

The 21st Century Archival Practitioner

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Abstract: In the United States, the role of the archivist is often viewed as serving the needs of scholars, historians, and posterity while the role of the records manager is seen as serving the interests of the organization so that it can meet its goals. In today's digital environment, however, these roles are converging. Archivists remain responsible for activities central to the archival process. But they increasingly work as part of a team that may be involved not only with records management but also with projects related to cybersecurity, blockchain distributed ledger technology, digital forensics, e-discovery, information governance and more. And they must carry out their duties within the prevailing societal and technological environment. This paper will describe the process used to identify topics of most interest to practicing archivists and to solicit information professionals from the fields of archives, records management, information governance, and related fields to share their expertise in describing those terms. This paper will also provide examples of the 111 entries authored by 105 information professionals that comprise *The Handbook of Archival Practice*.

Introduction

One may ask, "What happens when an archivist tries to put archival theory into practice?" To answer this question, a two-year journey was embarked upon. In 2019, with the aid of a 4-person advisory council¹, topics most important to practicing archivists were identified through requests made via listservs, websites, and more. Employing an iterative process, some recommendations were discarded while others were added to arrive at 111 terms. A website was created to explain the project and host a call for proposals soliciting authors to share their knowledge and expertise by writing articles for each term using a standard template. The template called for a definition and discussion of the term as well as practical examples explaining how the term influences archival practice. Each entry was reviewed by the editor with the assistance of two graduate assistants. Some authors provided documents for inclusion in the appendices, such as a strategic placement brainstorming worksheet, potential sources of funding for archival projects, online privacy statements, and collection development policy sample forms. In early 2021, the final draft was submitted to the publisher, and in September 2021, *The Handbook of Archival Practice* was published. Written primarily for an audience in the United States, the information contained within this work is of value to archival professionals worldwide.

Problem Statement

Despite advances in the digital environment, physical objects remain. Therefore, archivists are increasingly tasked with the responsibility for hybrid collections comprised of paper, analog, and digital materials. In addition, responsibilities traditionally considered outside the purview of the archivist but currently impacting professional activities—such as cybersecurity, digital forensics, and information governance—must be added to the archivist's knowledge base. And finally, at the time this project was proposed, there was no comprehensive handbook written from the perspective of the archival professional that the student, early practitioner, or seasoned professional could refer to for guidance on an as-needed

¹ Dr. Luciana Duranti, University of British Columbia; Dr. Adam Jansen, Hawaii State Archives; Dr. Julie McLeod, Northumbria University (retired); Richard Pearce-Moses, Clayton State University (retired).

basis. *The Handbook of Archival Practice* was developed to address these challenges by serving as a single source of information in today’s societal and technological environment.

Method

The approach to this project can best be described as mixed methods, as it involved completing multiple distinct tasks: 1) communicating invitations to archivists to recommend terms to be included in *The Handbook*, 2) hosting a focus group made up of advisory board members and the editor to refine the selection of terms, 3) creating a website to explain the concept and a survey form to solicit proposals from potential authors, and 4) writing and editing the entries and publishing the final product. Table 1 provides a high-level view of the various tasks involved.

Table 1: Overview of Project Activities and Results

Task	Method	Date(s)	Results
Communicated the concept of the Handbook to members of the archival community and solicited feedback and terms for inclusion.	Communication via email, listservs, discussion forums, and more.	April 11, 2019 – April 30, 2019	120 terms recommended by 43 respondents.
Appointed and worked with a 4-member Advisory Board to develop a proposal, refine a list of terms, and recommend authors.	Personal invitations were extended to the members of the Advisory Board. Meetings were held in Zoom.	April 14, 2019 – January 14, 2021	Contributed to the success of the project through participation in 21 meetings and numerous email discussions.
Created a website describing the project with a link to a form to submit a proposal. Informed authors of successful (or unsuccessful) proposals as they were reviewed.	Published 3 calls for proposals with a link to the website through email, listservs, discussion forums, and more. Communicated with potential authors via email.	October 28, 2019 January 21, 2020 August 11, 2020	40 proposals 33 proposals 17 proposals
Identified and invited additional authors, mainly from related fields, to participate.	With input from the Advisory Board, identified individuals with expertise on the remaining topics and sent personal invitations to participate via email.	August 11, 2020 – September 30, 2021	105 final authors confirmed to cover all 111 terms.
Editing of draft entries and subsequent revisions.	Word documents were accepted as email attachments and reviewed as received. All required at least one revision.	December 25, 2019 – December 20, 2020	Successful completion of 111 entries.
Submission of draft to publisher and editing of proofs.	Word documents and images (jpeg format) were submitted via Dropbox.	Feb. 1, 2021 July 1, 2021	Submission and further revision.

Release of The Handbook	Published by Rowman & Littlefield	September 12, 2021	Publication
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Results

The data was gathered from three main sources: 1) terms were solicited via email, listservs, websites, discussion forums, 2) proposals were invited through similar channels, and 3) confirmed authors wrote the entries. Survey Monkey forms were used to gather data provided by respondents to requests made for terms and proposals (items 1 and 2). In some cases, authors provided additional material which is included in the Appendices.

Topics for Inclusion

The original intent was to present the 111 entries in alphabetical order, but it was soon apparent that the final terms fell naturally into 10 key areas of practice as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Key Areas of Practice.

1. The Prevailing Environment	6. Digital Preservation
2. Records Creation & Recordkeeping Systems	7. User Services
3. Appraisal and Acquisition	8. Outreach and Advocacy
4. Arrangement and Description	9. Risk Management, Security and Privacy
5. Storage and Preservation (analog)	10. Management and Leadership

The first section of the handbook addresses topics that are in the forefront of archival discussions today, such as activism, ethics, and decolonization of records and archives. Authors of the entries included in table 3 provide strategies for those struggling to transform practices considering changes in the internal and external environment.

Table 3: The Prevailing Environment (9 terms).

Archival Activism	Ethics	Repatriation
COVID-19 Pandemic, Response to	Human Rights	Standardization
Decolonization (of Records and Archives)	Postcustodialism	

Concepts related to records creation and recordkeeping systems are shown in table 4. Although some archivists bemoan the records management responsibilities with which they are charged, in the U.S., knowledge of records management is required for certification by the Academy of Certified Archivists.

Table 4: Records Creation and Recordkeeping Systems (14 terms).

Appropriate Recordkeeping System	Enterprise Content Management (ECM)	Records Management Program Design
Blockchain (for Recordkeeping)	Functional Classification	Records Retention
Critical Records	Records Continuum	Records System
Disposition	Records Creation and Receipt	Records System Functional Requirements
Employee Training	Records Lifecycle	

Appraisal is a fundamental archival function which, although it may take place at any stage of an object's time within an archives, must occur prior to acquisition. Entries in this category are shown in table 5.

Table 5: Appraisal and Acquisition (13 terms).

Accessioning	Collection Management	Reappraisal and Deaccessioning
Accruals (Accretions)	Donor Relations (for Acquisition)	Replevin
Appraisal	Macro-appraisal	
Appraisal for Web Archives	Monetary Appraisal of Archives in the Canadian Context	
Collection Development Policy	Pre-acquisition Fieldwork	

Once a manual process, today arrangement and description increasingly involve technology and related standards. Linked Data is a perfect example of design principles for sharing machine-readable interlinked data on the web. Table 6 lists additional topics.

Table 6: Arrangement and Description (11 terms).

Arrangement and Description	Declassification	Linked Data
Backlogs	Encoded Archival Description (EAD)	Processing
Cataloging	Encoded Archival Standards	Taxonomy
Crowdsourcing Metadata	Finding Aid	

Storage and preservation are necessary for both analog and digital materials. The entries shown in table 7 do touch on technology; however, the original objects addressed in the entries are physical in nature.

Table 7: Storage and Preservation (Analog) (7 terms).

Conservation	Environmental Monitoring Systems	Preservation
Digitization	Microfilming (or Microphotography)	
Disaster Recovery Plan	Physical Security	

The topic of digital preservation elicited the most interest. Table 8 contains topics as diverse as Blockchain (for Archives), Emulation, and Website Archiving.

Table 8: Digital Preservation (19 Terms).

Active Digital Preservation	Digital Signatures	Social Media Archiving
Blockchain (for Archives)	Digital Surrogates	Trusted Digital Repository
Cloud-Based Digital Preservation	Electronic Archival Services (EAS)	Trustworthy Repositories Audit and Certification
Digital Archive & Preservation (DAP) Framework	Emulation	Virtual Worlds Archiving
Digital Curation	File Format	Website Archiving
Digital Forensics	Migration	
Digital Forensics for Archives	OAIS Archives	

User Services is the bridge between the processing workflow and access to archival materials by users. It encompasses reference services that aid patrons in locating materials relevant to their interests while providing both access and accessibility. Entries in this section, as shown in table 9, include the Freedom of Information Act, inter-institutional archival loan, and reading room design.

Table 9: Category 7: User Services (8 terms).

Accessibility	Inter-institutional Archival Loan (I-IAL)	Reference Interview
Freedom of Information Act	Providing Access	Teaching and Learning with Primary Sources
Instruction in Identifying Archival Sources	Reading Room (i.e., Reference, Research, Search Room)	

Archival advocacy involves activities designed to gain public support for archival institutions, records, and the profession (outreach) as well as activities undertaken to gain support within the parent institution for archival programs and materials (inreach). Authors of the entries shown in table 10 describe activities in which they have engaged, including community events, digital exhibitions, internal advocacy, and social media outreach.

Table 10: Category 8: Outreach and Advocacy (7 terms).

Archival Materials (Use in Education)	Event Programming	Social Media Outreach
Community Outreach Activities	Internal Advocacy (for Collection Care)	
Digital Exhibition	Public Awareness	

Security is described as measures taken to protect materials, while Risk Management is the systematic control of losses or damages. Privacy is more difficult for an archivist to enforce since it involves a tension between respecting the privacy of individuals and granting reasonable access to archival collections. Some, but not all, decisions will be guided by laws and regulations. Topics shown in table 11 include business impact analysis (BIA), cybersecurity, eDiscovery, PII tools, and privacy by design.

Table 11: Category 9: Risk Management, Security, and Privacy (11 terms).

Business Continuity Planning (BCP)	Electronic Discovery (eDiscovery)	Privacy
Business Impact Analysis (BIA)	Information Analysis	Privacy by Design
Cybersecurity	Information Governance	Risk Management
Dark Archives	PII Tools	

Archival management describes the application of archival principles and techniques to the professional management of an archival institution or program. Leadership requires additional skills in communication, motivation, inspiration, and encouragement to influence employees. Among the entries in table 12 are community and corporate archives, oral history programs, strategic planning and managing diversity, equity, and accessibility in the workplace.

Table 12: Category 10: Management and Leadership (12 terms).

Community Archives	DEAI (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion), Managing in the Workplace	Small Archives Management
Copyright	Grant Writing	Strategic Planning
Copyright: Limitations and Exceptions	Leadership	Sustainability
Copyright: Public Domain	Oral History Program, Designing and Managing	

Authors of Successful Proposals

Most of the successful proposals came from the United States (78). However, 27 authors represented 7 additional countries—Canada, 13; United Kingdom, 7; Australia, 3; and Jamaica, Germany, New Zealand, and the Russia Federation, 1 each.

As shown in figure 1, 44 of the 105 final authors had the terms “archivist” or “archives” in their job titles; 6 had the term “records” in their job titles; and 2 had both “records management” and “archivist” in their job titles. Twelve authors had job titles reflecting “professor” or “lecturer,” 9 of those were employed teaching archives, records management, and/or information management courses. Six authors listed their job title as “consultant.” Examples of additional job titles held by authors are digital strategist, program analyst, music reference specialist, head of knowledge and information, head of information and cybersecurity, curator of manuscripts, and digital initiatives librarian.

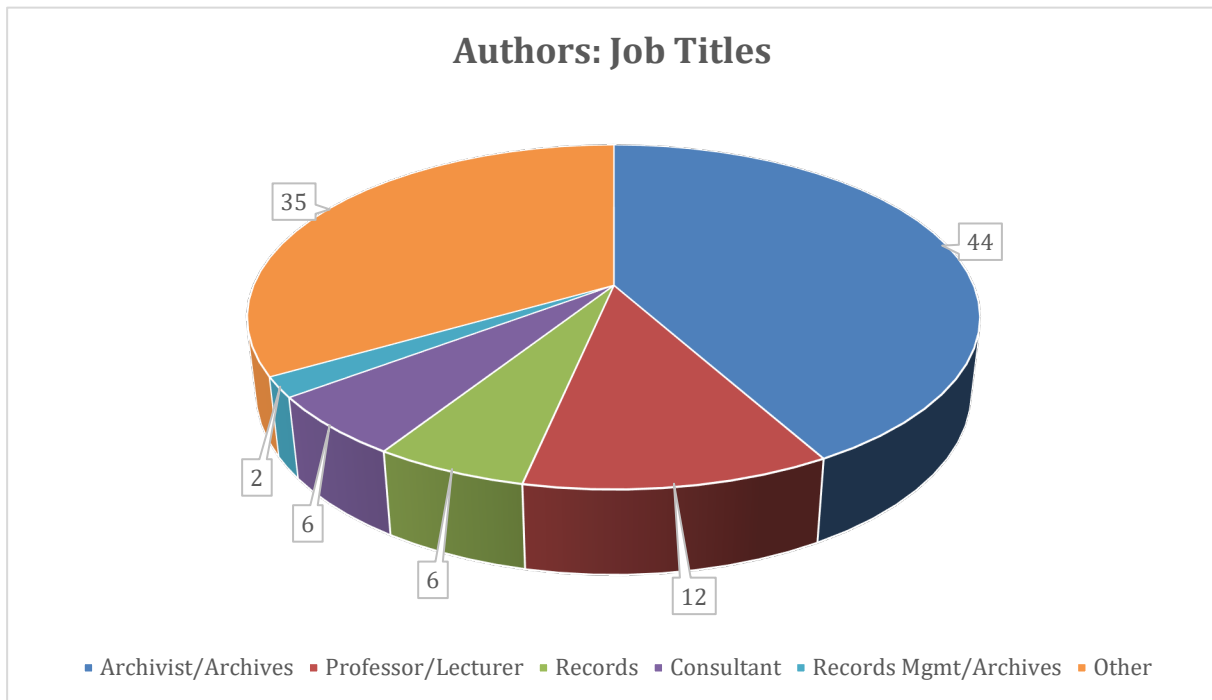


Figure 1: Job Titles of 105 Contributors to The Handbook of Archival Practice.

As shown in figure 2, 56 of the 105 authors are affiliated with universities; 15 of those are placed within the institution’s library. Twenty-three authors work in government; 16 in private organizations; and 6 are self-employed. The 4 places of employment categorized as “other” comprise a religious organization, a research center, a conservation center, and an historical society.

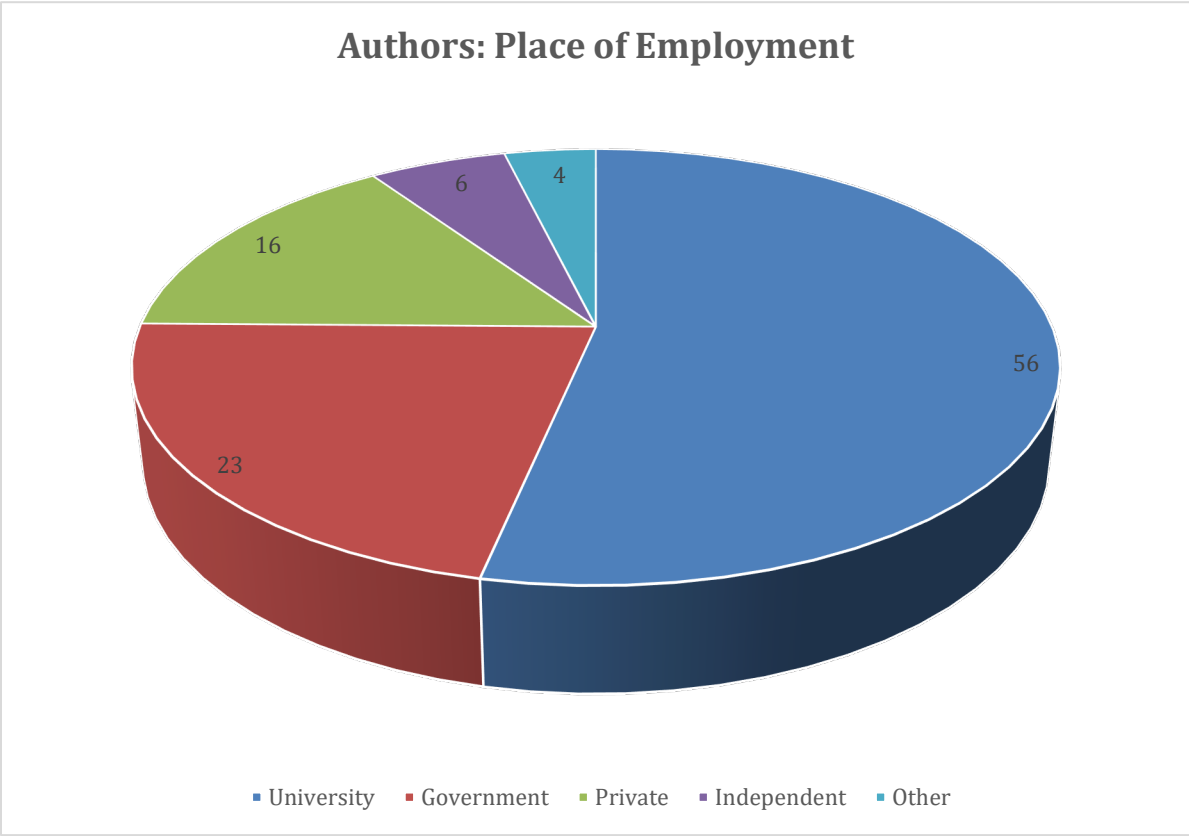


Figure 2. Place of Employment of 105 Contributors Work

Completed Entries

Each of the entries in the book begin with the term and a definition, either from a recognized authority such as the Society of American Archivists or written by the author. Then, depending on the term, the author provides additional information by describing a process, explaining the impact on archival practice, and/or providing guidance to those engaged in similar undertakings. Following is a description of six entries explaining their potential usefulness to the practicing archivist and underscoring the diversity of both the topics and the authors.

Archival Activism. The first entry in the Handbook was written by Carli V. Lowe, the University archivist at San José State University. She recommends using resources like *Documenting the Now*—a service that has been developing, curating, and distributing a set of strategies to preserve social media content. She also provides a table containing 8 terms described as archival work accompanied by strategies for each that can be employed to promote inclusion into the archivist's daily activities—for example, “description” should include vocabulary describing marginalized communities in their own terms (Lowe, 2021, 2-5).

Critical Records. Susan Hart, Digital Information Strategies Team Lead, Government of British Columbia, heads a team of government archivists responsible for providing policy and guidance that will ensure digital records retain their integrity and authenticity to meet current needs and archival preservation goals. She explained 7 critical records factors to be considered (e.g., operational importance,

risk/security, enduring value) and described the process involved in managing critical records (Hart, 2021, 37-38).

Cloud-based Digital Preservation. Valerie S. Komor, Director, Associated Press Corporate Archive, provided a graphical representation of their Collection Management process, beginning with input in paper, media, and digital formats and ending with access provided to several audiences including internal users, outside users and researchers, and visitors to AP Web Portals. As a corporate archives, they don't allow public access to their collections, but they welcome researchers to the reading room by appointment. Scholars whose institutions subscribe to Gale/Cengage products can access "AP Collections Online," a set of around two million pages of historical records from 1846 to the present (Ashley and Komor, 2021, 216-219).

Information Governance. Sarah R. Demb, Senior Records Manager/Archivist, Harvard University Archives, stresses the value for archivists to work within an information governance framework that allows for ongoing and organic communications between the owners of the infrastructure (IT), content (most staff) and policy (records and archives, risk management, legal counsel) to enable (as one possible outcome) healthy custodial practices throughout the lifecycle (or post-custodial continuum) of archival material. She provided an image of the Information Management Policy Portion of an Information Governance Framework to illustrate a selection of tools and governance bodies with stakeholders (Demb, 2021, 366-367).

Replevin. Jelain Chubb, State Archivist, Texas State Library and Archives (TSLAC) Division, is responsible for ensuring that permanent records documenting Texas' history are preserved and available for future generations. She described the approach TSLAC takes to locate, identify, make a claim, and repatriate alienated records—including obtaining the assistance of the Texas Attorney General's Office (OAG) for more complex situations when necessary. A copy of a letter used to assert a claim of legal ownership of an item offered for auction is included with the entry and can be used as a model by others finding themselves in a similar position (Chubb, 2021, 133-139).

Strategic Planning. Emily Rupp Cottle manages the corporate archive of *Vanguard*, one of the world's largest investment management companies. In her entry, she included a "strategic placement" graphic summarizing her archives' strategic plan. According to the author, "With this document you should be able to have discussions about your activities, resources, success metrics, and value to the organization. It can also be used as a decision-making framework for accepting new projects" (Cottle, 2021, 417-421).

Findings

In the United States, practicing archivists may demonstrate their mastery of skills and knowledge by earning certification through the Academy of Certified Archivists. The following list of topics recommended for inclusion by practicing archivists for inclusion in *The Handbook* align with the Academy's "Role Delineation Statement for Professional Archivists" (ACA, 2021).

1. Archival theory, method, and practice for archival materials on all media.
2. Impact of environment on archival materials and their origins (e.g., human rights, DEAI, decolonialization).
3. Professional standards and best practice.
4. Core archival functions (e.g., appraisal, description, access, preservation, protection, advocacy).
5. The concepts of the life cycle of records and the records continuum.
6. Management skills (e.g., strategic planning, grant writing, budgeting, staff training).

In addition to the archival, records management, and management competencies presented in the previous list, archival professionals desired information on the following related knowledge and skills.

1. Business Concepts (e.g., Business Impact Analysis, Business Process Management, Information Analysis, Information Governance, Risk Management).
2. Information Management (e.g., Enterprise Content Management, Content Services Platforms, Digital Forensics, Digital Surrogates, Emulation).
3. Legal/Privacy/Security Issues (e.g., Copyright, Cybersecurity, eDiscovery, FOIA, Privacy by Design).
4. Emerging/Developing Technologies (e.g., Blockchain, Cloud Computing, Electronic Archival Services, Social Media, PII Tools).

Some of the individuals who recommended terms agreed to write entries about those topics. However, most of those suggesting terms did so to learn about those topics and were not prepared to write an entry. Most of the individuals who submitted proposals, wrote entries based on their current work assignments. For example, Robyn K. Rodgers, inaugural Senior Archivist, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) History Office, contributed two entries: “Collection Development Policy” and “Collection Management.” In addition, she generously shared six Collection Development Policy Sample Forms for inclusion in the appendices: External Donations Form, Archives Internal Transfer Form, Deaccessions Form, Preservation Evaluation Form, Archives Processing Checklist, and Archives Researcher Registration Form (Rodgers, 2021, 437-443).

Conclusion

Each archivist is a product of their own times. Today’s information landscape is vastly different from the context in which early archivists practiced their craft. Traditional responsibilities—such as appraisal, acquisition, arrangement description, storage, access, and preservation—remain, but the way they are carried out are influenced by digital technologies and societal expectations. In addition, responsibilities traditionally considered outside the purview of the archivist but currently impacting professional activities—such as cybersecurity, digital forensics, digital curation, distributed systems (e.g., cloud computing), and distributed trust systems (e.g., blockchain)—must also be understood. *The Handbook of Archival Practice* was developed by asking practicing archivists what they would like included and by inviting those professionals—as well as professionals from related fields—to share their expertise by authoring entries. Although written primarily for archival practitioners in the United States, contributors to this work have generously contributed their time and talent to creating a valuable, easy-to-use reference that will benefit their peers in archives, records management, and related domains worldwide.

Resources

Academy of Certified Archivists. 2021. “Role Delineation Statement for Professional Archivists.” Last approved by Board in 2021. Accessed December 15, 2022.

<https://www.certifiedarchivists.org/role-delineation>

Ashley L.J. and Komor, V.S. 2021. “Cloud-based Digital Preservation.” In *The Handbook of Archival Practice*, edited by Patricia C. Franks, 216-219. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021.

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