could not physically access The ArQuives. Access continued to be the focus in 2017 when The ArQuives began work to move the collections database online for researchers. The Online Collections Portal launched in 2018 and now allows researchers to access the database independently and off-site for the first time.

Making the collections more accessible highlighted its gaps as more users could search the material online. Making material available online and collection descriptions accessible is ongoing as The ArQuives works to add backlogged material and create new exhibitions.

## Users

The ArQuives is used by many different members of the LGBTQ2+ community, the media, academics, artists, and community organizations. We are open to all researchers who would like to come in and see the collection and we have the privilege of welcoming researchers from around the world every year. While COVID has hampered our ability to welcome drop-in visitors, we have worked hard to provide by-appointment access to anyone who requests.

The ArQuives acknowledges that because of gaps in our collection, users from underrepresented groups are often not doing research at our institution. By actively collecting material to address the gaps in our collection, we will in turn be welcoming a more diverse group of users. As communities are better represented in the collection, members from those groups will be more likely to visit and use The ArQuives.

## Safe Storage

New collections mean that the storage space of The ArQuives will continue to feel the strain. The ArQuives is committed to only acquiring material that it can preserve and protect for the long term. Limitations around what we do collect are laid out in our Acquisitions Policy. Currently, our collection is held at our main site (34 Isabella Street), our offsite storage in Toronto (near our main location), and in a third-party storage facility in the Greater Toronto Area. As the cost of storage is high downtown, we will continue to use a third-party storage facility to safeguard the collection so that we do not have to stop or slow our collecting.

The risks to our collections grows in our current location as we struggle to maintain a safe environment for the preservation of the collection. The ArQuives does everything possible with the space that we have, however it has long been acknowledged that the space (a heritage building built before 1860) is not ideal. Since 2017, three different reports have been conducted to review the space as it exists, notice concerns, and make recommendations to safeguard the collection in the short term. The ArQuives will continue to review the space on an ongoing basis to ensure the safety of the collection.

The ArQuives is committed to finding a new space to house the collection and to welcome donors, visitors, and researchers in the future. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of real estate in Toronto, this process is likely to take time and a considerable amount of money. We will continue to use onsite and off-site storage to house the collections until they can be moved to a new space.

## Collections Review 2021-2022

To make any change within an organization, one must know where they are starting. In 2020 the funds for a Collections Review were approved by the Board of Directors. These funds were used to hire Inclusive Voices as an independent third party to research the collection and interview staff, volunteers, donors, and researchers. The ArQuives hired Inclusive Voices to maintain complete transparency and encourage earnest feedback regarding the experience of working with the collection and donors. They then randomly selected 7% of the archives to review for collecting trends. An executive summary, the final report from the consultants, and the recommendations to the Board of Directors can be found on our website.

The findings of the report were much what the staff and many volunteers at The ArQuives expected. The collection sample showed that the material was white (68.2%) and from Ontario (28%).



The ultimate recommendations of the report were divided into six different categories: Leadership, Finances, Collection Practices, Intergenerational Healing, Building Community Partnerships, and Mandate. While the recommendations around collections are linked in almost every category, there are several recommendations that are directly related to collections that were considered when creating this Plan.

Recommendations for collecting:

- a. The ArQuives strive to develop a robust fundraising campaign in the pursuit of hiring additional staff in the areas of collections management and community outreach.
- b. The ArQuives develop and implement a Collections Development Plan, that addresses the need for an updated Acquisition Policy, and the creation of a Collections Description Policy.
- c. The ArQuives develop a donor-focused accession process that gives the option to meet with a qualified staff member or informed volunteer to work through required paperwork, to build trusting relationships and to address quantified gaps in the collection.
- d. The ArQuives hire an additional staff member to aid processing donations, donor relations, and creation of the Collections Development Plan
- e. The ArQuives develop engagement opportunities that invite specific community groups and most importantly youth to interface with the digital and physical collections in ways that connect younger and older activists in the space and through materials.
- f. The ArQuives prepare and release annual updates in their Annual Report on its progress toward realizing the recommendations made in this report, and subsequent work that contributes to the spirit of this report.

## Collecting Priorities

The ArQuives has seen a lot of change over the past 50 years. The organization must evaluate its past practices as we plan for the coming years. The work done by staff and volunteers describing and organizing the collections that were in our backlog means that the gaps in our collection are now quantifiable. We have a better understanding of what we have and what is missing. New acquisitions are essential to meet The ArQuives mandate and support curatorial and educational programming for the LGBTQ2+ community and Canada as a whole. The ArQuives acknowledges that an inclusive library, archive, and artifact & artwork collection is only possible with the help of a transparent Collection Development Plan.

The ArQuives created The Collection Development Plan 2023-2027 to help the LGBTQ2+ community and the general public have an increased understanding of our priorities as an organization, especially around subjects and formats that we are most interested in adding to the collection. It is important to understand that we will not be excluding material from “low-priority” collections from being added to the collection. Instead, this list highlights what we will be actively reaching out to the community for and where The ArQuives will focus our processing priorities.

Development of the collection can be divided into 3 different areas: Geography, Theme or Sector, and Format.

1. **Geography:** relates to the geographical area that the collection is from or about.
2. **Theme or Sector:** the topic of the material or the focus of the community organization.
3. **Format:** the media on which the item is created (example: paper, CD, photograph, digital, or VHS).

Within each of these areas, we have created three categories: High Priority, Further Development, and Low Priority.

1. **High Priority:** Are materials that The ArQuives does not have or that are poorly represented in the collection. In some cases, these collections have been systematically ignored. In others, the material has been extremely difficult to transfer to our organization, difficult to care for to the standards it requires, or is too extensive for the organization to house. Further in other cases, the relationship between The ArQuives and community has been strained due to their erasure from our collections; so relationships need to be built or rebuilt. High Priority material will receive more of our human and financial resources.

2. **Further Development:** Are materials that The ArQuives has in their collection but needs work to broaden representation. These collections will receive both human and financial resources.
3. **Low Priority:** Are materials that are already highly represented in The ArQuives collection. These materials will be a lower priority for human and financial resources. These materials will continue to be accepted passively and reactively but will not be a part of active collecting.

Many collections can have multiple identifiers. As such, if a donation offer falls under High priority in any way, it will be prioritized for acquisition.

Based on the results of the Collections Review, The ArQuives understands that their collection has a bias towards material by and about white-cis-gay-men in Toronto. This bias, in part, is due to their position of privilege inherent in a white supremacist colonial country. It is also because Toronto was a hub of LGBTQ2+ activity and activism. The following priority levels take into consideration the collections that already exist within The ArQuives and those known to exist within the LGBTQ2+ community.

\* Please note that priority groups are listed randomly within each section.

## High priority

### Geography

- Rural experiences
- Northern experiences
- Alberta
- British Columbia
- Manitoba
- New Brunswick
- Newfoundland and Labrador
- Northwest Territories
- Nova Scotia
- Nunavut
- Prince Edward Island
- Quebec
- Saskatchewan
- Yukon

### Sectors and Themes

- QTIBPOC community members and community groups
- 2-Spirit and Queer First Nations, Metis, and Inuit community members and community groups
- The LGBT Purge and military experiences
- Newcomers, refugees, and undocumented experiences
- Sex work
- Trans, Non-Binary, and Intersex experiences
- Asexual Spectrum, Bisexual, Lesbian, and Pansexual experiences
- Children and Youth experiences (under 30)
- Current student grassroots activism
- Religious - Indigenous beliefs and spirituality, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Heathen, Pagan, Sikh, Hindu, Ba'hai, Jain
- French language and other non-English materials
- 1800s-1950s experiences
- Underhoused experiences
- Canadian music and musicians
- Disability experiences: activism, art, and culture
- Feminist
- Socialist and Communist experiences and activism
- Union activism and experiences

#### Formats

- Born digital records
- Photographs, 2000 to current
- Zines
- Website and social media captures

### **Further development**

#### Geography

- Ontario, Outside Downtown Toronto

#### Sectors and Themes

- Seniors and elder activism
- Sports (including dance)
- Women's experiences

#### Formats

- Machine readable

- Photographs, 1990-2000

### **Low priority collections**

#### Geography

- Downtown Toronto

#### Sectors and Themes

- Pornography (cisgender, white, gay)
- 1979-1989 Toronto experiences
- Upper-middle to upper-class experiences

#### Formats

- International large press fiction and non-fiction (including international biographies)
- Large format art books
- International large distribution films
- High circulating Canadian and international newspapers

## Collecting Methods 2023-2027

The ArQuives has been working to connect with LGBTQ2+ community members for many years. 2006 saw the creation of the Community Engagement Committee, which continues to conduct tours, assist with creating physical and digital exhibitions, research, and organize events. From 2013-2020 The ArQuives funded a staff Outreach position, and in 2017, The ArQuives hired two Trans Project Assistants to focus on Trans outreach and collecting. However, to achieve the goals of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, notably around having and serving a diverse LGBTQ2+ community, a more focused and sustainable approach to LGBTQ2+ community members and organizations must be solidified.

The ArQuives commits to increasing the amount of active collecting, specifically from High Priority groups and organizations, by engaging in a variety of different activities, including partnerships, programming (including exhibitions), bringing in new users, and communicating with community members about material that already exist within our collection.

## Goals 2023-2027

The ArQuives has set the following goals to improve its collection over the next five years.

1. Grow our Collection: Increase collection donations from High Priority groups
2. Grow our Programming: Increase the number of exhibitions and events from High Priority groups
3. Grow our Users: Increase use of collections by High Priority groups
4. Grow our Partnerships: Increase the number of sustained partnerships with High Priority groups
5. Grow our Visibility: Increase awareness of the collection by the public and High Priority groups

### 1. Grow our Collection

The ArQuives will focus its backlog reduction on collections that meet the **High Priority** criteria. Collections scheduled for description or cataloging that meet **High Priority** criteria will be marked within our internal database before being distributed to staff and volunteers for processing. This will ensure they are prioritized and made accessible to the public as soon as possible.

Additionally, The ArQuives commits to active collecting from High Priority groups. This means forming partnerships with community organizations, meeting community members where they are at, and working with them so they can better understand how their collection will be safeguarded.

The following numbers are based on the understanding that acquisitions are unlikely unless we can commit to creating long-term relationships built on trust and transparency.

YEAR	Number of High Priority Collections Added
2023	10
2024	10
2025	10
2026	11
2027	12

## 2. Grow our Programming

The ArQuives commits to increasing the number of Digital Exhibitions and events that focus on High Priority Groups based on existing and incoming collections.

YEAR	Number of new exhibitions or events per year
2023	3
2024	3
2025	3
2026	4
2027	4

## 3. Grow our Users

The ArQuives will focus on ensuring that High Priority groups become users by connecting with communities to share what material we have housed within our collection, create partnerships, and encourage donations. The ArQuives will make sure that our backlogged collections are processed and available to community members

and encourage them to become users through partnerships, programming, exhibitions, and where applicable, waive research and/or fees.

#### 4. Grow our Partnerships

The ArQuives commits to creating new partnerships with High Priority groups. The following numbers are based on the understanding that new partnerships are unlikely unless we can commit to creating long-term relationships built on trust and transparency, and can illustrate successful partnerships that benefit both parties.

YEAR	Number of new partnerships
2023	2
2024	3
2025	3
2026	4
2027	4

#### 5. Grow our visibility

The ArQuives commits to working to make sure that LGBTQ2+ communities know and understand which collections we care for. The ArQuives will work to render these collections accessible to the community that are already using the archives, but also to new users, such as youth through our new Educational Resources. Even frequent users may not be familiar with new collections that have been donated or recently described and available on our Online Collections Portal, new partnerships, exhibitions (online and physical), programming, and events. The ArQuives commits to sharing more information about collections, partnerships, and programming on our website, social media, and newsletter.

### Measuring Success

The ArQuives will monitor the success of the Collection Development Plan using several metrics.

1. Quantitative
  - a. The ArQuives will indicate on every donation if it falls within **High Priority**, **Further Development**, or **Low Priority**. The ArQuives will note this on both the Deed of Gift and in our internal collections database. This will



allow us to measure quantitatively if we meet our goals to increase High Priority collections year over year.

- b. The ArQuives will enable staff, volunteers, donors, and researchers the option to self-identify when working with the organization. This will enable us to see if we are meeting our goals of increased use by new users.
- c. The ArQuives will review the number of new partnerships and exhibitions created annually.

## 2. Satisfaction

- a. The ArQuives will survey new donors, partners, and users on their level of satisfaction in early 2025 and again in late 2027.
- b. The ArQuives will survey staff, volunteers to understand the perception of our collection at the end of every calendar year.
- c. The ArQuives will survey staff and volunteers on their level of satisfaction with the success of this plan in 2027.

## Budget

The success of the Collection Development Plan will not be possible without dedicated spending over the next five years. Like many community archives, The ArQuives struggles with funding collecting initiatives as this type of work does not fall under any current granting structures and must rely on our community donors to support these projects.

While The ArQuives will continue to collect exclusively by donation, funds will be set aside in each yearly budget to assist in acquiring materials from High Priority groups. These funds will be used for shipping and transportation of donations, which will be approved by the Executive Director. These funds will be limited and donor needs will be assessed on a case by case basis. The ArQuives commits to spend at least 80% of these funds on donations that meet High Priority group criteria. The remaining 20% will be at the discretion of the Executive Director.

The ArQuives commits to spending at least 80% of their programming funds on groups represented in their High Priority criteria. This includes exhibitions, events, talks, honorariums, and research. The remaining 20% will be at the discretion of the Executive Director.

Staffing will be essential to ensure that the Collections Development Plan is successful. The ArQuives commits to having collections staff continue to ensure that collections brought in are processed appropriately. While the number of collections staff is likely to vary over the years, at least one collection staff member will be responsible for

answering questions about incoming donations, working with donors to understand the paperwork, and ensuring that donations are correctly prioritized upon arrival.

Additionally, The ArQuives commits to continuing to fund a Trans Project Assistant, with the support of a community financial donor, to focus exclusively on augmenting our Trans collections and building further relationships within the community.

## Reporting

Each year, as part of the Annual Report, The ArQuives will indicate its progress based on the goals set in this plan. Copies of the Annual Report will be available on The ArQuives website for at least 5 years. At the end of 2027, the Executive Director and Board of Directors will review the Collection Development Plan goals. With staff and volunteers' assistance, the Executive Director will create a new Collection Development Plan based on the project's success and challenges.

## Conclusion

The ArQuives strives to be a safe and respected repository for Canadian LGBTQ2+ history. However, the organization has lacked consistency in collecting criteria, strategy, and priorities.

The Collection Development Plan provides a transparent and public guide for understanding the priorities and goals for developing The ArQuives' various holdings in 2023-2027. The work we have done leading up to 2023 has prepared us to implement this plan with the best transparent and accountable intentions as we begin our 50th year of operation. The work done in the coming years will strengthen our collections and continue to ensure the organization's relevance and future success.

## Appendix A: Further Reading

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## Appendix B: References

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