

Library Storage Facilities in Canada

May 24, 2019

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Background

One of the initial deliverables of the Canadian Collective Print Preservation Strategy Working Group is an environmental scan of Canadian collective print preservation initiatives. The working group felt that it would be important to develop an inventory of Canadian library storage and preservation facilities that could potentially serve as nodes in a collective shared print network. Doug Brigham, representing UBC and COPPUL on the working group, agreed to coordinate a survey and summarize the results.

On March 22, 2019, an email was sent to the CARL-L listserv, Library and Archives Canada, and the Library of Parliament seeking participants for a survey of standalone library storage facilities in Canada. Participants were asked to provide one response for each separate storage facility they manage. The survey asked for information about the location, ownership, contents, physical capacity, structure, organizational placement and operation of the storage facilities.

We received a total of 25 responses from 15 separate institutions:

1. Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ)
2. Carleton University
3. Library and Archives Canada (LAC) (7 responses)
4. Université de Montréal
5. Université Laval
6. University of Alberta
7. University of British Columbia (2 responses)
8. University of Calgary
9. University of Manitoba
10. University of Ottawa
11. University of Saskatchewan
12. University of Toronto
13. Western University (3 responses)
14. Wilfrid Laurier University (on behalf of the Tri-University Group)

15. York University (2 responses)

Ownership and operation

Respondents were asked to characterize the ownership and operation of their storage facilities. Twenty-three responses indicated that the library (or its parent institution) owns and operates the facility. Of those responses, two indicated that the facilities are joint efforts of groups of libraries:

- Downsview, for the Keep@Downsview partners: Toronto, Ottawa, McMaster, Queen's and Western
- Tri-University Annex, for the Tri-University Group: Guelph, Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier

Three responses indicated that they use commercial records management or storage solutions. Two of those responses explicitly stated that many different organizations store materials in the same facilities.

Whose materials

Respondents were asked to describe the parties for which they store materials. Five respondents indicated that the facility stores materials for institutions other than the owner: the three using commercial facilities plus two others. One specialized facility stores nitrate film on behalf of another organization. The other indicated that the facility houses a small quantity of materials belonging to other units of the same parent organization or to an outside organization.

All other respondents indicated that the facility stores materials belonging solely or primarily to the owner.

As noted above, the Downsview facility and the Tri-University Annex house materials on behalf of the members of their respective partnerships.

Which materials

Respondents were asked to list the types of materials that their facilities house. The results fall roughly into three groups by prevalence:

Group 1

- 88% house archival, rare or special collections
- 84% house print monographs
- 80% house print serials

Group 2

- 68% house media or audio-visual materials
- 56% house maps or plans
- 52% house institutional records
- 52% house microforms

Group 3

- 36% house artworks
- 16% house equipment
- 16% house photographic materials
- 8% house other materials
- 4% house ephemera
- 4% house library publications
- 4% house office supplies

Virtually all respondents indicated that their facilities house a mix of materials. This is not surprising, given that the groups above roughly represent the most common types of materials found in research library collections.

The only response that did not indicate a mix of materials was for a facility dedicated to the storage and preservation of photographic materials.

Contents of Storage Facilities

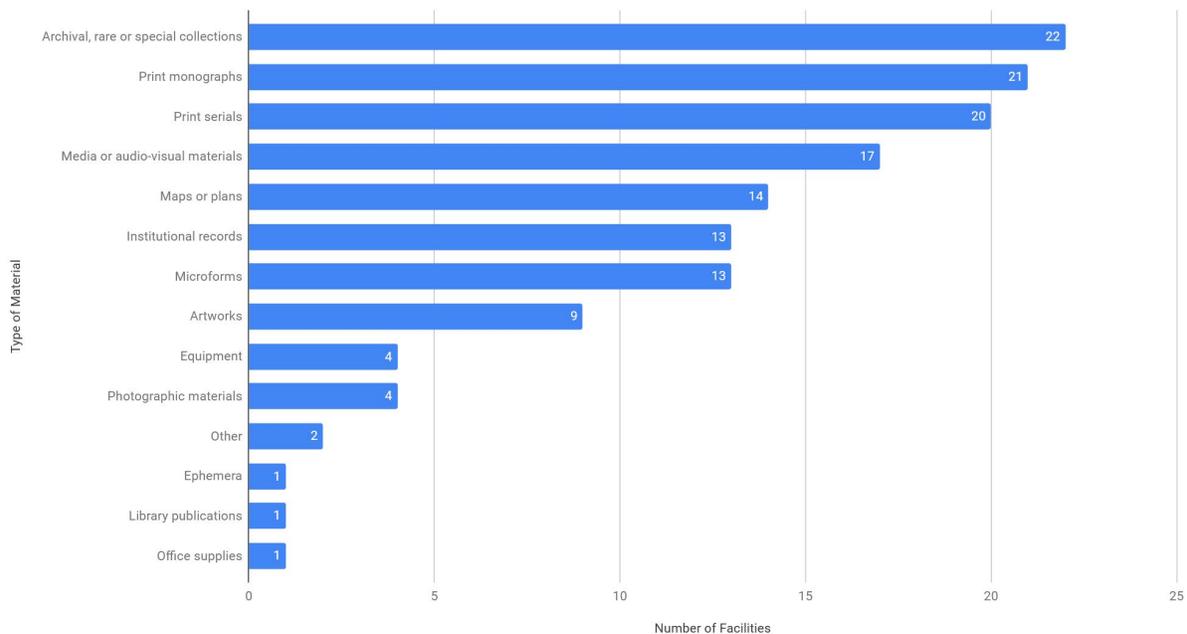


Chart 1: Contents of Storage Facilities

Location and structure

Respondents were asked to describe the location of their storage facilities as well as the physical configuration of the facilities.

Thirteen of the facilities are located on campus and the remaining 12 are located off campus or at some distance from the home library.

Eighteen respondents indicated that the facility is a stand-alone building. Thirteen of those include a single physical space, while the other five include multiple storage spaces.

Five respondents indicated that the storage facility is either contained within another library building or is co-located with another building at the same institution.

Two respondents did not provide any information about the physical structure of the facility.

Types of storage

Respondents were asked to describe the types of storage used in their facilities. The options focused on high-bay versus standard-height racks, mobile versus stationary shelving, and adjustable versus fixed shelves.

High-bay versus standard-height racks

- Thirteen respondents indicated the use of high-bay shelving, which is often 20 to 30 feet high
- Five respondents indicated the use of standard-height shelving
- Three respondents indicated a combination of the two
- One respondent indicated the use of a robotic storage system

Mobile versus stationary shelving

- Nine respondents indicated a mix of mobile (compact) and stationary shelving
- Four respondents indicated the use of only stationary shelving
- Two respondents indicated the use of only mobile (compact) shelving
- Ten respondents did not provide any information about the use of mobile (compact) versus stationary shelving

Adjustable versus fixed shelves

- Eight respondents indicated the use of only adjustable shelves
- Three respondents indicated a combination of fixed and adjustable shelves
- One respondent indicated the use of only fixed shelves
- Twelve respondents did not provide any information about the use of adjustable versus fixed shelves

Capacity and fullness

Respondents were asked: “What is the total storage capacity of the facility?” The responses fell into three categories: number of physical volumes, number of archival boxes and measures of length or area. Two respondents provided more than one type of measure. Two other respondents did not provide any sort of measures.

Respondents were also asked: “How full is the facility as of 15 March 2019?” The 21 responses received indicated an average of 80% full, leaving only 20% remaining capacity. It is worth noting that 11 of the 21 respondents indicated 90% or greater fullness.

The table below summarizes the types of responses, the total capacity, the fullness and the remaining capacity for all of the responses.

Metric	Total Capacity	Fullness	Remaining Capacity
Number of volumes	24,805,000	80%	4,987,131
Number of archival boxes	53,600	97%	1,360
Linear feet (shelving)	2,525,273	85%	367,284
Square feet (building)	113,504	97%	3,400

Table 1: Capacity and fullness of storage facilities

Using an estimate of ten volumes per linear foot of shelf space, the total capacity of the existing storage facilities likely exceeds 51,000,000 volumes.

Climate control

Respondents were asked about how the climate, particularly the temperature and relative humidity, are controlled in their storage facilities. Five respondents indicated some sort of partial climate control. Four respondents indicated no climate control or insufficient climate control. One respondent indicated that the facility shares climate control with the rest of the building, rather than having its own climate control.

Respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the climate control in their facilities on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied). Ten respondents indicated being more than satisfied (4/5) or very satisfied (5/5), six respondents indicated being satisfied (3/5), and three respondents indicated being unsatisfied (2/5).

Organizational structure and staffing

Respondents were asked how their storage facilities are situated within the structure of their home organizations. Eight respondents indicated that their facilities report within their collections units. Six (all Library and Archives Canada) reported relationships to their preservation branch. Four respondents indicated that their facilities report through

access services. Two reported a relationship with archives. The remaining four respondents indicated some other relationship or were unsure.

Respondents were also asked about the staffing model for their storage facility, specifically the nature and number of the staff who operate them.

Four respondents indicated that there are no permanent staff at the facility—staff only go to the facility to retrieve requested materials or to work there during collections moves. Seventeen respondents indicated that permanent staff are positioned at their facilities. Fourteen of those respondents described staffing types and levels consistent with the storage functions of the facilities. Three of these clearly described a mix of functions occurring alongside storage operations (digitization, interlibrary loan, collections and technical services).

Information available online

Respondents were asked whether information about their storage facilities is available online. Thirteen indicated that further information is available:

- BANQ banq.qc.ca/collections/collections_patrimoniales/sauvegarde
- Carleton University library.carleton.ca/services/storage-facility
- LAC bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/preservation/Pages/preservation.aspx
- University of British Columbia services.library.ubc.ca/borrowing-services/storage/ (2 responses)
- Université de Montréal bib.umontreal.ca/travailler/les-bibliotheques/centre-conservation
- University of Alberta library.ualberta.ca/locations/rcrf
- University of Calgary library.ucalgary.ca/c.php?g=255312&p=1703191
- University of Ottawa biblio.uottawa.ca/en/off-campus-storage
- University of Toronto oneseach.library.utoronto.ca/downsview
- University of Western Ontario commandrecords.com
- University of Western Ontario lib.uwo.ca/archives/
- York University archivesonelp.com/
- Wilfrid Laurier University www.tug-libraries.on.ca/tug-resources/tug-annex

Summary

Canada already has a distributed network of library and archival storage facilities in place. The majority of existing facilities are each connected to one owning/operating institution, with the Downsview and Tri-University Annex facilities as the notable

exceptions. Although the aggregate capacity of existing facilities likely exceeds 51,000,000 volumes, those facilities are often nearly full to capacity. The lack of remaining capacity in our storage facilities is a significant impediment to the preservation of research collections at a national level.

An effective national collective print preservation strategy could provide Canadian libraries with a framework to develop new opportunities for collective action around their research collections. Rather than attempt to create additional storage capacity along single-institution lines, libraries could choose to develop shared facilities, collections and services from the ground up. Libraries, or groups of libraries, could also create capacity within existing facilities by analyzing the collections stored within them, allocating materials for long-term retention at designated facilities, and deaccessioning the materials that are no longer required. This work must proceed in conjunction with the development of collaborative services to make our collective collections available to all Canadians.