



# Summary Report on Feedback Received on the DRAFT Framework

Prepared by the Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission Taskforce of the Steering Committee on Canada's Archives

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## I. Introduction

This report summarizes the feedback received on the draft vision statement, principles, objectives, and strategies encompassing the *Framework for Reconciliation Action and Awareness for Archives in Canada*. Feedback was solicited via a survey created on Survey Monkey in both English and French. A link to the survey was distributed via the Canadian Council of Archives' Arcan-L Listserv, the membership Listserv of the Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ), and direct email. The survey remained open from July 28 to October 9, 2020, and received feedback from 89 respondents from the following regions.

Ontario – 29	Saskatchewan – 1
British Columbia – 17	New Brunswick – 1
Yukon – 8	Northwest Territories – 1
Alberta – 8	Europe – 1
Manitoba – 9	Oceania – 1
Quebec – 9	Prince Edward Island – 0
Nova Scotia – 2	Nunavut – 0
Newfoundland & Labrador – 2	

Respondents also identified themselves as working in the following sectors:

Archives – 63	Education – 8
Libraries – 19	Indigenous Government – 8
Culture & Heritage – 16	Non-Indigenous Government – 3
Records Management – 16	Other – 5
Museums – 13	Language – 3

This report summarizes the comments and themes that recurred throughout the survey responses and/or that applied to the whole framework document and then describes feedback specific to the vision statement, principles, and individual objectives.

## II. Recurring Themes

- ***Need for Training and Practical Guidance***

Respondents were generally positive about the overall purpose of the framework and expressed excitement about the proposed objectives and strategies. They agreed that archivists must collectively and individually be held accountable for managing First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-related archival materials in respectful ways. However, they also acknowledged that this work might be “a very uncomfortable process” for non-Indigenous archivists, who will require “an openness to new ways of learning and knowing,” which may “contradict or conflict with ‘standard’ beliefs and practices.” To this point, they suggested a need for training that would provide archivists with the foundational knowledge required to apply the objectives and strategies in meaningful ways. They asked for links to resources on decolonization, a course to cover the content in the framework, and examples of success stories and work already begun to demonstrate what

implementing the framework might look like. They expressed their hope that there would be “a plan behind these words” and wondered if there would be follow-up documents, templates, and toolkits to offer more practical guidance.

- ***Questions of Responsibility***

Given the amount of work involved in implementing many of the proposed objectives and strategies, respondents also questioned who would be held accountable for this work, whether it would be the responsibility of the archival institution, archival associations and councils, or governments. Those working in smaller archives in particular expressed concerns that the objectives and strategies were not achievable with the limited resources at their disposal and requested clearer direction for different target audiences (i.e., small archives, large institutions, professional associations, etc.). As one respondent suggested, “If the idea is to help give a roadmap with this document, it seems important to let the various components of the archival community know what they can do.”

- ***Need for Additional Funding***

The lack of financial and other resources faced by many archives was repeatedly stressed throughout the feedback. Many respondents expressed concern that doing this work without additional resources would risk compromising the mental, physical, and emotional health of archivists who are already stretched thin with existing work. They felt that before such a framework can be implemented, archives and archivists must be provided not only the knowledge and training but also the funding, time, and support needed to “take on such important but complex work.”

- ***Concerns over Colonial Language and Terminology***

The majority of feedback responses related to concerns over the language and terminology used throughout the framework: many respondents believed this contained connotations that reinforced the power and authority of colonial institutions. The language and terminology repeatedly contested throughout the feedback responses are outlined below.

- ***Indigenous***

Several respondents felt that the term *Indigenous* was inappropriate for a document intended for the Canadian archives profession and risked creating a pan-Indigenous, “one-size-fits-all” approach to applying the objectives and strategies. They strongly recommended that *Indigenous* be replaced with *First Nations, Inuit, and Métis* to reflect the diversity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and encourage a distinctions-based approach to the work.

- ***Community***

Many respondents indicated a strong preference for the words *Nation* or *government* rather than *community* when referring to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. They argued that the term *community* denies First Nations, Inuit, and Métis nationhood and sovereignty and asserted that, for the work to truly adhere to the articles set out in *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), relationships should be developed at the government level and on a

nation-to-nation basis, rather than at the community level.

- ***Canadian Archival Community and Canadian***

The phrase *Canadian archival community* was described as lacking clarity. Given the content of the framework, respondents interpreted *Canadian archival community* to refer to non-Indigenous archives and archivists, which problematically implies that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people are not already part of the Canadian archival community. This implied dichotomy between the Canadian archival community and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, they warned, risks alienating the many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis archivists and heritage professionals in the field. Additionally, some respondents questioned to what extent there is a singular “Canadian archival community” and by what authority the taskforce speaks for this community. Additionally, there were some negative responses to the term *Canadian*: some respondents indicated that not everyone in Canada identifies with this nationality.

- ***Recognize and Acknowledge***

A respondent described the term *recognition*, as it is used throughout the document, as implying that the Canadian archival community has given itself the power to “recognize” or “acknowledge” the rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. They felt that this language is not only infused with colonial overtones but again emphasizes a distinction between the Canadian archival community and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

- ***Shall and Current Archival Practice***

Some respondents maintained that the term *shall*, used throughout the objectives and strategies, was too “imperious” and recommended replacing it with *should* or something less strong. Additionally, some respondents felt that terms such as *shall*, *will*, and *current archival practice* suggest that work related to the objectives and strategies has not yet begun – a suggestion that fails to acknowledge the existence of varied archival theories and practices, especially those that have been developed by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis professionals. Another respondent also felt that such language neglects to recognize that some current theory and practice has been beneficial to the preservation of some First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-related archival materials, such as treaty documents. Respondents variously suggested replacing instances of *shall* with *shall continue to*; “contextualizing these strategies as being relevant for archives looking to begin the work of decolonization and reconciliation”; and “celebrating and promoting theories, practices, and research” that are “engaged in the work of reconciliation or directed by Indigenous communities and Indigenous archivists.”

- ***Represented in Its Collections***

When describing First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-related archival materials, the phrase *represented in its collections* was called out on several occasions for two reasons: First, some respondents felt that the phrase suggests that these materials are owned by the archival institution currently holding them. This again stands at odds with UNDRIP and turns First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples into the subjects of archival materials rather than seeing them as cocreators, stewards, and

owners. Second, some felt that specific references to the First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-related materials “represented in the archives’ collections” mean that the objectives and strategies apply only to the archival institutions holding such materials when they should instead extend to all archival institutions, regardless of what materials they do or do not hold. These respondents argued that true systemic change will occur only if the entire archives profession commits to the actions outlined in the framework.

- ***Traditional Knowledge and Inclusive of Indigenous Perspectives***

It was argued that the term *Traditional Knowledge* was “relegating [Indigenous] knowledge [to] something that is static and in the past.” A respondent suggested changing all instances of *Traditional Knowledge* to *First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Knowledge*. Some respondents also asserted that the word *perspectives*, when used in phrases such as *inclusive of Indigenous perspectives*, should be replaced with *Knowledges*. Furthermore, the phrase *inclusive of Indigenous perspectives* was described as continuing to privilege colonial perspectives. As one respondent argued, “It is not enough to just be inclusive.” Rather, the work must be “Indigenous-led, informed, and engaged.”

- ***Concerns over Colonial Tone and First Nations-centricity***

The term *reconciliation* was also called out as being problematic and as not accurately reflecting the process. One respondent expressed their preference for the phrase *perpetual conciliation*, which they asserted is a stronger and more meaningful phrase. Several responses also asserted that the overall language of the objectives and strategies takes on a “saviour from the outside” tone, including when using terms such as *capacity building* and *outreach* and when prioritizing the bureaucratic processes of archival institutions. They recommended ensuring that the language makes it clear that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments and communities are leading archival projects and that nothing is done without their expressed desire and consent. Respondents also suggested that language throughout the document should more strongly prioritize and emphasize First Nations, Inuit, and Métis intellectual sovereignty and self-determination. Many of the respondents also called out the overwhelming focus on First Nations-specific examples and the lack of Inuit and Métis voices throughout the framework.

### **III. Vision Statement**

While some respondents were supportive of the intent of the vision statement, they also expressed concern over its “wordiness” and the use of the word *ownership*, which one respondent believed should be changed to *custodianship*, which was felt to be more appropriate in a First Nations, Inuit, and Métis context. Other suggestions for rewriting the statement included the following commitments:

- to the long-term preservation of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultural heritage
- to supporting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis rights to access their records, recorded memory, knowledge, and information
- to advocating for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis rights to ownership and sovereignty over their data

- to respecting and learning about First Nations, Inuit, and Métis ways of archiving
- to redressing harms

There were also several critical reactions to the vision statement, including a comment that it was very “vision-statementy” and another that described it as “corporate and hollow” in comparison to the more nuanced and meaningful objectives and strategies. Another response criticized the phrasing of “the Canadian archival community supports” as patronizing and othering. They suggested changing the statement to reflect the fact that the archival community “is made up of people of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry to this land” and that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis sovereignty and self-determination are components of equitable relationships between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

Additional comments requested clarity on whether “non-status” First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people were included in this statement and further discussion on the meaning of *information sovereignty*, including the legal implications of supporting it. Finally, a respondent suggested removing *truth* from the first sentence due to the vagueness of the term, arguing that it is unclear exactly what and whose truth this refers to.

#### IV. Principles

Overall, respondents were pleased to see the inclusion of UNDRIP and the Joint-Orentlicher Principles and acknowledged that the framework’s principles “point everyone towards a more collaborative process.” However, they also expressed concerns that, based on current discussions within the archives profession, the principles “unfortunately, seem aspirational.” They worried about the financial resources and emotional labour necessary to do the work, identified the challenges that archival institutions face in knowing which people or organizations to consult with, and asked questions about whose authority the principles have been issued under. They felt that, in order for the principles to be fulfilled, the three national archives associations would need to work together with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) to ensure that the mechanisms, time, money, and resources are in place to make “relationship building . . . a central priority of the profession.”

Suggestions for revising the principles were many and varied. Some respondents suggested reordering while others requested the addition of principles that speak to redressing the harm of mainstream archival frameworks and ensuring long-term preservation of Indigenous documentary heritage. There were also several concerns related to the language in this section of the draft. Respondents suggested that describing archives’ actions as “proactive engagement” was too colonial in tone and that this should be rephrased to clarify that any engagement should be First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-led. Respondents also asked for clarification regarding the meaning of some phrases, for example, *Indigenous community priorities*. They asked who, or which governance bodies, sets these priorities. Others requested elaboration on how the “equitable sharing” of resources would be determined and stressed that “building capacity” should be done in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, while another respondent recommended

that the principles should also refer to those who are neither youth nor Elders. Most respondents were fully supportive of the principle acknowledging “that First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis are diverse and distinct peoples and sovereign nations with their own systems of governance and established protocols,” although it was pointed out that the Inuit are not a nation but a collective name for several nations. With regard to the principle pledging commitment to “reconciliation and relationship building” as guided by both UNDRIP and UNJOP, one respondent felt that it was important to add *truth* to any commitment to reconciliation, as “archives hold many truths that still need to be brought to light before they can be reconciled.”

## V. Objectives & Strategies

### **Objective 1: *Relationships of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility***

The overall feedback for objective 1 was positive. Respondents believed that this objective rightly acknowledges that mainstream approaches to archival practice may cause harm to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and that “not accepting this is a barrier to meaningful change.” They also agreed that anchoring the relationship-building process in the Four Rs and “sticking to them will ensure that it is done right.” Respondents also wished to emphasize “an important first step in starting this journey” is to “respect the sovereignty of [the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis] Peoples and Nation with whom you wish to dialogue” and that engagement “is a journey, not a series of events,” and requires a long-term commitment to “creating trusting relationships which facilitate long-term sharing and knowledge creation.”

There were, however, several comments that said the language in this section appears to give agency to archives. Respondents reiterated that engagement should take place only by invitation and that collaborative projects should always be determined and led by the First Nations, Inuit, or Métis community. With regard to the establishment of advisory committees, respondents said that “the key is to support those communities eager for our support and NOT to establish committees, panels, etc. based on an external quota” required by funding agreements. They also argued that members of advisory committees “should be chosen by communities to represent themselves in the process.” Several concerns were also expressed about the concept of reciprocity, which one respondent described as “a lofty ideal” because “equity, trust, and relationship must first be established before establishing a framework for reciprocity.” Furthermore, “collaborations shouldn’t be expected to be mutually beneficial” at all times but rather should support Indigenous sovereignty and benefit First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities first and foremost.

The feedback also identified several areas for improvement. One respondent suggested adding a point that highlights the need for archivists to be prepared for the formal and informal terms of any relationship to change over time. Another respondent said that the transformation of archival theory and practice should not be limited to the management of First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-related archival materials but should also involve “creating spaces for Indigenous voices and autonomy within the profession.” There were also calls to emphasize the fact that pre-meeting research only prepares you so much – that “one must have the



ability to listen to people and their concerns/priorities at the meeting itself.”

Additional comments included the recommendation to add a point calling upon archives and archivists to (1) advocate for legislative reform that protects First Nations, Inuit, and Métis sovereignty over the archival materials by and about them; (2) ensure transparency about the work and purpose of the archives and any proposed archival projects; and (3) build on work that has already been done in this area so that archives are not duplicating work and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities are not overburdened with requests. To illustrate the latter point, respondents offered practical advice. For example, they recommended (1) contacting other heritage institutions that hold materials from the same First Nations, Inuit, or Métis community to determine who to contact and what protocols to follow; (2) exploring past funding reports and websites to determine if any archival work has already occurred in the community; (3) developing an online directory of governance organizations with information on communications protocols; and (4) sharing a primer on the concept and importance of cultural Protocols. One respondent also felt that the strategies rely too heavily on technology and requested ideas on how to connect with the many rural, remote, and northern communities that do not have reliable access to the Internet.

## **Objective 2 – Governance and Management Structures**

Comments on objective 2 were primarily supportive. One respondent stated that “this is the heart of reconciliation” and “universities and colleges, as well as archives, must provide concrete, real opportunities for Indigenous people to become archivists, curators and librarians, if we are to truly be willing to respect self-determination and Indigenous control over how Indigenous culture and history is kept and shared.” Others agreed but also stressed that this objective (including the strategies it outlines) “requires serious change in current practices,” especially with regard to funding. Respondents commented that “funding is always a critical factor in a long-term partnership” and needs to be available for more than short-term projects; “few hard-cost grants or funding pots [are] available for communities to build technical and physical spaces to support archival/cultural work”; and “we need to push for change and understanding from [funding] agencies if we want to move forward respectfully.” One respondent also suggested adding a point about encouraging archives and archivists to prioritize staff and monetary resources for First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-related outreach and projects, “even when it does not benefit the institution to do so.”

Critical responses to this objective described the language and examples provided as privileging “colonialist white settler bureaucratic priorities” and processes – describing “directive” terminology such as *establish*, *direct*, and *formalize* as “not inclusive.” As a result, respondents interpreted the strategies as “forcing collaboration upon Indigenous nations,” using Eurocentric structures and instruments, when it should be up to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments or communities to decide whether they want to participate and, if so, on what terms.

### **Objective 3 – Professional Practice**

Overall, respondents agreed on the importance of the work outlined in objective 3 and were pleased to see the reference to Oral History, which “in Indigenous languages IS the archives of Indigenous communities.” There were, however, several requests for more practical information on “what these partnerships would look like, what challenges we need to address, etc.” and “who would ensure this happens.” Suggestions included creating a national directory of heritage institutions holding First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-related archival materials and creating an “outreach archivist” position at every archive.

Regarding the provision of trauma-informed archival practice, a couple of respondents called for the compilation of a catalogue or directory of professionals who can provide trauma support services. Another respondent asked for clarity on the term *safe space*, and others expressed their discomfort with the term *user* when referring to people who use archives. There was also some concern about the strategy for improving the visibility of the archives profession, which one respondent felt contradicted the strategies to create more inclusive and safe spaces; they suggested that the profession as it exists is not necessarily something to promote: “What profession are we improving the visibility of? The existing profession or the NEW profession we are trying to build that is more open and inclusive.”

Respondents also offered several warnings. They cautioned that implementing these strategies without a coordinated approach risked overburdening First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments and communities. To address this, one respondent called for funding to establish a centralized office to lead the work. Other respondents also recommended clarifying that cultural competency training should always be delivered by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis teachers and that archivists should “not expect Indigenous colleagues, partners, or users to facilitate or provide labour in training non-Indigenous staff members.” Finally, some respondents again pointed out the need to reconcile suggestions in many of the strategies to utilize technology with the fact that many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities in rural, remote, and northern communities have limited access to Internet connectivity and other technological supports.

### **Objective 4 – Ownership, Control and Possession**

Objective 4 elicited varied comments requesting further elaboration and qualifications to the text. One respondent pointed out that the first point, regarding the concept of collective ownership, “is not unilateral for all Indigenous peoples in Canada” and suggested that it might be more appropriate to “frame this section as beginning with recognizing and respecting Indigenous Peoples’ intellectual sovereignty over archival materials created by or about them, but approaches to ownership can change from community to community.” Similarly, another respondent suggested adding a strategy to “recognize and respect that every instance of ownership, control, and possession is unique, and there is no singular policy or procedure to privilege the Indigenous community’s understanding of and rights to the materials in question.”

One respondent recommended that the concept of collective ownership should be explained closer to the beginning of the section, as one of the main principles, as “community ownership is central to the idea of Indigenous record sovereignty [and] needs to be centred at the forefront!” Another respondent suggested adding a point that urges archivists to “advocate for the removal of legislative and other barriers that restrict Indigenous sovereignty.” Several respondents also called out the lack of Inuit- and Métis-specific protocols in this section, including the absence of a reference to the National Inuit Strategy on Research (NISR). Additionally, several respondents remarked that repatriation, which “always needs to be on the table,” was not prioritized enough, nor was the need to advocate for funding to build the infrastructure and support needed for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments and communities that want their materials repatriated but may not have the facilities to house them. Others again suggested rephrasing the language to foreground First Nations, Inuit, and Métis agency in decision making.

Other concerns expressed in the feedback were related to the implications of this objective on archival practice and the challenges archivists will face in implementing the strategies. One respondent feared that the strategies will restrict archival acquisition; another questioned whether archives are legally able to repatriate materials in their custody; and another argued that repatriation and restricted access would hinder public education as “educating mainstream society about Indigenous cultures and issues can only happen if the materials are available to all.” Further clarifications were also requested regarding the meaning of *collaborative custodianship* and whether intellectual ownership extends to even those archival materials not created by but about First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. To guide the work, respondents requested “best practice” recommendations and suggested looking to museum repatriation literature for guidance.

## **Objective 5 – Access**

Comments on objective 5 suggested that the need for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments and communities to retain complete control over who has permission to access and use their archival materials is not emphasized strongly enough in the main objective statement, with one respondent asking, “Do we dare add the term ‘legal possession’ in relationship to the ‘repatriation’ option here?” Other comments questioned what materials are considered “Indigenous-related” and how the strategies would be organized, tracked, and enforced. To facilitate the work, respondents variously recommended (1) identifying which members of the archival community are positioned to lead on the proposed strategies (especially with regard to database development); (2) creating working groups to discuss how to develop more appropriate finding aids; and (3) addressing the financial and technological barriers to access. One respondent also pointed out that the strategies fail to emphasize that database development should include consideration of the need for archival materials to be translated into First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages.

## Objective 6 – Arrangement and Description

A few points were repeated throughout the feedback for objective 6. These referred to concerns about the workload and costs, the need for long-term commitment and collaboration, and requests for examples of work that has already occurred in this area. Respondents agreed that, while the potential of this objective is exciting, it is a “huge undertaking” and “highly problematic in practice.” As one respondent stated, “Lots of work needs to be done in this area. One historically inappropriate term can cause a lot of misunderstanding and damage the relationship. I’ve seen it many times.” Yet respondents also noted that many archives simply do not have the resources to develop and implement such systems and suggested that provincial archives associations be tasked with the responsibility for directing this work.

In terms of the practical application of these strategies, as noted in the feedback to other objectives, the emphasis on technology in this section was pointed out as a barrier to those in rural, remote, and northern areas. Respondents also asked for guidance on how to structurally arrange materials in a way that supports First Nations, Inuit, and Métis researchers and on how to handle historical terms and language that are racist and/or offensive: “Records are offensive and need to be preserved as evidence of this. But how this is done in a way that doesn’t marginalize or further alienate Indigenous Peoples is something we need help on.” Practical suggestions included creating (1) a network catalogue of proficient language speakers, organizations, or groups for each First Nations, Inuit, and Métis language; (2) a channel for continuous feedback from communities; and (3) a bibliography of collaborative work that has been done among varied institutions and disciplines.

A couple of respondents noted that this objective does not address how arrangement and description standards marginalize and decontextualize First Nations, Inuit, and Métis histories – pointing out that the *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)* “is based on creating structures to outline the original context of records” and changing such standards will be difficult, as “the entire enterprise of archiving and keeping records is to a certain extent based on [a] Euro-Western [organization of] social life.” As one respondent asked, “If we have a government department’s records, are we going to not describe it in the context of its role in government at all and only describe by its content/relevance to audience?” Another respondent remarked that mentioning the *(ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description)* in this section was problematic as this standard is currently “being reimagined entirely and the new approach is infinitely more complex and much, much less user friendly [and] it is not even clear if it takes into account Indigenous perspectives.”

Others also noted that, contrary to what is stated in this objective, the possibility for describing records created by a collective exists in mainstream archival standards. They pointed out, for example, that religious archives often contain records in which a communal group is described as the creator of the materials. Additionally, others referenced First Nations-, Inuit-, and Métis-developed standards (such as the Brian Deer Classification system) and asked for these to be included as examples of existing and emerging work in this area.

## **Objective 7 – Education**

The feedback for objective 7 indicated overall support but also included several questions about how this objective will be realized. Respondents wondered if a new curriculum would involve offering additional courses focusing on the proposed topics or integrating the content into existing classes. They also asked who would lead and provide the funding to enact these strategies, suggested involving post-secondary institutions and associations in the work, and recommended highlighting the need for community-based programs and other less formal learning opportunities.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This report summarized the feedback received on the draft vision statement, principles, objectives, and strategies. Taskforce members reviewed and discussed the feedback responses, which were then incorporated into the text of the framework or addressed in the introduction, glossary, or frequently asked questions (FAQs) included in the final report.